Book Reviews


The present book constitutes the continuation of two earlier enterprises, namely the *Handbook of Christianity in China*, edited by Nicolas Standaert in 2000, and a workshop in Leuven, which was also initiated and held by Standaert in 2004. The goal of this was to further develop and deepen the subject of rituals in the old China mission and was entitled ‘Christian Rituality in Late Imperial China’, with the topics confession, fasting, burial, Imperial guest ritual etc. These rituals, which had and still have the function of creating community among the participating persons, also reflect the changing attitude and role of Catholicism in Late Imperial China: from the religion of learned men and scholars to a religion of poor people.

Besides the introduction by Nicolas Standaert and Ad Dudink, there are four substantial articles:


Liam Matthew Brockey and Ad Dudink, ‘A Missionary Confessional Manual: José Monteiro’s *Vera et Unica Praxis breviter ediscendi, ac expeditissime loquendo Sinicum idioma*’.

The first article by Eugenio Menegon demonstrates through the change of the practice of confessions the shift of the mission from the 17th to the 18th centuries: from a ‘pastoral of self-perfection’ to a ‘pastoral of fear’. This runs parallel with shifts in mission from the educated class to the lower classes. Over time confession became rooted in the practice of the masses, rather than of the elite.

Menegon thoroughly examines each step within the rite of confession — as promoted by French Carechsis recommended by the Vicar Apostolic of Fujian, Charles Maigrot (1652-1730). Accordingly, the five steps for confession were as follows: 1. examination, 2. contrition, 3. firm resolution to reform, 4. confession, 5. satisfaction. Confession and penance constituted important aspects of personal morality as well as priestly and social control of the individuals. In this context Menegon explores especially two facts, namely the prescriptive-normative aspect and the practice, and thus shows that the ritual could have different meanings.
After baptism confession became the next most prominent sacrament. Frequent confession was difficult because of the large distances between the parishes in China. Therefore, confession normally took only place on high feasts as Easter and Christmas.

The development of confession in China started with Matteo Ricci, one of the pioneers of the China mission, who stressed personal moral self-cultivation for learned people (everybody is responsible for himself), the priest only being a mediator. But most people who went to confession were not literati, but people who had to struggle with everyday problems. An important text on penitence was written by the Italian Jesuit Giulio Aleni (1582-1649) *Dizui zhenggui* 洗罪正規 (Correct Rules to Wash Away Sins, 1627) for literati, there was also an abridged version *Dizui zhenggui lüe* 洗罪正規略 for normal people, both being based on European casuistry. Ferdinand Verbiest (1623-1688) wrote an apology of the sacrament *Gaojie yuanyi* 告解原義 (*The Original Meaning of Confession*), whereas the Jesuit Lodovico Buglio (1606-1682) translated several relevant texts for priests into Chinese.

Menegon gives accurate descriptions of the rituals of contrition and also public penance, which were community building rituals responding to the needs of people. This excellent written study not only gives an insight into the meaning of confession in China, but also much information about the post-Tridentine Baroque ways of rituals.

The article by late Prof. Erik Zürcher (1928-2008) from Leiden compares the Buddhist Chanhui 懺悔 rituals with Christian Confession, using the writings of prominent Chinese Christians of the 17th century. Self-examination and self-accusation have a long tradition in China. Some people close to Buddhism kept diaries where they listed their positive or negative deeds each day, the *Gongguo ge* 功過格 (Ledger of Merit and Demerit). This served to have control over self-improvement. The Buddhist forms of confession showed great differences from the Christian. The Chanhui (confession of guilt and remorse) rituals were paid by a family or group and aimed at a better *karma*, i.e., its intention was the benefit of a whole group of people. It was performed by a priest in a fixed pattern of rituals. There is a long list of standardized sins, which are read or sung. The merits which were gained by the liturgy were transferred automatically to many people, not just to one penitent. Even if the Christian and Buddhist rituals seemed to have an external similarity, there were great differences in meaning and performance. Christian confession, as the Chinese Christian and scholar Yang Tingyun wrote, never worked automatically, but the sinner must personally address to Lord of Heaven. Similarities can be seen in the role of the priest. The Christian, the Buddhist and also the Daoist priest have a special status and special power, which they can use as exorcists, healers. They use sacred talismans, and they are experts in liturgical texts and gestures. They are in a lineage to their predecessors. In Catholicism only supernatural authority can remove the sins from a single sinner, and only Christians can receive absolution. The ritual as such is always personal and individual, it is a dialogue between the priest and the sinner.

But the Chinese Christians and missionaries of the 17th and 18th centuries had problems with the external similarities in doctrines and magics considering them as manifestation of bad power to delude mankind. The demon(s) gave power to deceive their adherents by clairvoyance, glossolalia, physical force and so on. Therefore new Christians had to forswear all pagan beliefs, which was confirmed by baptism.