

KLEINE BEITRÄGE

MISSIONARY EFFORTS IN INNER MONGOLIA A REVIEW ARTICLE

by Julian Pas*

In the seventies an eminent missionary and historian of the Belgian missionary society; the Scheut Fathers (c. i. c. m.: Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary), Father JOSEPH VAN HECKEN published a voluminous series of works documenting the missionary history of the various territories in Inner Mongolia where the Scheut Fathers had been active from 1872 until their gradual exile from China under the new regime. Since these works were published privately and moreover in Dutch (or Flemish), they are not easily accessible to researchers interested in missionary history or in Sino-Mongolian studies. I believe that these volumes contain a rich treasure for scholars interested in a variety of Sino-Mongolian subjects. There are basically two sets of volumes: the first series covers the area of East-Mongolia, the second one deals with South-West Mongolia.

First Series:

J. VAN HECKEN, *Dokumentatie betreffende de Missiegeschiedenis van Oost-Mongolië. Bisdom Jo-ho-erh*. 9 vols., Leuven, 1970-73. [Documentation concerning the Missionary History of East Mongolia. Diocese of Jehol].

This voluminous pioneering work came to my attention in the summer of 1977 when I was visiting Japan. In one of the central houses of the Scheut Fathers in Tokyo, I had a chance to look through these nine volumes and the present review is based on notes taken on that occasion. Since I do not have the work with me, I can only report the table of contents and point out those themes which are of interest not only to the church historian but to mongolists in general:

Volume 1: Introduction, Leuven, 1972 (221 pp.)

Volume 2: Leuven, 1970 (283 pp.)

Ch. 1: Efforts toward Evangelization by the Jesuits in East Mongolia

Ch. 2: The Spread of the Faith in East-Mongolia from the Arrival of the Lazarist Fathers (1785) until the arrival of the Scheut missionaries (1866).

Volume 3: Leuven, 1970 (254 pp.)

Ch. 1: The Take-over of the Apostolic Vicariate until the Division into three Vicariates (1866-83).

Volume 4: Leuven, 1970 (337 pp.)

Ch. 2: The Take-over of the Apostolic Vicariate of East-Mongolia by Bishop Rutjes

Ch. 3: First Expansion and Difficulties

Ch. 4: Apostolate around Pa-kou, Pei-tzu-shan-shou and Sun-shu-tsui-tzu.

Ch. 5: The Rebellion of the Secret Societies in Mongolia (1891-92) and its effects

* Dr. Julian F. Pas is a Professor of Religious Studies of the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Canada.

- Volume 5: Leuven, 1971 (391 pp.)
 Ch. 6: Restoration after the Persecution and new Expansion
 Ch. 7: The Boxer Rebellion and its Results
- Volume 6: Leuven, 1971 (428 pp.)
 Ch. 8: The Missionary Personnel and Restoration of the Mission after the Boxer Rebellion
 Ch. 9: The Great Leap Forward (1902–11)
- Volume 7: Leuven, 1972 (517 pp.)
 Ch. 10: The Missionary Personnel and Development of Jehol from 1912 till 1920
 Ch. 11: Missionary Personnel and Development of the Mission from 1920 till 1931
- Volume 8: Leuven, 1973 (521 pp.)
 Ch. 12: Expansion of the Catholic Church in Southern Jehol from 1932 till 1941.
 Ch. 13: The Apostolic Vicariate of Jehol during the Japanese Occupation (1934–45)
 Ch. 14: The Diocese of Jehol during the Communist Rule (1945–)
- Volume 9: Leuven, 1973 (523 pp.) Missiological Considerations. Christian Vision of Life. Missionary Personnel. Appendices.
 Ch. 1: Missiological Considerations
 Ch. 2: Missionary Personnel
 Ch. 3: Bibliography and Appendices

As is clear from a simple look at the table of contents, several parts of this series are of special value to the historian; although the book is written from the standpoint of missionary history, its intricate relationships with contemporary events in that part of China cannot be lost out of view. Of primary interest are chapters 5 and 6: the rebellion of the secret societies (vol. 4, ch. 5, pp. 248–278); and the long treatment of the Boxer Rebellion (vol. 5, ch. 7, pp. 225–365). Also extremely interesting are the reports on the Japanese occupation (vol. 8, ch. 13) and the communist rule (vol. 8, ch. 14). Also vol. 9 offers points of interest: the relationship between the Scheut missionaries and the Mongols (ch. 1, sub-section 7, pp. 183–200), especially the pages on how they made efforts to approach the Mongols by means of intellectual activities (pp. 195–199).

If I am able to have access to the books again in the future, I'd like to explore several of the mentioned themes and report on them in greater detail.

Second Series:

Part 1

J. VAN HECKEN, *Documentatie betreffende de Missiegeschiedenis van Zuid-West Mongolië. Aartsbisdom Suiyüan. Bisdom Ninghsia. Eerste Deel. Inleiding: Land en Volk in Zuid-West Mongolië*. Leuven, 1976. [Documentation concerning the Missionary History of South-West Mongolia. Archdiocese of Suiyüan. Diocese of Ninghsia. Part One: Introduction. Land and People of South-West Mongolia]. (556 + iv + v pages).

Although the title indicates that the book as a whole covers the history of (the Roman Catholic) evangelization of the diocese of Ning-hsia (Ordos) yet this first volume barely touches upon the missionary activities of the Belgian-Dutch Scheut missionaries at all. It is in fact an introductory work giving an historical account of the Land and People of South-West Mongolia or the Ordos region, with a great amount of information on other aspects as well.

In Chapter One, the author relates his sources and bibliography. Foremost among his sources (pp. 20–24) figure unpublished letters, preserved in the archives of the missionary society of Scheut in Rome and letters published in various missionary periodicals and books, as well as oral communications obtained from eye-witnesses such as missionaries and Christian converts from the area. Another part of his sources includes articles, reports, statistics, etc. equally found in the archives of the society in Rome or in the author's possession.

The lengthy bibliography (pp. 25–59) is divided into works concerning the geography (pp. 29–36), and the population of South-West Mongolia (pp. 36–45), and other works more directly relating to missionary activities (pp. 46–53). A final part of the bibliography concerns 'missiological considerations' (pp. 54–56), as well as works in Chinese (pp. 56–59), Mongolian (p. 59) and Japanese (p. 59). Although the bibliography is extremely useful and extensive, the division is not always clear and should preferably have been listed at the end of the work. Also, the number of oriental sources seems rather limited.

In Chapter Two (pp. 60–208), the author offers a general description of the area of South-West Mongolia, which used to include five administrative divisions of the Chinese empire: (i) the land of the Mongol League (?) also called Ordos; (ii) the land of the Mongol Banners Alashan-Ölöd and Torghud; (iii) the prefecture Ning-hsia of the Kansu province, later of the Ning-hsia province; (iv) the land of the Ulantshab Mongol League; and (v) the land of the Tümed-Mongols, later on part of the province of Sui-yüan. The description of these five areas is approached from seven different viewpoints: descriptive geography, travel accounts, meteorology, flora, fauna, geology and archeology. From a historical angle, it looks that the last part: the archeology of South-West Mongolia (pp. 187–208), is the most exciting since it covers such items as old cities, graves, walls, and a variety of individual objects. The author admits that his report is only general, and one gains the impression that the topic could easily by itself grow into a wide project of research.

Chapter Three (pp. 209–483) contains the bulk of the author's investigations. He first discusses the intricate problem of the various peoples which inhabited the region of South-West Mongolia before it was ultimately occupied by the Chinese in modern times. One by one the various traditional periods of Chinese history are discussed starting with the prehistoric era up to 214 B. C. (pp. 209–244). In the second place the author deals more in particular with the Mongolian population of the area from 1234 till present times (pp. 245–331), and thirdly with the Chinese population or rather with the colonization of South-West Mongolia by the Chinese (pp. 332–392). In the fourth place the author resumes the topic of the Mongolian population but deals more in particular with the Mongolian people of the province of Sui-yüan from 1933 till 1949 (pp. 393–444): of great interest – since not often treated by modern scholars – is his report on the civil war and the gradual communist victory in this area (pp. 429–441). The fifth and final section of chapter three deals with the situation of both the Mongols and the Chinese during the Communist regime (pp. 445–483).

In Chapter Four, the final chapter (pp. 484–545), the author describes and analyses the religious situation in South-West Mongolia. In three subsections he treats successively the religions among the Mongols (shamanism, the cult of Genghis Khan and other Mongol heroes, Nestorianism, Roman Catholicism and Islam), Lamaism, and the religions of the Chinese. The section on shamanism, although short (pp. 484–492) is very useful: hopefully it will be taken up again at another time in greater detail. The section on Lamaism or Tibetan Buddhism introduced into Mongolia is rather sketchy and offers an historical and geographical framework:

once again a monograph is asked for! The final section deals with the religions practised by the Chinese population living in South-West Mongolia. Characteristic for the author's bias is the epithet of 'pagan' which he adds to 'religion' in this context. Among those 'pagan' religions are not only mentioned popular practices such as the worship of Kuan-ti and Ts'aishen, but also Confucianism, Buddhism and Islam. Roman Catholicism is treated briefly (pp. 535-545), that is it only covers its history before the arrival of the Scheut missionaries in 1872. The further development of the Catholic missionary activities is referred to Part Two.

All in all an impressive work, with a wide scope based on a wide variety of source materials. Unhappily for the reader, many of the sources are in private possession and can therefore hardly be verified. Be this as it is, the author has made an extremely valuable contribution to our knowledge of this part of Mongolia and his efforts can only be praised. However, if this volume would ever find a regular publisher, I wish that the author or editor will take into account the following criticisms with regard to (i) language, (ii) technical aspects of writing and (iii) to his basic theological presuppositions.

First of all, the author's language is poor and rather antiquated; there are many instances of awkward expressions and even more instances of poor word selection; e. g., "gouvernement" should be "regering" (p. 10) and "dépêche" is purely French for "spoedbericht" (p. 11). It would have been greatly advisable that the author had invited a language specialist to revise and polish the whole manuscript before printing.

Secondly, it appears that the author is not familiar with the commonly accepted norms of public writing:

examples:

quotations should be indented and single-spaced;

titles of books and foreign terms in romanization should be underlined;

Chinese place names should be uniform and romanized according to the postal system: "Shen-si" should be "Shensi".

Romanization of Chinese characters is not usually done according to Legge or Mathews (p. 8) but according to the Wade-Giles system.

The publication facts of books are preferably referred to footnotes instead of interpolating them in the main text.

In the third place, I take exception with the author's theological presupposition, which I feel not only hurt the feelings of fellow-Christians but even offend Roman Catholics as well. In a work of this nature, theology can be easily put aside or at least should not influence the author's scientific endeavour. However, the author does not share this opinion as he states unambiguously (my translation):

"... we consider it necessary to add here some further considerations with regard to the standpoint on which we place ourselves and the viewpoint from which we look at the matter. We are firmly convinced that this viewpoint is the only authentic one for a Catholic priest; that of the Catholic missionary in China. He has the absolute certainty that the announcement of the Christian Gospel to the population of China is a divine mandate which says: 'Go and teach all peoples' (Mt 28:19) and that the predication of the 'Good Message' is the only possible road to redemption, i. e., to the acquisition of eternal salvation by the Chinese ... Therefore salvation is not made possible by Gautama (Buddhism), by Lao-Tzu (Taoism), by Kung-tzu (Confucianism) or by Mohammed (Islam). These creatures are not able to elevate man to the state of supernatural life and therefore unable to assure him eternal salvation. The conclusion which the missionary draws from these truths of faith is very simple: for the Chinese as for any other people in the world, eternal salvation is impossible except through conversion to Christianity by which they participate in the merits of

Jesus Christ, who elevates them to divine life through sanctifying grace and cleanses them of all sin. This is St. Paul's theology with which the Ordos missionaries were deeply penetrated." (pp. 9-10)

Such an emotional outcry in a work which is basically historical is not necessary and besides outmoded. The author is apparently not aware of the teachings of the Vatican Council II and even less of the efforts of Roman Catholic theologians and ecumenically minded priests such as THOMAS MERTON, who died while he participated in a congress of Buddhist monks in Bangkok. Since the author's bias does not seem to affect his scientific treatment of the material (at least not in this Part One), we can forgive him this one time: "quandoque dormit bonus Homerus . . ." and hope that the future volumes will be 'redeemed' from such a questionable bias.

Part II

J. VAN HECKEN, *Documentatie betreffende de Missiegeschiedenis van Zuidwest-Mongolië, Aartsbisdom Sui-Yüan. Bisdom Ning-hsia, Tweede Deel, Onder Monseigneur Jac. Bax, c.i.c.m. (1872-1883)*. Leuven, 1976 (n. p.), 351 pp. [Documentation concerning the Missionary History of South-West Mongolia. Archdiocese of Sui-Yüan. Diocese of Ning-hsia. Part Two, under bishop James Bax, c.i.c.m. (1872-1883)].

We are now presented with a purely historical treatise of the Roman Catholic missionary activities in the area of South-West Mongolia. This volume consists of one chapter only: it deals with the Foundation of the Ordos mission up to the erection of the Apostolic Vicariate of South-West Mongolia. When the Belgian (and Dutch) missionaries of Scheut took over the Mongolian mission from the French Lazarists in 1865, this immense territory was subdivided into three large districts: 1. the eastern district of East Mongolia (also called Kuan-tung) and already at that time spoken of as Ch'eng-te-fu or prefecture of Ch'eng-te; 2. the central district consisting of Christian centers around the 'mother-mission' of Hsi-wan-tzu, situated in the eastern Tshahar Banners; 3. the western district called Hsi-k'ou-wai, encompassing the western Tshahar Banners, Eastern Tümed and Hon-pa in Ssu-tzu-wang. The author describes in great detail the development of the Christian church in this area until the time of its division into three separate religious districts in 1883. This chapter is subdivided into seven sections: 1. the expansion of the western part of the Apostolic Vicariate of Mongolia, 1866-74 (pp. 1-49); 2. exploration trip through the Ordos and first establishment of the Scheut missionaries: Feb. 1874-Jan. 1875 (pp. 50-118); 3. foundation of the Mission among the Mongols in Djunghar, Otogh, Alashan and Uüshin (pp. 119-177); 4. apostolic work in Alashan: 1875-80 (pp. 178-203); 5. apostolic work in Djunghar, Dalad and Tümed (pp. 204-229); 6. development of the mission in Southern Ordos (Otogh): 1887-83 (pp. 230-301); 7. development of the district of San-tao-ho: 1880-83 (pp. 302-340).

After a conclusion (pp. 335-338) the author adds a register of proper names, place names and object names (pp. 341-346) followed by a table of contents and a list of Chinese characters (pp. 349-351). Because of its insight into the social character of the Mongol population in the area, I translate here in full the conclusion of pages 335-338:

The exclusive purpose of the foundation of a mission in Ordos had been the conversion of the Mongols with the exclusion of the Chinese. The first missionaries to arrive perhaps imagined that it would be as easy to convert the Mongols as the Chinese who, compared with primitive peoples were actually hard to persuade to accept Christianity. For civilized peoples like the Chinese, strongly anchored in their organized religion, it is extremely difficult to disentangle themselves from it and to convert themselves to another foreign religion. However, the true situation made the missionaries very soon aware that the Mongols were not free to

embrace any other religion but Lamaism, and certainly not Christianity. Not only were they not free but they were often strongly attached to Buddhism through family ties, since most families counted a member among the lamas. Add to this their moral corruption and the satisfaction of their passions which they would have to curtail in the Christian religion. For many these were serious obstacles to enter into the Church. However the greatest hindrance for an Ordos Mongol to convert to Christianity, was his total dependence on the magistrates and nobility. Although the Mongols are no xenophobes, the magistrates were frequently injected with this poison either by the higher magistrates of Peking or by reading antichristian pamphlets. After all efforts of the missionaries to convert the Mongols for these reasons had failed, they turned to the Chinese and thus the Ordos Mission has become a mission among and for the Chinese. There was only one exception: the small Mongolian "appendix" at Boro Balghasu where the missionaries for many years have fought a strenuous battle against the above mentioned four antagonistic elements. These we will further discuss in more detail.

1. Dependence of the Mongols upon the authorities in the administrative and social area.

Notwithstanding the appearance of freedom, which the Mongolian wanderer seems to enjoy in his immense pastures and lonely deserts, one has to admit that few peoples enjoy so little liberty as the Mongols at least from an administrative and social viewpoint.

a. From an administrative viewpoint.

The Mongolian families, apparently independent and mutually unrelated, were tightly roped together through administrative ties which were very narrow. Each Banner is divided into regiments (HARIYA), and each regiment in companies (SUMU). At the top of each Banner, there is a prince (named 'king' by the missionaries) who is assisted in his administration by a council of five ministers (DJINKS). Among the five ministers two are TUSALAGHTSHI or first and second minister; the third minister is called DJAKIRUGHTSHI, and is considered to be the minister of war and leader of the military power; the two remaining ones are called MEYIR. At the head of each hariya there is a DJALAN, a very powerful official, appointed by the prince and his council and replaced every few years. He commands and is responsible for several SUMU of which his regiment is composed. He controls his own court for minor affairs and is entitled to beat and torture the defendants. At the top of each SUMU there is a DJANZGI: he rules over two TABIN-U KÜNDÜ, each of whom in turn controls two HORIN-U BOSHO, who finally have each two ARBAN-U DARUGHA as assistants (or adjudants). All these officials used to be called 'mandarins' by the early missionaries. They are responsible for their subjects and in dealing with them dispose of far-reaching powers. Punishments for crimes consist of whipping with the black whip (at least at the DJALAN court), of fines of money or cattle and of forced labour. Threatened with those enforcements the Mongols are as slaves, prepared to do or to avoid whatever pleased the official. Causes of appeal by individuals who wish to defend their right against some official and accuse him before a higher official, are only effective if they are lined with gifts of gold. However such a process results in the total ruin of the accuser who is then doomed to lead a miserable life, even worsened by the effective and insatiable revenge of the accused official. In ordinary cases officials did not allow their subjects to convert or to go over to the foreigners, for they believed that they would lose them for their slave services and financial contributions; or because they had been influenced by the lamas who did not want their subjects to join a foreign religion. They were entitled to use any kind of violence to prevent such a defection and actually widely abused their authority.

b. From the social viewpoint.

Socially speaking the Mongols were not free to convert. The old system dividing the population into nobility (Tayidji) and serfs (Lbatu) remained in existence among the Ordos

Mongols. The nobility are descendants of Genghis Khan or his brothers. Each nobleman disposes of several families of serfs over whom they exercise the fullest rights, whereas the serf has only duties. If a nobleman forbids his serf to convert to Christianity or to have contacts with Europeans, it becomes impossible for the Albatu to do so. His lord is entitled to impose on him all possible punishments no matter how unreasonable they are.

2. Dependence of the Mongols upon Lamaism.

The Lamaism of Tsongkapa, or reformed Lamaism had suffered greatly during the Moslem rebellion: thousands of Ordos lamas had been massacred and almost all temples in the Ordos region had been destroyed. This fact made the Catholic missionaries hopeful that they would not meet with any considerable resistance from the side of the lamas. However, the few remaining lamas still exercised an all powerful influence upon the minds of the superstitious Mongols: the lamas knew how to threaten them to instill into them a superstitious fear for divine punishments. They skillfully exploited the misfortune of some converted Christians by explaining those as divine vengeance. On the other hand, the lamas could always rely on the assistance of the officials whenever there was a need of using violence against the Christians. Several times the lamas themselves did not hesitate to use brutal force. The missionaries could only rely on the rights accorded to them by the treaties concluded between China and the nations. However, the Mongolian authorities did neither recognize this right nor take seriously the few remarks made by the ministers in Peking. Several Mongols were not personally attached to Lamaism and are even happy to be liberated from its hated tyranny of demanding financial contributions, women, etc. But the threats of punishments for transgressing taboos by which the Mongols were strongly chained, had a powerful influence on the hearts and will of the ordinary Mongol. Therefore, the Mongols' dependence on Lamaism had to be considered the most important, if not the strongest obstacle for their conversion to Christianity.

3. The Mongols' moral corruption.

As a people the Mongols were no longer the strong and brave men from the times of Genghis Khan. Moreover, Lamaism had because of its forced celibacy weakened the morals of many people. The lamas wandered through the desert and passed the nights here and there living with the women of their relatives who did not dare to oppose them. The strict family life had been thus destroyed in many cases, also because the head of the family was absent for days on end, either to search for a lost horse, camel or ox, or to perform forced labour at his prince's court. Moreover, Chinese itinerant merchants had introduced into many families their own vices of smoking opium, gambling, concubinage, etc. To someone wishing to become a Christian all this was forbidden.

In the town of Fu-ma-fu, Father Devos experienced a deep moral corruption, so much so that he could elicit there only very few, if any conversions. In Shadjintuhai his Mongolian converts were persecuted to death. In Djünghar Father A. Jansen experienced the Mongols' strong attachment to the cult of Genghis Khan. This made him leave the Mongols and turn to the Chinese instead.

In Boro Balghasu the missionaries persevered but only God knows at the price of what sacrifices and efforts! With the exception of this locality, all mission stations of South-west Mongolia became missions among the Chinese. The Chinese residing in the Ordos were all people who had lost their means of existence in the interior. Thanks to the missionary action they had rediscovered a decent human life through becoming Christians!

Part III

J. VAN HECKEN. *Dokumentatie . . . Derde Deel. Onder Monseigneur Alfons Devos (1883-88) en Provicaris P. Alfons Bermyn (1888-89). Leuven, 1977. 261 pp.* [Part Three: Under Bishop Alfons Devos, 1883-88, and Provicar Father Alfons Bermyn, 1888-89].

Part Three also consists of only one chapter: it deals with the Ordos mission from 1883 until 1889 under leadership of Bishop DEVOS and Pro-Vicar BERMYN, later to become bishop of Ordos. The subdivision of the chapter has no special significance: each section covers one particular year. The subdivisions could as well be dropped, its only justification being the shortening of the chapter.

Although these 2 volumes will be of the greatest interest for those concerned with missionary history, they could attract a wider circle of readers if on the one hand they would be available in a different language and on the other hand would be rewritten by a gifted novelist: the information contained here constitutes a particularly moving document of human adventure in the service of an ideal. The great amount of materials taken from letters written by the "heroes of the story" makes the whole work lively and fascinating. One feels admiration for the author who painstakingly collected the sources and reconstituted the history of an episode of Christian missionary activity which has perhaps left no more traces in the very land where the events took place.

Part Three has no indexes or list of Chinese characters, and ends with a table of Contents (pp. 260-261). A special paragraph on p. 261 contains rather disappointing news: because of the author's illness, the continuation of this series has to be stopped. The materials are almost ready for publication and would comprise a total of 10 volumes:

Part 4: *Ordos under Bishop Ferdinand Hamer (1889-1900);*

Parts 5 & 6: *Ordos under Bishop A. Bermyn (1900-1915);*

Part 7: *Ordos under Bishop Van Dyck until the division (1916-1922).*

From this point on, new subtitles are given but no further division into new volumes follows:

After the division (of Ordos):

The Apostolic Vicariate of Sui-yüan (which became an archdiocese in 1946) under Bishops Van Dyck and L. Morel until the take-over by the Chinese clergy.

The Apostolic Vicariate of Ninghsia under Bishop G. Frederickx (1922-32); under Bishop Schotte (1932-43); under Vicar Delegate N. Depuydt (1943-46); under Bishop C. Van Melckebeke (Diocese of Ninghsia) (1946-53).

Hopefully either the author or a successor will make these promised volumes available, since they will certainly not only contain materials relevant to the immediate objective: missionary history, but also enrich the historian's documentation concerning an interesting period of modern Chinese history: e.g. the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, the period of warlords and bandits in North-China, and the gradual communist conquest of China.

The author once again should be congratulated for his efforts to publish such a major work on Mongolia (Inner Mongolia) keeping in mind the reservation made concerning his outdated theological premises.