

# THE ART OF CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CHINA

Liu Ping



CHINA INTERCONTINENTAL PRESS

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# The Art of Catholic

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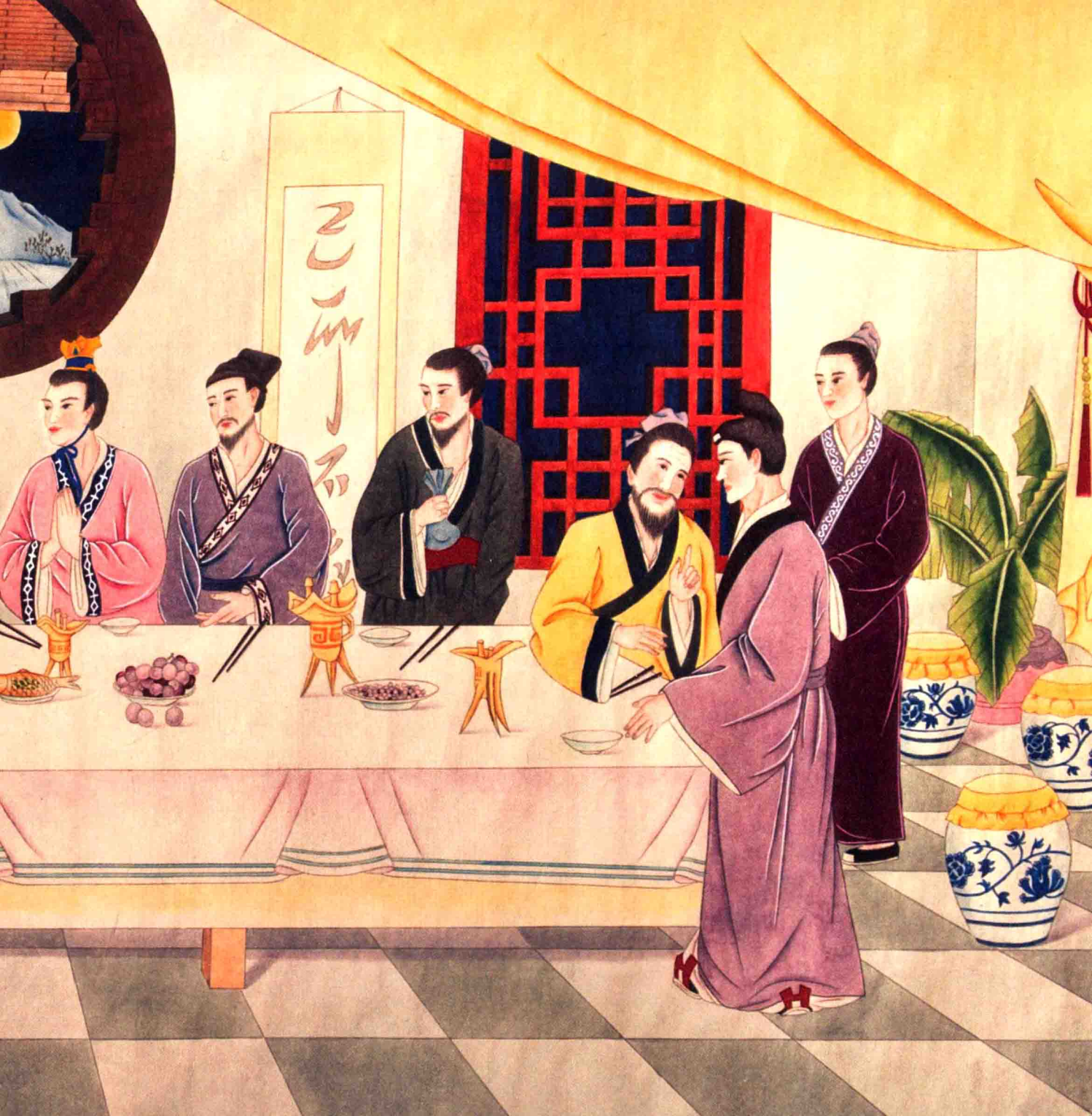


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# Preface

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The Son of God incarnated in the midst of Jewish people and shared all the elements of the Jewish culture. This reality provides the source of motive as a perfect exemplar for enculturation of the Church. Therefore, the Catholic Church has been concerning the issue of the relationship between the Church and various cultures since its beginning as Jesus Christ who completely and totally incarnates into each and every culture and hopes to bring the gospel of salvation to all in the ways people of every culture are able to receive. Each and everyone should be shined by the inspiration of God. The Asian Bishop's Conference in 1974 emphasized this issue as well. It stated that the local church should be born in the midst of the local people. It should be locally characterized. It should constantly, humbly and friendly have dialogues and communications with local people's tradition, culture and religion.

The art and cultural development go hand in hand. On the one hand, the art is the earliest companion of human's civilization, and it has an important role in the culture and it is an element of the culture. The art is an external expressive model of the culture. On the other hand, the culture is the source and content of the art. Different cultures develop different arts and different arts are like cultures pleasing to God. The art becomes an effective carrier of the crystallization which concretes human's emotions, and it leads human race to pursue beauty and ultimately pursue toward God.

Therefore, by researching and studying art we find a method of seeking the omnipotence of God which is pleasing to the Lord. The encountering of Christian faith and Chinese cultural art has ever spurted the dazzling light, and it has ever gone to its low ebb as well in the vast Chinese land. The Chinese nation has gone through trials and hardships for as long as one hundred years from the Opium War to the establishment of the People's Republic. In fact, enculturation which the universal Church always asserts has been challenged and tested. Missionaries from different countries tried to be against the authority of the Holy See for their own purposes and benefits in China, and they wrongly imposed European church style into the China church. This deeply hurts the dignity of the Chinese people.

Through out the Chinese history, many talented people of Chinese church tried to put their best efforts in the fulfillment of faith's enculturation. In 1922, Gang Hengyi was assigned to be the first representative



of the Holy See in China. Since then, he started his reform of enculturation, and this reform joined together with church's art from its beginning. However, the reform at this time was just lasted for a short moment. After the establishment of the People's Republic, the China church stands beside its nation and people, and chooses the way of self-determination for its development. At this time, Chinese church's cultural art for various historical reasons has been stagnated, and such a stagnated situation has lasted for a longer time. Until the reform and open policy was adopted, Christian faith and the Chinese cultural art could be able to have a wider space for its own development. The rich Chinese historical culture has become the strong supporter for the union and constant development of Christian faith and the Chinese traditional and cultural art so that the Chinese traditional and cultural art has gained a great achievement and it's breaking through in the field of art.

We have achieved a great deal and the breaking through in the field of art, but we still have a long way to go in terms of researching and studying in the field of art. Hence, *The Art of Catholic Church in China* is born. It is in a more detailed way to summarize the entire situation of the development of art in the China church especially the situation of the development of art in Beijing diocese since the adoption of the reform and open policy in 1978. It is also to have an overall view about the entire situation in the field of art in the Chinese Catholic Church since Tang Dynasty (618-907). By reading this book, one can explicitly find every bright point in each period of time.

In the beginning of the second decade of the new millennium, Beijing diocese starts "The Year of the Faithful Evangelization". Mr. Liu Ping, a lay person was commissioned to write and edit this book. When Mr. Liu received this commission, he could realize that there was very few materials for him to consult in this field of art. As a result, Mr. Liu has to do a lot of research on his own to study the historical materials in the field of art of Catholic Church in China. If it is necessary, sometimes he could go to actual places to get real situations. By doing so, he tried to figure out the venation of the development of art in the Chinese Catholic Church from the faith point of view. This work tries to provide a possible reference model in the field of Church's art for the Church itself and for the society. It is by his great efforts, we are able to come to know how the art of the Catholic Church enter China in the beginning, how it could consequently enter the center of nation's conception in China, how it could step by step inosculate with the local cultural

art, and how it could finally complete the initial work of enculturation of Church art in China by making tough decisions. This work provides a clear direction for the development of art in the Chinese Catholic Church. This work well expresses the reality of church art's pursuit of truth, goodness and beauty, and the philosophical concept of beauty of the Catholic Church, and the structure of value of the art of Chinese Catholic Church and so on.

This work provides an outline for us in the field of church art with a quite academic level. We are glad to see that the publication of this book will certainly benefit the work of enculturation of the church art, and it will make a great contribution to the construction and development of the church art and to the mandate of church's evangelization by affording excellent suggestions, guidance and references. I hope that all the clergy, nuns, lay people and all the people who are concerned about the development of Chinese Catholic Church as well as its art will be able to find many bright points in this book so that they may easily recognize the work of enculturation of church art which the Chinese Catholic Church has been doing. I wish that you may enjoy reading this work and be benefited from reading it.

In a recent meeting, the Fifth Session of the Eleventh National People's Congress, the Chinese premier, Mr. Wen Jiabao explicitly stated that all religious communities, religious clergy and faithful should bring all positive factors which are theirs into play in issues of economic construction, of social harmony and of cultural development. This work of Mr. Liu Ping is to be published in responding to this call, and it is also one of the concrete actions of the Chinese Catholic Church in an active response to the call of the State as well. Wishing through the constant efforts of church's organizations and of all the faithful people, we can offer contributions to the development of the excellent religious culture in social culture and to the flourishing of the nation's culture.

May God bless our society and all readers of this work!

The bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Beijing

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized Chinese characters, likely representing the name of the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Beijing.

March 15, 2012 Beijing





# Prologue: Faith Extended From Here

The art is an earliest companion in the process of the development of human's civilization. The engraved paintings can be referred to as the first expression of human's art. If we look at the overall Chinese history of as long as 5000 years, many artworks are being called the Art because of the beauty experiences which their visualizations bring to human's eyes. The art for reason of its visualization reflecting human life differs from philosophy and science. However, the visualization is the characteristic of partial art models, and it is not the all of art. The real art needs to express in different artistic forms the light of visualization and of emotional thinking and this can only be done by the artist under the inspiration of his or her rich feelings. The artist through his or her artworks delivers to people the sense of beauty which he or she gained from his or her own life experience so that people through the artworks of the artist may be influenced in traveling in the emotional world, and they gain the spiritual enjoyment and satisfaction. This is the crystallization of human's emotions. Without human's emotion, an art cannot be rightly called the Art.

This spiritual enjoyment is the human's experience about beauty. The art is such a thing which expresses beauty and it is the carrier of beauty. The art contains all the positive elements in the entire history of human's civilization. Furthermore, we dare to say that the entire history of human's civilization itself is a history of finding and pursuing and creating beauty. Beauty is interlinked with goodness and especially with truth, and beauty, goodness and truth unify as one. This trinity is characterized by truth as its first priority.

The Catholic faith believes that "God is Goodness, and God is above all creations. The God of goodness creates all things which are very good". (St. Augustine: *Confessions*) God is the source of all beauties, and God possesses all the truth, goodness and beauties within Himself. All creatures express the beauty of God. God granted humans the sense of beauty, and God made humans be capable of enjoying the art. While enjoying the art, humans can also get the inspiration of the beauty from the Lord. Humans can through prayers respond to God's inspiration and gain the spiritual beauty and sacred beauty. "Afterwards, the Lord hears the earth and filled the world with His beauty".

Therefore, when people face church art, they through their own beauty experiences already gained the strength of inspiration which the Christian artists and the Catholic Church communicate. In this way, they are able to reinforce and nourish their inner feelings and experiences of faith, and eventually they come to seek the real meaning of the mystical body of Christ.

The main theme of this book is about the Art of Chinese Catholic Church. Namely, this book is very much focusing on how the Chinese Catholic Church expresses its faith through artistic manner in light of the spirit of enculturation which the universal Church has always pursued. This is not only the difference between regions, but also the differences between races, the West and the East and cultural backgrounds. This is not simply a matter of adjusting and compromising, and of assimilation and acclimation. This is truly the light which is lighted by the jointed point of the Christian faith and the Chinese cultural art through each time. Different artistic manners, such as sculpture, architecture, painting, music, fine decoration, landscape gardening and etc, inosculate and develop again and again. While the Chinese nation gets the Christian faith, it also gains artistic achievements and it's breaking through. When some people of this nation constantly accept the Christian faith, they express their faith not only by using their own artistic manner, but also by using the artistic manner of the other side which they used to, or by using the jointed artistic manner of the East and the West. By enjoying the beauty of each and every artwork, we can recognize how the art of the Catholic Church from the West has been developing in China of the East, and how the Chinese people could put different wisdoms and arts together as one by following the historical veneration. It is in the development of the national concept and in the each and every kind of artworks that faith finds its space to be truly extended.

# The First Chapter

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## **The Historical Dust Blown Over (Tang Dynasty)**

