MINISTRY OF NATIONAL EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
„1 DECEMBRIE 1918" UNIVERSITY IN ALBA IULIA
FACULTY OF ORTHODOX THEOLOGY
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

DOCTORAL THESIS

The Religions of China (Confucianism, Daoism, *Chan* and Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism) and Christianity.
A Historical Case Study for an Orthodox approach to the Theology of Religions and Comparative Theology: the „Empathic Exclusivism" Model

~ Summary ~

Scientific Coordinator:
FR. AND UNIV. PROF. DR. EMIL JURCAN

Author:
ANDREI EMIL DIRLAU

Alba Iulia
2016

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Key words: accomodationism, inculturation, indigenization, contextualization, syncretism, sinology, diffused religion, teocracy, charismatic authority, archaic monotheism, graphocracy, iconicity, iconocracy, optocracy, logograms, Sogdiana, Syrian Church of the East, Buddhist-Daoist Christology, non-Masoretic text, contextual theology, Hamites, Semites, onto-semiotic, fractals, Empathic Exclusivism.

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SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This work has an interdisciplinary nature, involving aspects from disciplines such as sinology, history of religions, dogmatic theology, history of culture, history of the Universal Church, philosophy, linguistics, semiotics, sociology, missiology, Biblical archaeology, theology of religions, comparative theology. It does not aim at an exhaustive treatment but, primarily, at contributing to filling some gaps in the Romanian epistemological area, where some of the topics concerned are generally not covered, while others are, but not from this angle.

Firstly, a panoramic work dedicated to the enormous Christian missionary effort made over centuries in China is still missing in the Romanian language. It is a fascinating chapter of cultural history, as well as in the history of the Church, and it was time to make it at least minimally accesible to the Romanian public, by providing information of a historical and bibliographical nature.

Secondly, I have considered that a presentation of the ancient Chinese religion from a perspective which highlights its monotheistic dimension is particularly relevant in a culture such as the Romanian one, defined as it is by an authentic Christian Orthodox tradition. The Romanian reader can more easily approach, through the angle of monotheistic elements, the Chinese culture where such elements do exist, even if in a specifically Chinese garment.

The main purpose has been to chart the fascinating process of understanding and transmission of specific religious, philosofical and ethical concepts, of mediation, translation and intercultural communication, in both directions (Europe-China and reverse), undertaken along the centuries by people with a primarily spiritual-religioasmotivation – Christian missionaries and sinologists.

Another result of the research has been extracting suggestions aimed at outlining a comparative theology of Chinese religion.

The assertion of China at the scaleof world economy as a first-ranking power, affecting the global macroeconomic, geopolitical, strategic and military ballance, has exponentially increased the interest in sinology studies, including the role played by religious phenomena within the multimilenary chinese civilization. The complex interactions between Chinese religions and Christianity, and possible isomorphisms among them, are studied.

This work outlines a brief picture of Christianity in China, of its impact on the Chinese world, and of the way in which the two cultures have perceived each other, primarily through the mediation of the first sinologists – the Christian missionaries. It argues that the reception of Christianity in China has been more significant and left deeper traces than it might seem at first sight, the reason being that it found a ground already prepared to a certin extent by the ancient monotheistic Chinese tradition, which it tried to graft itself through various methods of inculturation, indigenization, contextualization and accomodation. This process knows today an unprecedented development. However, the modern and contemporary period are not included within the scope of this work, which is more interested in the historical and conceptual grounds of this spectacular current evolution.

The relevance of the paper is to be regarded in the context of the current global religious pluralism, to which it tries to suggest some answers – in a context in which this reality is still sometimes ignored or summarily dismissed. Another stake of the work is the missionary one: the approaches described have been meant to facilitate the access of interested Chinese people to Christianity through the notions they are most familiar with, from their tradition. The method of „grafting" Christianity onto the trunk of the ancient *Ru*-ist religion is legitimate, having the advantage of not asking the Chinese who wish to understand Christianity and maybe to become Christian to deny their own cultural roots, but to rediscover and integrate them in an authentic Christian faith.

As to the issue of reconciling the requirement of scientific objectiveness with the Christian perspective asumed in this work, I believe it is to be framwd in terms of a sincere recognition that pure obiectivity is in practice an impossible ideal. Moreover, it is undesirable precisely because, being impossible, the claim to absolute objectiveness is unsincere. Rather than claim to be objective

without ever being able to effectively be so, it is preferable to explicitly declare one's methodological presupozitions, since they will inevitably exist anyway.

PART I ARCHAIC CHINESE RELIGION: FROM MONOTHEISM TO DIFFUSED RELIGION

I start by outlining the Chinese religious and philosophical tradition, highlighting two of its main features: its archaic **monotheist** essence and its **diffused** nature. The political and religious stability and the longevity of the Chinese society are explained by the fidelity of the political praxis to the Confucianist religious and moral principles and concepts, which have structured political thought, grounding and legitimizing imperial power along the millenia. It was not by chance that this centralized imperial model of a hierarchic-autoritarian birocracy has decisively marked the Chinese state paradigm, with its autocratic-absolutist state governing pattern and obedient-collectivist social reflexes, which later would allow a violent imposition of a communist regime.

CHAPTER 1: ARCHAIC CHINESE MONOTHEISM. THE RICCI–LEGGE–GILES–CHRISTENSEN HERMENEUTIC LINE

The Neolitic archaeological cultures are listed, attesting the antiquity of Chinese civilization – evidence serving in subsequent chapters dedicated to controversies linked to the archaic cronology of China. The Erlitou culture is mentioned as possible proof of the historicity of the Xia dynasty.

This is followed by a presentation of the *Classics* (*Wu jing* 五經 – *The 5 Classics* and *Si shu* 四書 – *The 4 Books*), the canonical books which are the heritage of antiquity, the source of archaic tradition and normative fundation of the entire Chinese civilization. They evoke the ideal governing of the forst Chinese sovereigns, set forth as exemplary models of virtue.

The case is made for the religious dimension of the *Ru*-ist tradition (*Ru Jia* 儒家), misnamed „Confucianism", and wrongly reduced to the status of a secular humanism whose moral-philosophical system allegedly had strictly ethical-social functions, meant to ensure the social cohesion of East Asia. Rodney Taylor is quoted, demonstrating that its religious dimension is the very quintessence of *Ru*-ism, denouncing the nefarious insistance of Western researchers to eliminate religiuas aspects from the interpretations of Confucianism, this impoverished of its central feature. In fact Confucius did accept the religious authority of *Tian*, understood as supreme divinity with theistic attributes, an authority necessary for the emulation of the way of the ancient wise sovereigns and the human religious development. A hermeneutics refusing to acknowledge this religious authority of *Tian* in the thought of Confucius is but a distortion of textual truth, motivated by a, whether declared or not, atheistic perspective. It is a flaw in the epistemological and above all metaphysical evaluation of the *Ru*-ist doctrine and the content of the *Classics*, due to an atheistic methodological postulate, trying to impose an interpretation key which is not just Christianophobe, but sacrophobe in a wide sense.

The religious character of *Ru*-ism is the ground of the assertion that the Chinese imperial political paradigm was **theocratic**, normed by the order of ancient rules of a proper ritual and sacrificial relationship between man and Heaven. The ritualic order, a model for the harmony of the cosmic and the human, institutes and maintains cosmic order, but also social-political order. As an instrument for the cultivation of the self, ritual is meant to bring offers and thanks to Heaven, and to make respectful notifications and requests in order to obtain its approval and blessing.

The *Ru*-ist paradigm is presented by means of the network of philosophical-metaphysical and ethical-symbolic concepts grounding a religious anthropology and a socio-political ethos, undergirding the mechanisms of sacral foundation of authority and legitimization of imperial power. It dates from the era of an *illo tempore*, the mythical time of the founding Legendary Sovereigns. They are the civilizing heros with a nomothetical status, credited with instituting the laws (firstly moral), invention of writing, of the trigrams, astronomy, the calendar, etc. As models of altruistic and virtuous behaviour, they set up an archetype of government to become normative for Chinese

emperors throughout the millenia to come.

The matrix of the archaic *Ru*-ist religion was presided over by the supreme metaphysical concepts *Shang Di* and *Tian*. Prestigious sinologists such as Ricci, Legge, Giles or Karlgren, but also Christensen, converge in stating that they were designating the Supreme Divinity, understood as having personal attributes. Legge goes as far as to clearly state: „Not henotheist, but monotheist", in order to exclude any equivocal interpretation. Numerous passages are quoted in support of these statements. *Shang Di* (上帝, *the High Sovereign*, *Lord on High*, *Supreme Ruler*) is the most ancoent Chinese name for God, found in the earliest writings remaining from the Chinese pre-history, c. 2300 B.C. The name *Shang Di* was used to invoke the Supreme Divinity during the Xia dynasty. Then, in the Shang dynasty (1700-1100 B.C.), the name *Tian* (Heaven) starts to dominate, although *Shang Ti* continues to be uised as a variant, or sometimes along with the first. Only in the Zhou dynasty, *Tian* (天) almost completely replaces *Shang Di*, as a subject of the religious ritual at the highest level of the State cult, the imperial one. Since today there is no modern Orthodox transation of the Bible in Chinese, the Chinese Orthodox faithful are recommended to use not the *Shen* (神版) edition of the Bible, but the *Shangdi* (上帝版) edition in which „God" is rendered by Shang Di.

The concept of *De* 德 (*virtue*) is then presented, rendered by Christensen as the **uncreated „grace"**, **manifestation** or **energy** of *Dao*. *De* is the charismatic source of political legitimacy of the legendary sovereigns, founded on the presence in them of a supernatural power. Then follow *Tian Dao*, *Tian Xia* and the other concepts in the Confucianist constelation.

CHAPTER 2: *RÚ*-ISM AND DISGUISED THEOCRACY

A periodization of Confucianist schools is followed by a description of the concept of **mandate of Heaven**: political authority remains transcendentally grounded, but now through a symbolic mediation. The universe is seen as a sacred semiosis, cosmic phenomena – as divine signs of approval or sanctioning by Heaven of the sovereign's acts. I emphasize the lack of any distinction between the temporal and the spiritual imperial power (like in Christian monarchies), in China such distinction being unconceivable. Power was one and one alone, with no crack or cleavage, political and religious at the same time, and fully embodied by the emperor. Therefore there could be no conflict between *imperium* and *sacerdotium*.

Having supreme religious prerogatives, the sovereign was preziding over the **State Cult** (inseparable in China from the public function of the imperial administration). He was also fulfilling the role of a High Priest or Arhpriest. As such he was heading the highest religious ritual, dedicated to the Supreme Divinity *Shang Di* / *Tian*: **the Great Sacrifice** named *Feng* 風. The sovereign was bringing this sacrifice in the Hall of Light (*Ming Tang*), always on solstice days. The prayers he uttered were undeniably addressed to Shang Di as supreme God, even if gradually other secondary spirits were added, superstitiously and politeistically idolatrized. I have quoted in full the text of such a prayer, translated by myself after James Legge's English version. God was addressed as a personal Being, the Lord of all, to Whom the Sovereign thanked on behalf of the entire people for the blessings received in the past, and Whom he asked for protection and further blessing. This cult and the Great Solstitial Sacrifice was preserved in China down to the last dynasty, Qing, abolished in 1911, being the main form under which monotheism was maintained for millenia in China. The emperor was the only one who, as „parent of the people", had the right to invoke Shang Di and to perform service to Him on behalf of the whole empire. The resemblance that Legge notices between this prayer and the prayers of the ancient Jews, particularly with the Psalms of David, is explained by the common origin of the two religion, in the primordial Adamic religion, transmitted through the descendants of Adam and then of the patriarch Noah.

The Chinese Empire was a **theocracy**. Since there was no distinction or separation between religion and politics, between Church (a notion unknown in China) and the state, the supreme religious function was exercised by the sovereign as a high sacerdotal function. He was celebrating religious ceremonies to Shangdi, and everything linked to the imperial institution was under a taboo, sacralized, „contaminated" by a sacral aura, by the numinous (R. Otto). But since there was no

notion of priesthood as such, as a distinct class with exclusively religious prerogatives, these attributes being inseparable from the political-administrative ones, I have called the sovereign an „implicit priest", and the Chinese theocracy – an **implicit**, **equivocal theocracy**, a theocracy **in disguise** or under camouflage. In order to define this type of religiosity characteristic to China, I used the concept of „**diffused religion**", introduced by the sociologist C. K. Yang (who borrowed it from Talcott Parsons and Emile Durkheim). Yang shows that China never knew any distinction of the sacred–prophane, transcendent–immanent, religious-secular, spiritual-temporal, divine-worldly type, like Christianity, nor did it have any specialized „ecclesial" institution, separated from the political-administrative ones. Religion completely infused Chinese society, being intimately integrated in the institutions of the state. therefore Daoism and Buddhism, which did have priests, monks and monasteries, were marginal in Chinese society, having an inferior social status. The Europeans drew the wrong conclusion that religion played no major role in China, as they failed to understand the different, diffused religious paradigm. Although not constituted in distinct structures, having an ambiguous doctrine regarding the transcendence and only vague metaphysics, religion did fulfil essential social functions: it permeated the institutions, being merged with the public administration and private life, grounding social and individual morals by the Confucian precepts, and maintaining social order. It was intimately diffused throughout the entire society as a force integrating all communities, mainly through rituals, ensuring the cohesion of the family, of guilds and of the whole population, and legitimizing the ethical-political system.

CHAPTER 3: *RÚ* 儒 – A SACERDOTAL CLASS. GRAPHOCRACY, HIEROGRAPHO-PHANY, ICONOCRACY, OPTOCRACY

The "mandarins", scholars or „litterati" (*Ru* 儒) were at the same time officials in the bureaucracy of the state apparatus, appointed on meritocratic criteria, and the „priests" of Ru-ism (as the true name of „Confucianism" was the *School of the Mandarins*, *Rú Jiā* 儒家). Confucius himself belonged to this class, he was a *Rú*. They were a magical-(semi)sacerdotal caste, an intellectual aristocracy, a cultivated, refined elite, with ceremonial competence, experts in divination, „professionals of the ritual", but also of the cultivation of virtue, of emulating the model of the ancient wise. They maintained an ambivalent function, both a ritualic-religious-moral one, and a political-administrative one. Nakamura calls them the "Brahmins of China" and the preservers of traditional culture, based on a "charismatic authority" or "gentilic charisma" (Weber).

Apart from sciences (astronomy), they also mastered the sophisticated art of hieroglyphic writing, of calligraphy. Since their power was also due to graphical skills, I have called them **graphocrats**. Given the **iconic**, visual nature of Chinese writing, I also gave them the name of „masters of iconic signs" – **iconocrats**. And as "masters of the visual", of the image, I also called them **optocrats**, and Chinese culture – an "**optocratic culture**". I quoted the orientalist E. Fenollosa, who explains the visual nature of Chinese culture.

As an element of originality, I have connected this **visual pattern of Chinese thought** with the **mental pattern of iconic thinking**, specific to **Orthodox Christianity**. I quoted the prestigious sinologist David Keithley, who states that Chinese proto-ideograms were originally "logograms with a high degree of iconicity," that there may have existed in them "a play between the phonetic and the iconic, and this may have rezonated with a certain religious significance". I have highlighted the resemblance between the Chinese way of thinking, cast in and inseparable from the visualness of ideographic writing, and the prevalence of the **iconic** in Orthodoxy, ever since the time of Byzantine civilization (M. Mondzain).

PART II   CHRISTIANITY IN CHINA. ITS INTERACTION WITH THE THREE RELIGIONS

It has been recently predicted that the Chinese giant, just awoken, might become the country with the greatest Christian population in the world, during the time of a single generation. Currently millions of Chinese are becoming neo-Protestants, also wishing to imitate the American culture so

fashionable in modern "capitalist" China. But even these denominations may be providentially preparing the ground for an autocephalous Chinese Orthodox Church, which the dimensions of China would justify. There are all the conditions for an Orthodox conversion of China.

A chronological survey of previous attempts to evangelize China and of the reasons they were for a long time thwarted, preventing these Christian missions to yield fruit, may lead to relevant conclusions for the current Orthodox mission in China – which has chances to be more successful than before.

CHAPTER 4: AN APOSTOLIC EVANGELIZATION OF CHINA IN THE FIRST CENTURY? THE HOLY APOSTLES THOMAS AND ANDREW

I am here presenting two hypotheses concerning a possible missionary presence of two Holy Apostles (St. Thomas and St. Andrew) in China, respectively at its borders.

The presence of St. Thomas in China and the evangelization of China by him in the first century A.D. has always been regarded as a sure fact in the tradition of the Chaldean Church in Irak and of the Church of the Siro-Malabar Rite in Southern India called "St Thomas' Christians". „The books and traditions of the Siro-Malabar Church clearly speak of the arrival of Thomas to India, then to China in the 60's A.D., then again back to India where he was martyred. Two Breviaries (one on the Malabar coast, Southern India, another in the Syrian language, of the Church of the East) refer to Thomas and China," says Daniel Bays.

In two books published in 2008 and 2012 respectively, the French profesor Pierre Perrier and other researchers submit the theory that this tradition is confirmed by the sculptures in Kongwangshan, near Lianyungang. That was the ancient first port of entry to China, lying at the mouth of the Yellow River into the East China Sea, the access point to the capitals of the Chinese empire in the Han dynasty. Perrier formulates the hypothesis that St. Thomas journeyed by sea from India to China in 67 A.D., remaining in China three years and forming a Christian community. In 69 A.D. he returned to India, wjere he died as a martyr at Mylapore in 72 A.D. After his departure, persecutions wipe out any trace of Christianity, which is replaced by Buddhism. Perrier brings in support of his thesis archaeological arguments (artefacts found in Christian tombs dating from the 1st and 2nd centuries A.D., the East-West orientation of the ruins of some "pagodas" such as that of the Baima Si monastery, universally considered the craddle of Buddhism in China, the sculptures at Kongwangshan), as well as historical, linguistic, and theological ones. He claims that Christianity was "hijacked" in China by Buddhism, which took over may of its elements and deleted its traces.

There are traditions saying that another Apostle, St. Andrew, would have reached Western China. The Greek author George Alexandrou wrote a monumental monography (1000 pages) dedicated to the Holy Apostle Andrew, published in Greek, titled *He Rose the Cross on Ice*. For its elaboration Alexandrou used oral traditions and texts on St. Andrew in ancient Greek, Pontian, Calabrian, Georgian, Abkhasian, Slavonic, Serbian, Russian, Ukrainian, Romanian, Kalashic, Kurdic, amharic Ethiopian, Coptic, Arabian, Aramaic Syrian, Turkish of Central Asia, Iranian, Bulgarian, Old English, German, Italian, Latin, Albanian, Finnish, Karelian, Armenian. From his research he found that St. Andrew made 4 long missionary journeys to Asia, Europe and Africa. On his second missionary journey he reached Central and Eastern Asia, travelling through Antioch, Georgia, Parthia (Persia), Kurdistan, today's Balucistan at the border between Iran and Pakistan, Sogdiana (today's Samarkand and Buhara in Uzbekistan), today's Afghanistan, along the Silk Road to the Massagetes (China's North-Western border), Altai Mountains, and back by the Caspian Sea. Alexandrou quotes the Byzantine historian Epifanios who states that St. Andrew reached Northern China, in the land inhabited by the Masageti Scytes and the Massacs, and the Altai Mountains. A probably Chinese disciple of St. Tadeus is mentioned, named Agai, a silk maker, who preached in Parthia, Sogdiana and Central Asia.

CHAPTER 5: THE MISSION OF THE (SIRIAN) "CHURCH OF THE EAST" TO TANG DYNASTY CHINA (618–907 A.D.)

I have avoided to use the name of "Nestorian Chirch," prefering that of "Church of the East in

Syria". I have quoted the paper *The "Nestorian Church": an unfortunate misnomer*, by Sebastian Brock who shows that the Syrian Church was wrongly named "Nestorian". Brock claims that this name is only a "pernicious popular caricature", based on a distorted historical-dogmatic image, originateing in a "hostile historiographic tradition which has dominated the textbooks of history of the Church", the reality behind doctrinal, linguistic and political splits of that time being far more complex.

The main written (Syrian, Arabic and Chinese) sources and archaeological evidence are presented, attesting the Syrian missionary presence in the 7th-9th centuries China:

5.2.1.　　　The Xi'an Stele

Raised in 781 AD, this Stele is the best known vestige of that time, the text engraved on it having been translated by the Jesuit missionaries and published in Europe in the 17th century. The Stele was discovered near Chang'an, the ancient Western capital of China. It records the arrival to China, in 635 A.D., from the Persian Empire of the Sassanids, of 21 Syrian monks led by Aluoben. Emperor Taizong, known for his policy of tolerance, receives the missionaries with great hospitality and issues a decree whereby they can preach Christianity in the Chinese empire. He orders the scriptures brought by them to be translated into Chinese and spread throughout the country, as well as a Christian monastery to be built in the capital. His follower, emperor Gaozong, allows Christian monasteries to be set up in all the 10 Chinese provinces. Aluoben becomes the bishop of the Syrian Church in China. In 745 their name is changes from "Persian" to "Byzantine" (*Da Qin*) monasteries. The inscription on the Stele describes the Christian doctrine, proving the effort to contextualize the new religion by using Buddhist and Daoist terms. The text of the inscription is composed by the Syrian monk Adam, "priest and *papash* of Sinistan" – i.e. the first metropolite of China (called "Beth Sinaye" as an eccleziastic province of the Syrian Church).

5.2.2.　　　The *Da Qin* Monastery

This is the first Christian monastery in China, set up in 640 A.D., soon after the Aluoben's arrival in China and the issuance in 638 of Taizong's decree of protection of Christianity. By the name of *Da Qin* the Chinese were designating the Roman, i.e. Byzantine, Empire.

5.2.3.　　　The Dunhuang Documents or the "Jesus Sutras"

This is a library with thousands of manuscripts in Chinese, mostly Buddhist, found in the caves near Dunhuang in North-Western China, where they were hidden in 1035 A.D. due to persecutions. Among these manuscripts, 9 Christian texts were also discovered, known today as the „Jesus Sutras", dating from the 7th-10th centuries, and containing Christian teachings brought by the Syrian missionaries. They are the only surviving writings of *Jing Jiao* (the „Luminous Religion", as the Syrians called Christianity in Chinese), of the scores of texts which they had translated from Syrian into Chinese. I have included a presentation of the 9 texts, classified in <u>doctrinary</u> and <u>liturgic</u>. They lay special emphasis on the ascetic practice as a prerequisite for obtaining the mystical revelation and salvation.

5.2.4.　　　The Luoyang Pillar

It is another Christian monument, raised in 815 A.D. in Luoyang, the Eastern capital of the Tang Empire, discovered in 2006 in a Christian tomb. The inscription on it includes the *Trisagion Hymn* in Chinese, a Christian „sutra" composed by the same Syrian metropolite Adam of China, and the epitaph of some Sogdian Christians burried there.

The persecutions against foreign religions (Buddhism, Zoroastrism, Manicheism, Christianity) in 795, then 841-845 A.D., seriosly affect Syrian Christianity, which all but disappears from China in the 10th century along with the fall of the Tang dynasty. Paradoxally, it is persecuted precisely because of the Buddhist terminology and style which it had too mimetically adopted with an „**indigenization**" purpose.

I have dedicated a subsection of this chapter to the crucial issue which all missions in China had to confront – that of the need to resort to a certain degree of **inculturation**, **contextualization** and **accomodation**, withoiut which missiunea seems impossible. Due to the utter lack of a Chinese Christian vocabulary and the formidable barrier of the Chinese multimillenary language and culture,

which makes the Chinese extremely xenophobic and sinocentric, reopposed to any foreign tradition, all Christian missionaries had to adapt and transate Christianity into Chinese terms. They obeyed a cultural imperative, adopting a Chinese terminology: the Buddhist-Daoist one in the case of the Syrians, the Confucianist one later in the case of the Jesuits. However, the dilema is the fine border between **indigenization** and **syncretism**: where the legitimate accomodation process must stop and where begins the syncretism which is to be avoided. The Syrians *avant la lettre* „accomodationist" approach can be seen also from their borrowing Buddhist iconographic elements in the symbolic imagery engraved on the two monuments – the Xi'an Stele and the Luoyang pillar.

I have presented arange of concepts taken from the Chinese Buddhist and Daoist terminology in order to translate Chrostan concepts. The Syrian missionaries' theology, particularly their Hristology and soteriology, is contaminated by syncretistic elements, of Buddhist-Daoist and Manicheist influence. Some authors even speak of a Buddhist-Daoist Hristology and soteriology, created in order to forge a new, Asian identity of Christianity, in the language and ethos of other religions, by reformulating Christian theology within the terminologic framework of a Buddhist-Daoist view of the universe and the human condition. Thus the Christian message was indigenized, the original theological framework – abandoned, and the Buddhist-Daoist categories of thought were progresively adopted. Some researchers claim that it was precisely this, all too accomodating, adaptative evolution was a cause of the disappearance of Oriental-Syrian Christianity from China. In the 10th-12th centuries Syrian Christianity was practically absorbed by the Chinese religious systems.

Another section of the thesis is dedicated to the fascinating **hypothesis** of a substantial **Christian influence on the formation of Mahayana buddhism in Central Asia** during the 1st-3rd centuries A.D. Significant elements taken over by Buddhism from Christianity might include the strong accent on compassion (*karuna*), the *Goddess Guanyin* and the *Boddhisattva* concept. This is a hypothesis which still requires in-depth research going far beyond the scope of this thesis, which can do no more than indicate a possible direction of study.

CHAPTER 6: SYRIAN CHRISTIANITY AND THE FRANCISCAN CATHOLIC MISSION TO YUAN DYNASTY CHINA (1271–1367)

Next is another period when the evangelization of China was attempted – that of the 12th-14th centuries, before and during the **Yuan dynasty**. Two types of Christianity are competing with each other in this period – the Nestorians and the Catholics.

Nestorian Christianity is now brought back into Northern China by **Christianized Turkish-Mongolian tribes** of Central Asia (Keraits, Öngüts, Uigurs, Naimans, Merkits, Oyirats, living in today's Mongolia and Inner Mongolia, Southern Siberia, and along the commercial routes stretching between the Middle East, Central Asia and China – the Silk Road). The second introduction of Syrian Christianity into China occurred mostly witnin the foreigners resident there, including the Mongolianconquerors, rather than among the Chinese. The majority of the Chinese population and the overall Chinese society remained little affected by Christianity. Gradually the Mongolians and the other Christian foreigners were assimilated and sinicized, and along with the fall of the Yuan Mongolian dynasty in 1367 and the rising of the Ming Mongolian dynasty, Christianity all but disappears from China once more.

A section presents some remarcable Christians coming from these tribes: the **Queen Sorghaghtani** – the mother of founding emperor of the Yuan Mongolian dynasty, Kubla Khan –, the **Syrian Patriarch Mar Yaballaha III** – of öngüt descent, and the Uigur **Bar Sauma**, ambassador of Persia to the Vatican.

During the 13th-14th centuries the **Syrian Church of the East** and the **Roman-Catholic Church** were disputing their jurisdiction over China andother Asian teritories. In oered to exercise their spiritual authority, Bagdad and Rome were sending priests and appointing bishops who raised monasteries and churches, evangelizing the local population. During almost three centuries the Syrian Church set up in Central Asia and China **institutional ecclesiastic structures** which carried an intense missionary activity and enjoyed prosperity. This flourishing was going to end along with the fall of the Yuan dynasty, which protected Christianity, and the blocking of commercial routes between Persia and China through the conquest of Central Asiei by Tamerlane. The Church of the East set up, along the Silk Road, its own metropolitan provinces with metropolites reziding in Merv,

Samarkand and Kashgar. Other two Nestorian metropolitan provinces were set up in China: Almaliq and Cathay (headquartered in the capital Khanbaliq, toda's Beijing), which also included South China. A specific features of the religious situation in China was (and still is) the incorporation of the clergy and of ecclesiastic-religious structures into the governmental administration. Neither could Christianity be an exception – all Christian bishops, priests, monasteries and rites being administered by the Bureau for the Christian Clergy, set up in Khanbaliq in 1289. The institutional integration of the religious clergy into the public administratyion was a tradition in China ever since the first dynasties, when the *Rú* 儒 was fulfilling at the same time the roles of sacerdotes and of government officials. As we saw, the Confucianist class continued to act this duuble role along the entire history of imperial China.

The subchapter dedicated to the **<u>first Catholic missions to China</u>** presents some of the 16 missionaries of the Franciscan order who arrived in Central Asia and Yuan dynasty China (which however they called *Cathay*, not knowing its exact size and associating it only with the Mongolians, as shown in Marco Polo's account). The monks **Giovanni dal Piano dei Carpini** (1245-1247) and **Willem van Rubroek** (1253-1255) arrive via the Silk Road to Karakorum, the ancient capital of the Mongolian Empire.

The monk **Giovanni da Montecorvino** (1247-1329) is sent by Pope Nicholas IV to the court of Kubilai as a response to his wish to receive Christian scholars, conveyed to the Pope by Niccolo Polo. He arrives in Khanbaliq in 1293, becomes Arhbishop of Beijing, where he raises two churches, and is the first Catholic missionary who dies there. As a papal legate, he is received by Emperor Chengzong (1294-1307) to whom he delivers the letters of the Pope inviting him to embrace the Christian faith. He translates the New Testament and the Psalter and celebrates the Liturgy after the Latin rite in the öngüt language.

Another missionary in Yuan dynasty China is the Franciscan monk **Oderic de Pordenone** (1286-1331). The account of his voyage to Khanbaliq via Persia, India, Sumatra and today's Vietnam, and back through Tibet, Khorasan and Tabriz, is very successful in his time.

CHAPTER 7: THE CATHOLIC MISSION TO MING AND QING DYNASTIES CHINA (16TH-18TH CENTURIES)

This is an ample chapter dedicated to the important Jesuit and Dominican mission to China in the premodern period.

A total of 920 Jesuits served in the Chinese mission between 1552–1800. Among their undeniable merits is also that of being the fathers of sinology.

However, serious accusations were also eveled against them. One is that their accomodationist method promoted an unacceptable tolerance (from a Christian perspective) to thw pagan rituals of the ancient Confucian tradition, permitting idolatry even as they were preaching Christianity. A second one is that they "sinicized Europe: having praised so well the wise scholars, sovereigns and people of China, the Westerners asked what reason might exist to evangelize such a moral and well governed country. "Instead of the Christianization of China, the missionaries made a vigorous contribution to the de-Christianization of Europe". These are unjust accuzations, to which the answer requires an in-depth, nuanced analysis of the complex interaction between the two cultures.

The missionaries were a top-level product of a system of Christian education focused on performance. They were among the most well-trained scholars of their age, some of the best that the system produced in their time from an intellectual point of view. They had a passion for China and made available to Europe rigurous information about a parallel world, a civilization whose alterity was hard to perceive (then as it is today). They provided a nowledge of China based on their respect toward an ancient civilization. What the Westerners did with this knowledge, and how they used it, was not the missionaries' but the Europeans' responsibility.

Another question asked was how objective and impartial could be their writings, considering their inevitable „colouring" by the Christian view and their missionary concern. But this was the view of their time, and it was particularly inherent to their position. Moreover, it was an explicit, openly declared and assumed presuposition, the reader being fully warned of it. Despite it, however, they made huge efforts to enter and assimilate the Chinese culture and to make it accesible to Europe, in

the terms and at the level of their time (and sometimes much ahead of it).

7.1. The Jesuits in late-Ming-dynasty China (16th-17th centuries)

The first Jesuits who entered China at the end of the 16th century were **Michelle Ruggieri** and **Matteo Ricci**. A special merit in their success must go to the credit of the „accomodation strategy" designed by **Alessandro Valignano** (1538-1606), the Visitor of all Asian missions. He understood that the only chance was the adaptation of the missionaries to the local culture, i.e. „to become Chinese in China" (and Japonese in Japan). Ruggieri and Ricci study Chinese language and culture intensively, managing to make themselves accepted by Chinese bureaucrats who issue their entry permits. They settle in Southern China, and initially wear modest grey robes and shave their heads like Buddhist monks. But soon they understand that in China only the Confucian scholars, representatives of the ancestral Ru-ist tradition, enjoy universal prestige, and that as long as they are not accepted by this highly respected class – who also occupy all the official positions in thje imperial administration –, as long as their teaching remains devoid of the endorsement of this intellectual and cultural elite, neither shall it be accepted by the people. From that moment on, they become "sinicized", adopting the garments and the attitude of the Confucian„litterati".

By applying Valignano's strategy and building on the bases laid by Ruggieri, **Matteo Ricci** raised a missionary edifice in China for which he has remained famous in Europe, but also in the Chinese annala, being known until today in China as *Lì Madòu* (利瑪竇), *Xitai* (西太) or *Taixi* („the Wise man from the remote West"). Recognized as the „father of sinology", Ricci has been called „**the most prominent cultural mediator between China and the West of all times**", and even „**one of the most remarcable and brilliant men in history**" (J. Needham). It is true that Ruggieri's and Ricci's performance was not isolated, being part of a vast effort of exploration and evangelization of the Far East, benefitting from the exceptional logistic and communication Jesuit system. The „Society of Jesus" was the world's first global organization, combining centralism and flexibility in managing intellectual and material resources to create „the most formidable transnational network of the pre-modern age". Communication was another strong point of the Jesuits, their internal reports serving a minute organizational management. Their travel and missionary activity accounts, written with talent, were translated and printed for the public opinion, circulating among the intellectual circles of the European elite.

Ricci used his skills as a mathematician and astronomer to gain the admiration of the Chinese. He makes the first world map in a European style, in Chinese, with the American continents unknown to the Chinese, and metal terrestrial globes to illustrate the round shape of the Earth and the Ptolemaic view of the universe. With Ruggieri he writes the first Chinese dictionary in a European language. Ricci is appointed the superior of the China mission. The reputation of his virtuous life, his literary talent and his scientific competence grows. He reaches Beijing, where in 1601 the emperor Wanli invites him to be an imperial advisor. He is the first Westerner to enter the Forbidden Citry. He obtains the Emperor's patronage and the permission to set up the SOuthern Cathedral (*Nantang*) of the Immaculate Conception – the oldest Catholic church in Beijing. At the end of his life Ricci had gained the respect of the Chinese intellectual elite, and Chroistianity had become from an unknown, suspected faith, rejected by the Chinese society, a religion with its own cathedral in the capital of the Empire and thousands of adepts, including scholars and high-ranking officials in the imperial administration. He dies in 1610 in Beijing; making an unprecedented exception, the emperor Wanli gives the Jesuit mission a plot of land in the capital to bury Ricci – the highest honour granted to a foreigner in China, as a sign that he was truly assimilated to the Confucian scholars, fully integrated into the Chinese culture.

I have described the „**cultural accomodation strategy**" designed by Valignano and applied by Ricci. The inovative idea was that great civilizations of a considerable antiquity, suvh as the Chinese or Japonese ones, had to be first understood and respected before being able to be successful in the missionary activity. This had not been the approach adopted before by the Catholic Christianity on continents such as Africa or North and South America. But Valignano was arguing for an **empathic approach**. He wanted missionaries to learn the language of the hst-country, to study and respect the local way of life, habits and traditions, to adapt to them as long as they were not violating the

Christian teaching. „His intention was not to «Europeanize» the Far East, but he wished that, in all that was compatible with the Evangelical dogma and morality, the **missionaries should become** Indian in India, **Chinese in China**, Japanese in Japan – in all that was not a sin.” Ricci successfully applied, under Valignano's coordination, this method of conversion to Christianity by adapting the Christian message to the traditional Confucian culture and rituals, based on a knowledge of classical Chinese language. He translates the *Four Books* of the **Confucian Canon** (*Si Shu* 四書) under the name of *Tetrabiblion Sinense de moribus* – a version which circulated in a manuscript among the Jesuit missionaries, and was the basis of the volume *Confucius sinarum philosophus*, published one century later.

By studying the classical Chinese canonical texts, Ricci found that, in contrast to other cultures in South Asia, the Chinese culture bore the strong seal of certain **values -** the **Confucian** ones – which he considers **compatible with the Christian ones**. Therefore he decides to use Confucian terms and concepts to explain the Christian religion, which he presents to the Chinese not as a new, foreign and exotic, faith, but as a fulfilment of their own ancient faith, a natural fulfilment of all that was best in Confucianism. He argued that the Chinese people and culture had always had a belief in God, that the Chinese archaic religion had been monotheistic, having been based on a faith in a single divinity. To convert the *Ru* – Confucian scholars, in whom he finds educated, open and sometimes even friendly interlocutors, he writes in Chinese a *Treaty on Friendship* inspired from Cicero, Quintilian, Seneca and other Latin classics, a book enjoying an extraordinary success. It is an exceptional exercise in transcultural intertextuality and aculturation. Also in Chinese he writes in 1603 his famous „*Catechism*” called „*The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*” (*Tiānzhǔ Shiyi*, lat. *De Deo Vera Ratio*). This treaty, become famous, is an apologetic text in the form of a Socratic dialogue, proving with quotes from Chinese *Classics*, the proto-monotheism of the ancient Chinese religion. It has remained until today the most popular book on Christianity in China, the first work of reference in Chinese which is consulted by any Chinese who wishes to learn about Christianity. It was written over 4 centiries ago in a context in which the first Christian missionary arrived in premodern China had to spare the prejudice and idiosyncrasies of a centripetal civilization, proud of its own ancient culture, which could not understand why Christ had been born in a „barbarian” Judea and not in China, the centre of the civilized world. The doctrine of the Incarnation, particularly from a Virgin, His Crucifixion and death on the Cross, raised other insurmountable problems for the Chinese.

The „Lord of Heaven” in the title of the treaty was Ricci's answer to the problem of finding a semantic equivalent for „God” in Chinese. To say that the Chinese did not have such a word would have meant to say they were a people of atheists – which was unconceivable for such an impressive civilization, so advanced morally and culturally, a nation led by a refined intellectual elite like the *Ru* scholarsm, who laid such emphasis on morals and courtesy. The solution of transposing a European term into Chinese phonemes, as done in Japan – the phonetization of the Latin *Deus* – was an unnatural artifice, with no chance of being organically integrated into the local culture. Therefore an „**indigenization** of God” is searched by finding an „accomodationist” adequate Chinese name. Ricci cites the terms in the *Classics*, *Shang Di* 上帝 and *Tian* 天, suitable for the Christian meaning of God. But since in Chinese there was no concept for the creation of the world *ex nihilo* in a Christian sense, this solution was to be used later against Ricci's line, accused that the natural religion he preached to the Chinese looked like deism. Finally, since the CHinese venerated Heaven, *Tian*, as a supreme hypostasis of the sacred, he chose the term *Tiān Zhǔ*, translated as *Master* or *Lord of Heaven*, to show that the Christian God was even above Heaven, consodering *Tian Zhu* as less prone to confusion. Ricci wrote: „It may be hoped that, by God's mercy, many of the ancient Chinese may have found salvation by the law of nature, supported by that help which, as the theologians teach us, is refused to no-one who does all he can for salvation, according to the light of his own conscience.”

If Ricci valorized the <u>*Ru*</u> tradition, building on it his missionary accomodationist method, in exchange he **fought Buddhism** and **Daoism**, considering them politeistic and **idolatrous** and publishing writings in which he attacked the faith in metempsychosis and concepts such as the *void* (*sunya*) and non-existence (*wú* 無). That was the reason why he disavowed Zhu Xi's Neo-confucianism, which had tried to integrate Buddist and Daoist concepts into a syncretistic synthesis. Nevertheless, it is significant that none of the Confucian intellectuals converted by Ricci had to deny his roots in his own cultural tradition, since in Ricci's view, Chrostianity was compatible with the

classical Confucianist moral-philosophical system. His pproach was summarized by his disciple, Paul Xu Guangqi, in the formula: „Complement Confucianism (*Bu Ru* 補儒), replace Buddhism (*Yi Fo* 易佛)".

Ricci wrote that Buddha had yaken hos teaching about **transmigration** from Pythagoras, that about Heaven and Hell from the ancient Hebrews, and that on inner tranquility and peace from the Daoists. He also wrote that the famous dream in which emperor Ming in the Han dynasty was revealed a new religion from the West referred to **Christianity**, and only by mistake his envoys stopped in India and returned with the **Buddhist** scriptures, instead of reaching the Great West and bring Christianity – which was a calamity for China.

Ricci did not ask his Chinese converts, starting with those who held positions in the public administration, to renounce the traditional rites for honouring the family ancestors, Confucius and the Emperor, being aware that would have meant a violation of the fundamental laws of Chinese society, jeopardizing the Christian mission in China. The **Ancestors' Cult** had ancient collective roots, embodying all that was most sacred in the family, clan and state. Hard to understand for Europeans, the saslvation of an individual soul seemed to the Chinese insignificant when compared to the continuity of the collective family and state tradition.

In an age in which the ancient Confucianist formulas were challenged, being contaminated by a Buddhist-Daoist syncretism, the **criticism** levelled by Ricci to the **Neo-Confucian** *melange* and his plea for a return to the ancient sources, centered on morality and fidelity to the most ancient tradition, the authority of canonical texts and the models of the founding sovereigns, and the cult of a Lord of Heaven fully compatible with imperial authority, found an eager audience in the consciences of the age. No wonder that the emperor himself appreciated the value of that message and recognized Ricci as an elite scholar.

7.2. The Jesuits in Qing dynasty China (17th-18th centuries)

Ricci's work is continued during the period of tranzition to the Qing dynasty by his colleagues. **Nicolas Trigault** translates into Latin the chronicle of the Catholic mission to China written by Ricci, starting with Francis Xavier's failure to enter China in 1552, until 1610. Published in 1615 under the title *De Christiana Expeditione apud Sinas*, it had an enormous impact in Europe. **Alvaro Semedo** published in 1641 *Imperio de la China*, illustrating the same accomodationist strategy of the „**Confucianist-Christian synthesis**" traced by Ricci. The content of these important works is presented in section 7.2.1. Semedo too **condemns Buddhism** as idolatrous. he mentions the **syncretistic** tendency in the Ming dynasty of harmonizing the three teachings, citing the formulas: „The scholars [*Ru*] master the state, Daoists naster the body, Buddhists master the heart", and „There are three doctrines, but truth is only one".

To gain access to the imperial court, interested in practical aspects, Ricci asked for missionaries with a solid scientific training to be sent to China. Schreck's work on the calendar reform is continued by Fr **Adam Schall**, a mathematician, astronomer and cartographer. He won a reputation through his „German" precision in forecasting eclipses and casting 510 canons, which however cannot save the Ming dynasty from the Manciurian army. Shunzhi – the young emperor of the new Qing dynasty – appoints him as director of the Imperial Astronomic Observatory and Tribunal for Mathematics, and in 1650 gives him a plot of land to build the Southern Cathedral *Nantang* (still by Catholics in Beijing). His relations with the imperial family are so close that some researchers even claim that in the decade 1651-1560 Schall seemed to have been almost the *de facto* regent of China. But his position make the Chinese envious, so he is accused of treason and condamned to death. He escapes by miracle from execution. His case shows that Ricci's double strategy (cultural accomodation and joining mission with mathematical, scientific and tehnical skills to obtain imperial protection and therefore social legitimacy) proved to be correctly calibrated for Chinese realities, being fruitful.

Christianity flourished under **Kangxi**, a brilliant, cultivated **emperor** who understood that the new Manciurian dynasty, coming from a people of warriors, could not govern an empire like China if it did not rise to the levwl of its multimillenary culture. Kangxi also understood the value of the services which foreign missionaries could provide. For instance, he charged Gerbillon and Pereira to

be China's interpreters and diplomatic reprezentatives in the negociations with the Russians in Nercinsk in 1689 regarding the Russian-Chinese border. The negotiations were carried in Latin through the Jesuits and ended in the first peace treaty between China and the tzarist empire, whereby Moscow gave to Beijing a disputed territory in Manciuria. For this result the Jesuits are praised by Kangxi. The missionaries in Beijing acquire the permanent imperial favour, being always well received by the emperor.

The peak of their success are the two „**Edicts of Tolerance**" issued in 1692, whereby missionaries are permitted to freely practice their religion in their churches along with their Chinese converts. Kangxi oficially declared that *Tianzhu Jiao* – the name given by Ricci to Christianity – posed no threat to the state, and that the missionaries had made a valuable contribution to the dynasty by their scientific and linguistic competences. The persecution of their religion was declared unfair. It was a triumph. Kangxi was compared to Constantine the Great, and his decrees with the Edict of Milan of 313. The Chinese were free at last to receive the holy faith, and the Chinese empire finally open to Christian preaching.

The success of the China mission are communicated in Europe through a huge effort of translation, publication and dissemination of the missionaries' writings. The highlight of the campaign of presentation, at a high academic level, to the European intellectual elite, of Ricci's accomodationist formula, is the publication in 1687, in Paris, by **Philippe Couplet** as editor, of the work *CONFUCIUS SINARUM PHILOSOPHUS*. The book is the translation of three of the Confucian *Four Books*: *Da Xue* (The Great Learning), *Zhong Yong* (the Unwobbling Pivot) and *Lun Yu* (Analects). It was a joint translation proiect involving 17 sinologists, being the finalization of a translation made by Ricci between 1591-1593 („*Tetrabiblion Sinense de moribus*"), improved by generations of missionaries throughout a century.

I have presented this work in extenso, since it illustrates all the accomodationist tenets, being an application of the **accomodationist formula** on the European side of the "mountain of differences" separating the two cultures. It was meant to contribute to the assimilation of Chinese culture in Europe, by presenting the fundamental books of that culture, unknown to Europeans. The intellectuals of the age and the theologians of the Vatican could form an idea about the sophistication and the exceptional moral precepts in the Chinese tradition, and better appreciate the difficulties confronting the missionaries in their inculturation approach.

The book opens with a preface titled *Proemialis Declaratio* – a historical-theological-hermeneutical-linguistic study. It presents the *Classics* and the tradition about the virtuous sovereigns Yao, Shun, Yu. Their **monotheist** faith in **Shang Di** is emphasized. "Figures" of Christianity in Chinese antiquity are brought as evidence that the ancient Chinese had known God: King Cheng Tang who offers himself as sacrifice for the forgivance of the sins of his people is regarded as a **prefiguration of Christ's sacrifice**. They plead for a **return to the original sense of the *Classics***, which for them, along Ricci's line, was the **monotheist** one.

Neoconfucianism is **criticized** as unusable for their Confucianist-Christian accomodationist synthesis. The authors of the *Preface* accuse Neoconfucianism of two things. Firstly that it postulates an **atheist-materialist** cosmological view based on the concept *Tai Ji* (Supreme cosmic Axis), which replaces God (Shang Di). The notion of *Tai Ji* does not exist in the *Classics*. Besides, the Neoconfucianists equate *Tai Ji* with another concept, *Li* – the structuring principle or constitutive reasdon which gives form to primary matter, *Tai Ji*. That materialist cosmological substrate of a primordial universal substance excluded any supernatural, divine origin. The other accusation is **syncretism**, the influence of Buddhist-Daoist metaphysics in a pantheistic sense.

The volume includes a biography of Confucius, presented as a teacher, not a god, to show that the his veneration was of a civic, not a superstitios-religious nature. Confucius's role in preparing the Chinese to receive the Christian truth is compared with the role of pagan poets in ancient Greece who had prepared the Athenians, as shown by the Apostle Paul. Thus **St Paul** is legitimately quoted as a **ground for accomodationism**.

I have analyzed in detail the translation from Chinese into Latin of the *Classics* made in *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*. I have shown that the translation has accomodationist shades, visible in translation choices which slightly "colour" the text in a Christian sense. I have stressed however that they are only moderate, within perfectly reasonable, natural limits, pertaining to an act of

interpretation inevitable in any translation, which is always subject to the translator's interpretive grid, inherent to any translation. I said that these "accomodationist" choices built bridges across the cultural and linguistic chasm between China and Europe, facilitating the mutual reception of the two cultures.

I gave examples of such terms equated in a Christian sense, starting with the key concepts of Confucianism: *Jun zi* (the accomplished man, perfected human), *xiu shen* (spiritual cultivation of the moral self), *xiu min* (renewal of man through a cultivation of virtues). The passage in *Zhong Yong* XIX.6 ("Through the winter and summer sacrifice rituals [the ancients] venerated Shang Di") is interpreted in a monotheistic sense; the Neoconfucianist Zhu Xi, who gives the passage a politeistic inyerpretation, by adding the divinity of the Earth, is contested. Sometimes the interpretions are excessively rationalized: *Zhong Yong*, the crucial concept of just ballance or natural measure, is rendered by *ratione concentus* (reason of harmony / concordance) and *ratione consentanea* (consensual reason). *Tian Ming* (man's authentic reason, in the sense of divine image in man) is renderd as „rational nature", in the sense of a rationalist reduction. *Dao* is rendered by „rule". *Ming De* ("luminous or shing virtue") is wrongly rendered as " rational nature", "the rational part given to man by Heaven". *Sheng Ren* (accomplished man, absolute superlative of virtue) is rendered as „Saint", which is not wrong, although later it would be translated particularly as "wise", a solution which loses a lot of the meaning of ideal human spiritual-moral perfection, since sainthood is more than just wisdom. Moreover, they interpret *Zhong Yong* 27 **in a Messianic sense** as a prefiguratin of Jesus Christ, prophesied by Confucius in much the same way as the Sybil prophesied the Saviour.

7.3. The Rites Controversy

The Rites Controversy was initiated by **Longobardo**'s **Treaty** expressing an anti-accomodationist position. According to Longobardo the entire Confucianism is materialistic, pantheistic, atheistic, idolatrous, and is to be totally rejected. He relies on wrong interpretations, refuted by Ricci, but his position shall be adopted with serious consequences by the enemies of accomodationism. The Controversy will last for two centuries, leading to the condamnation of the accomodationist method and the failure of the mission.

The initial success was due to Ricci's intuition of converting *Ru*-ist scholars, invoking the ancient **Chinese tradition as a monotheistic religion**, presenting Christianity as a return of the Chinese to their monotheistic roots, a rediscovery and fulfilment of their own archaic tradition. That because the scholars were the true continuators of this tradition, unlike Daoists and particularly Buddhists. By perceiving the **metaphysical gap of Confucianism**, they tried to fill it with Christian **metaphysics** (as Buddhists had done with their metaphysics). They were comparing their approach with Augustin's treatment of the Platonists who could be converted to Christianity starting from their own doctrine.

But the accomodation method had two components which were challenged: the terms *Shang Di* and *Tian*, and the allowance of a continuation of the practicing of rituals for **honouring the ancestors** by the Chinese converts. The missionarie interpreted these rites as ceremonies with a social-civic, not religious, role. I have described these Confucian rites and their importance in the Chinese society. I have shown who were the adversaries of accomodationism, their social-political and istorical motivations, and dogmatic arguments, including the totally unjustified analogy made by the Dominicans between Zhu Xi and his contemporary Thomas d'Aquinas. I pointed to the failure of the Catholic hierarchy in Rome to understand the **pseudo-theocratic** nature of the Chinese system and the **diffuzed**, ambiguous, **equivocal** nature of Chinese religion, organically impregnated in the social tissue, of the enormous cultural differences, of the fact that Chinese reality simply was not translateble into European terms. For the Chinese, notions such as idolatry, heresy, politheism or even religion did not exist conceptually, or they had other meanings. I have emphasized the Vatican' insistence to have a direct control over Christianity in China, even tresspassing the Emperor's will and autority – a totally unacceptable claim for Kangxi, who otherwise showed good will towards Christianity. I have cited the rudimentary interpretations, of the accomodationist method by the Sorbonne theologians, many of them Jansenists, and by the *Propaganda Fide* Congregation. An issue of a practical, missionary nature, was turned into a speculative dispute, decided by administrative-hierarchical authorities which had no adequate knowledge of cultural, anthropological

and social realities confronting the missionaries in China. The nuanced approach in the field was overruled by the presuppositions of ecclesiastic authorities in Rome, which were far from grasping the Chinese reality. The result were the papal decrees prohibiting accomodationism and then the Chinese repression and expulsion of missionaries from China. Between treating the Chinese civilization from equal positions and losing China, the Vaticanul chose to lose China. A consequence of the **failure of the mission** was the triumph of British colonialism in China. The mathematician-theologians will be followed in China by English merchants and guns. Accomodationism is replaced by trade and the Opium Wars. In Europe the anti-Christian attacks of the French Enlightenment will use the intra-Christian polemics about China in order to de-Christianize the West.

Only in 1939 another Pope shall issue a decree abolishing the interdictions posed by his predecessor in 1642 and declararing Confucianism a philosophy – part of the Chinese culture, not a pagan religion. It is another explanation of the stubborn persistence of the thesis of the non-religious character of Confucianism.

The 1939 decree was ironically calle the "Jesuites's Revenge". In light of the extreme tolerance of modern Catholicism toward other rites, the derogations requested by the missionaries in China seem today rather insignificant. "Their crime was to ask for them too soon."

PART III: FIGURISM – INTUITIONS AND ERRORS. A "DEAD END", OR THE FIRST ATTEMPT AT CREATING A COHERENT CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY IN CHINA?

CHAPTER 8: THE SEPTUAGINT OR THE VULGATE? THE ISSUE OF CHRONOLOGY

8.1. The Septuagint and the early, non-Masoretic version of the Old Testament

Another serious problem raised before Christian theology by the Chinese *Clasics* was that they involved a longer chronology of the universal history than the Biblical one, as officially set by the Vatican based on the *Vulgate*, adopted as official version by the Conucil of Trento. The Chinese civilization seemed to have a superior longevity than the one which Biblical traditiopn, according to the *Vulgate*, recognized for mankind. The history of China would have started before the Flood. The two traditions had to be reconciled. The Chinese one was credibly attested by Chinese historiography in rigorous chronicles. The missionaries' solution was to use a chronology calculated based on the *Septuagint*, which gave 1500 extra years for the history from Adam to Christ, placing the Fall in 5500 B.C. instead of 4000 B.C. like the *Vulgate*.

I gave an explanation to the differences between the two versions and made a historical presentation of the way the translations were produced. I quoted the Jewish historian Emanuel Tov and other specialists who confirm thet the *Septuagint* was **translated after an early version of the Old Testament**, a **non-Masoretic source-text which long preceded the Masoretic Text** (MT). This source-text was a canon of the Old Testament established after the return from the Babilonian captivity and the rebuilding of Jerusalem and of the Second Temple when, aided by Ezra, Neemia set up a library woth the holy books of the Hebrews in 445-444 B.C. (2 Macab 2:13; Neemia 8:2). The **Canon is approved by the Great Assembly** or the Great Sinagogue – the leading body of the people of Israel, formed of 120 scribes, wise and prophets, in the period between the last Biblical prophets and early Hellenism. This Great Assembly is the one which closes around **450 B.C.** the Biblical canon, initially called *Mikra*, then *Tanakh*. It is the source (***Vorlage***) after which the *Septuagint* **was translated**. The manuscripts found at the Dead Sea confirmed the existence of this *Urtext* or *Urvorlage*, **substantially different** from the subsequent **Masoretic Text**. I cited the Israelian expert Menahem Cohen, who affirms the existence of a **type-text** in common use in the time of the Second Temple. Also, the professor Joseph Fitzmyer, who rules out the hypothesis of a translatoin error in the case of the variations in the Septuagint versus the MT, stating that "these differences are not the result of a weak or tendentious translation from Hebrew into Gerek, but prove the existence of a different, **pre-Christian**, form of the Hebrew text". To the same effect I quoted from *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* where the Septuagint is "exonerated", shown to be "a faithful translation of an ancient Hebrew text, superior to the Masoretic Text". The same is asserted

by Mogens Müller and Robert Hanhart. In the primary Church it was considered that after the beginning of the Apostolic reaching, the Hebrew texts in the originary Biblical canon were modified by rabinic Judaism to make them less prone to "Hristologic-Messianic" interpretations. The purpose of the modifications was to reduce the textual basis for the possible identification of vetero-Testamentary profecies with a Messianic significance and reference to the Incarnation and work of the Saviour Jesus Christ in history. These prophecies, undeniably Messianic, were qupted by Christians in their controversies with the Hebrews, as arguments in favour of the new religion. As a reaction, the Judaism of the second century B.C. altered the texts. Evidence to this resect is brought by Patristic authors such as St. Irineus of Lyon or St. Justin the Martyr and Philosopher. The result of the modifications became the Proto-Masoretic Text – which was a standard text already in the second century, then the intermediary form used by Jerome for his translation of the *Vulgate* in the 4th-5th centuries.

8.2. The *Vulgate* and the deviations of the Masoretic Text

I am here accusing **J**erome for dropping the *Septuagint* and allowing himself to **be seduced by the proto-Masoretic text**, without knowing that the latter had already been altered. Although Augustine and others of his contemporaries asked him not to do that, in order to preserve the unity of the Church, he **insisted on translating the *Vulgate* after a modified Hebrew text**. The *Septuagint* was then excluded from the Catholic West due to a deep hostility after the Schism to anything linked with the Greek-speaking Byzantine East. Jerome's preference for the „*Hebraica Veritas*" and his rezervations regarding the *Septuagint* later also fueled the unfortunate veneration of the Masoretic Text by the Protestant Reformers, taken as a basis for many translations of the Olt Testament after the Reformation.

CHAPTER 9: FIGURISM – DEFINITION AND DIRECT PRECURSORS

Along with laborious calculations meant to harmonize the two chronologies, some missionaries-sinologists made an impressive hermeneutic effort to demonstrate the existence of a unique source of the two civilizations – European and Chinese – a source stretching back to the Tower of Babel, the Flood and even before. They tried to find in the Chinese *Classics* evidence of this common origin. They were called "**Figurists**", from their hermeneutical system trying to find in the Chinese *Classics*, read in parallel with the Bible, "signs" or "figures" (*figurae*), common historical and symbolic elements **prefiguring the divine Revelation**. Various characters, events and chronological series were interpreted in the sense of a convergence or common origin of the two ancient traditions – the Chinese and the Biblical one.

Figurism is an extreme form of accomodationism: it is accomodationism taken very far, constituted in an exegetical system. The border between accomodationism and Figurism is uncertain; it is hard to say where accomodationism ends and Figurism begins. That is why I included as precursors of Figurism some Jesuit sinologists who could fit just as well in the previous section dedicated to accomodationism.

9.1. Gabriel de Magalhães

Magalhães is one of Ricci's successors who extended the meta-narrative framework of the Christian-Confucianist accomodationist sinthesis, asserting the existence of a common ascendence. He stated that the ancient Chinese descended directly from Adam, from whom they had inherited the moral law. He too is convinced that they were venerated the same God as the ancient Hebrews, Whom they called Shang Di. He tries to show that the *Classics* contain vestiges of this ancient monotheistic cult.

In his work published under the title of *Nouvelle relation de la Chine* in Paris in 1688, Magalhães presents a Chinese "Figurist" chronology *avant la lettre*. He mentions two theories: one claimed that the Chinese history started with Fu Xi in 2952 B.C. Another one – which was the smallest common denomitor accepted by all Chinese scholars – claimed it started with King Yao in 2357 B.C. Magalhães pleads the *Septuagint* chronology whose variations of calculation allowed for greater

flexibility in contrast with the rigid dating of the *Vulgate*. According to this version, by his calculation, he placed the Flood in 3152B.C., and Fu Xi's reign 200 years after the Flood, which matched the Chinese tradition. Thus, Noah remained the ancestor of the entire world, and **Fu Xi was** a **descendant of Noah**.

Another element making Magalhães a "**proto-Figurist**" is also his interpretation of King **Cheng Tang** as a **Christ-figure**, a prefiguration of Christ's redemptive sacrifice. He mentions that, in the Chinese tradition, when KIng Tang offered himself as a expiatory sacrifice in order to beseach Heaven to forgive the people, he dressed himself in a white garment like an innocent lamb:

> "When the Chinese have difficulties regarding the mystery of the Incarnation, we convince them by this example, telling them how this King dressed himself in a lamb skin and offered himself as a sacrifice, to obtain the forgivance for the sins of the people, and that nevertheless this did not diminish at all the brightness of his majesty, but on the contrary, it made it greater."[1]

Magalhães added that this explanation seemed reasonable to the Chinese, who like to prove the truth of Christianity by examples from their own history.

9.2. Martino Martini – the "Celestial Mandarin"

Born in Trento in 1614, half a century after the Council meant to reform the Catholic Church in the context of the Counter-Reformation, Martini is an Italian of German origin. A Renaissance-type of universal spirit, he joins the German rigour, minutiosity and exhaustivity in his scientific work with the Italian fervour of devotion and specifically Southern impassioned faith in God, but also the balance, aesthetic sense and artistic talent characteristic to Italian Renaissance. He arrives as a missionary in China in 1643, in the degringolade caused by the Manciurian invasion which abolished the Ming dynasty. Already in 1647 he can write in Chinese, aided by a convert, his treaty *On Friendship*, continuing Ricci's tradition. Among the converts gathered around him there are many scholars, Martini being an adept of Christian Confucianism of the accomodationist line of his compatriotes Ruggieri and Ricci.

In 1650 he is sent to Europe to plead in Rome the accomodationist cause in the Rites Controversy. He fulfils this task with outstanding success. I found useful to describe in detail the presentation of the **accomodationist method** he made in front of the theologians of the ***Propaganda Fide Congregation***, of the disputed points, his argumentative strategy and the materials he brought in support of the submitted petitition, with all the theological (pastoral-missionary, dogmatic, sacramental), linguistic and cultural details. Martini's presentation is so convincing that the cardinals of the Congregation make a pozitive decision. Martini obtains the only decree (promulgated by pope Alexander VII in 1656) ever issued in favour of the Jesuit position during the entire Rites Controversy.

During this journey Martini published his three works, with a wide circulation in his time, for which he is still famous: *Sinicae Historiae Decas Prima*, *Novus Atlas Sinensis* and *De Bello Tartarico Historia*. He returns to China in 1658, composed a few works in Chinese, raised a church in Hangzhou and died in 1661, only 47 years old.

His wolk, after the immense success in his age, is then ignored for three centuries and rediscovered in the 1980's. The cone of shadow is explained by his position in the Rites Controversy (a position only confirmed in 1939) and his too favorable perspective on China, and negative regarding the *Vulgate*.

The first work written by Martini in Chinese is his treaty ***On Friendship*** is offered by him to doctor Zhu Shi, as a classic form of literary friendship. It is a replica to that of Ricci, but longer and more complete. But friendship was also lived by Martini, who understood it in the Christian sense of love for one's fellow human being, *caritas*, as the central theme of his apostolate. All his activity is to be interpreted in the light of this value.

Another work in Chinese is hit ***Essay against the doctrine of reincarnation***, which refutes Buddhism as incompatible with Christianity, and the belief in metempsyhosis.

Martini is also the author of the first ***Grammar of Chinese language***, a pioneering work published

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[1] Gabriel de Magalhães, *Nouvelle relation de la Chine*, p. 114.

in a small number of copies in 1696.

Paradoxically, more than a European missionary in China, Martini was known in his time as a "missionary" of *China* in Europe. By his works in Latin the European intellectuals inthe 17th-18th centuries knew the geography of China, its culture, ancient and modern history and something about its language. Before Martini, about China, printed and for wide dissemination in the public domain, there was almost nothing.

The most famous of his treatises was ***Novus Atlas Sinensis***, published in 1655. It is a treaty of historical and anthropic geography, with an interdisciplinary, socio-antropological methodological approach, going far beyond the mere cartographic description. He used a modern analytical grid to conceptually synthesize China's vast territory, especially its urban network, and to describe the huge territorial-administrative machinery created for its being centrally managed by the sovereign.

I described ***De Bello Tartarico***, the first history of the war between the Chinese and the Manciurians and the first "journalistic account" of the conflict, written based on contemporary documents and personal experiences and memories, as an eye-witness of the faall of the Ming dynasty and instauration of the Manciurian one. It is a chronicle based on lived facts, narrated with the flavour of direct testimony. But his metodology is theoretically grounded. He makes the effort to understand the causes and connections of the events of which he is a spectator, to conceptualize them in historical terms, and to interpret them in light of the past, which provides a key for a correct understanding, and of the political-administrative, economic, military, human and moral reasons which determine them.

I considered that Martini's historiographic method deserves a distinct section. Like any Christian historiography, his is also subject to absolute values inspired by an eschatological vision and has a universalist dimension, being concerned with the spiritual meanings of events. For the Christian conscience, history is the field of the interaction between the human subjectivities and the divine one. For the theologian, history either is universal and goes toward the Parusy, or it is not at all. Either it is the field of the mysterious interaction between divine providence and human liberty, or it is nothing. A meditation on history ignoring its soteriological sense is impossible for a Christian conscience, which regards history as being centred by the Incarnation of the Creator in it, and oriented toward something which transceds it. Equally impossible is a reflection on historical events which would completely ignore their ethical dimension, or to an equal extent, one on the condition of the human person in history which should totally ignore the moral sense of individual and collective acts.

Only for **Buddhism** is a **non-eschatological, un-historical perspective, in which history is an illusion (same as the entire universe) possible**, even inevitable. Since Martini is the adept of the Christian perspective, like Ricci, he **denounced Buddhism as an idolatrous "plague" which "infected the Chinese soon after the birth of Christ"**, a **religion which "regards good and evil as being one and the same thing", having "no eschatological component"**.

Martini's historiography is permeated by a clear **ethical view**, grounded in both Christian and Confucianist assumptions. But the ethical view does not cancel the desideratum of maximum objectivity and integrality possible which is a characteric feature of the best Jesuit historians' "historiographic realism". Martini remains faithful to his " programme of an integral reconstruction" of Chinese realities. In *De Bello Tartarico* he depicts a fresco of a contemporary China, with a clear historical perspective. The dramatic events of the fall of the house of Ming are realistically described, being at the same time **attributed to divine judgement** understood as a historical category, overlapping the Confucianist one (the loss of the Mandate of Heaven). The **ethical explanation meets the theological one**.

Sinicae Historiae Decas Prima (or ***Decas***) is a synthesis of the reconciliation between two worlds. It is the first serious, detailed, exact history of China published in Europe, presented in a systematic, exhaustive manner, and a chronological order intelligible to the European public. *Decas* reflects the Christian view on history much more programatically than *De Bello Tartarico*. Although it takes all its basic elements exclusively from the accounts of Chinese historians, he uses them in a narrative reconstruction equally reflecting both paradigms, the Christian and the Chinese one, in a synthesis representing a spectacular attempt at reconciling them. The work presents an uninterrupted history, from the most ancient times up to the year 1 A.D., in the chronological order f the reign of China's first 109 legendary and historical sovereigns. Book I deals with the most archaic history, from Fu Xi

to Shun, "the 8th emperor". Then the Xia, Shang, Zhou, Qin and Han dynasties follow up to the year of the death of emperor Ai – the year of the birth of Christ. This terminal point is chosen because it marks for Christians the middle of universal history, the central point of the existence of mankind. The treaty ends with a chronological table. Martini retroactively calculates the ruling dates of Chinese sovereigns, from the beginning of the Christian era, in order to place them in a European chronology. They are similar to the standard chronology used by Chinese moderni historians. He argues the exactness of the dates invoking the acriby of Chinese chronicles, their continuity since the most ancient times and the historical conscience of the Chinese nation. This table of the first 3000 years in the history of China is the first serious challenge addressed to the Biblical chronology prevalent in 17th century Europe. Through the *Decas* the Christian West met for the first time with an uninterrupted tradition boasting a historiy as long as the Biblical one: there had been nothing similar when the missionaries had discovered other civilizations, either less ancient, or with nothing like the precise and documented historiographic tradition like the one kept by the Chinese. This forced the Europeans to reconcile the two historical perspectives within a global view on the world history.

Martini's history starts with Fu Xi, whose reign he places between 2952–2838 B.C., suggesting an implicit association of Fu Xi and Noah. He places the Flood about 3000 years before the Christian era, like the *Septuagint* (the chronology used by Eusebius of Caesarea). Martini supports the hypothesis that the first ancestors of the Chinese, heirs of Noah, migrated to China from the West toward the East, after the Flood, in the time of Fu Xi, i.e. after 2952 B.C., probably after the confusion of tongues at Babel.

Martini is a precursor of Figurism not only by his chronology, but also by numerous elements cited from the Chinese annals and interpreted in a Christian sense. I am presenting a series of examples of such "proto-Figurist" motifs. The selection operated by Martini on the Chinese *Classics* is highly relevant, since he chose episodes with great exemplary value.

One such episode is the wonderfulbirth, without a man, of Fu Xi by his mother who stepped in the footprint left in the sand by the huge foot of the divinity. Another is the **restoration of the monotheist cult** by the sovereign **Zhuan Xu**. The same Zhuan Xu is the one who introduced the rule that only the emperor is allowed to perform the sacrifices to *Shang Di*, as a High Priest. Martini even titles this paragraph *Emperor and Sacerdote* (*Imperator simul Sacerdos*). The purpose of this rule was to restore cultic purity after the trouble caused by the magician Jiu Li (during the reign of Shao Hao, Zhuan Xu's predecessor) and to avoid in the future any occurrence of heretical (satanist) practices by invoking evil spirits. Here we have the explanation of the **imperial monopoly on the cult of Shang Di**, maintained thereafter during the entire course of Chinese history. Later Bouvet shall see in these sovereigns-sacerdotes hypostases of Melchisedec, king and priest, whose double function as Emperors and High Priests shall be shared by all Chinese sovereigns.

Other examples are Xie, miraculously conceived by his mother who makes an **oath to Shang Di**, and Hou Ji, just as miraculously conceived after his mother **prayed to Shang Di and steps into His footprint**. About the sovereign **Yao**, modest, ascetic, of a celestial or angelic goodness, Martini says he resembled more a monk than a pagan emperor.

Equally about the emperor **Shun** he says that "not only he made others better, but also he himself always tried to cultivate the good qualities he recognized in others, hating evil and wishing to reach perfect accomplishment". Martini cites Shun's amazing order asking no-one to obey him because he is an emperor, but because he orders righteous things. He tells his ministers: *Obey me only when what I ordered is good and just*. Martini also praises the forgivance by Shun of his brother who tried to murder him, so that the guilty brother repents and becomes virtuous.

The cumulated functions, **imperial and sacerdotal**, is also mentioned by Martini in the case of the sovereign **Yu**. He gives a fascinating explanation of the evolution of this double prerogative:

Up till Yu, all sovereigns were elected by **meritocratic** criteria, based on the recognition of the exceptional virtues and qualities of the worthiest candidate. At the same time, each time, the one who, due to his merits, was elected as sovereign, also acquired the **sacerdotal prerogatives of High Priest**, also by the will of those who had elected him. Those who made the election of the new sovereign official, also *delegated* the function of Sacerdote, on behalf of the people. It was an act of free will by which he was entrusted with a mandate to represent the people in front of Shang Di, to bring sacrifice to the Supreme Heavenly Lord through the traditional rituals and to pray for the

people. The act of delegation was reiterated for each new sovereign on the moment he was invested in the "Temple of the Perfect Ancestor".

After Yu, the throne was offered to his son, then it remained hereditary. So **hereditary succession** to the throne in Chinese dynasties dates from Yu. However, after the monarch is no longer elected but becomes hereditary, the priviledge of bringing sacrifice as a **sacerdote** is not withdrawn; but from now it is no longer freely offered by the people, of their opwn accord, as a result of an election, but it comes *ex officio*, being inherited along with the throne. Starting with Yu, **the sacerdotal function** b**ecomes a prerogative inherent to the imperial one**, the two functions of the emperor being inseparable. The sovereign continues to remain the only one who is allowed to bring sacrifice to Shang Di. And even the capital punishment is instituted for any transgression: **not anyone may pray to Shang Di**, but only the **sovereign**, under death penalty for any who would dare to violate the interdiction.

Martini describes **King Cheng Tang** (1766-1660 B.C.), the founder of the Shang dynasty, an example of virtue, goodness, justice, humility and love for his people, as an "expiatory sacrifice" in the sense of a Christ-figure. He is also referred to by other missionaries in oered to illustrate to the Chinese not just the future redemptive sacrifice of Christ, but also His wonderful Incarnation and Birth from the Virgin. When necause of a draught the people is ready to perich, Tang offers himself as a sacrifice, praying:

"O, Supreme Lord of Heaven, I beseach you! Let not the people pay the price of my recklessness. Pour Thy wrath onto me, but spare the innocent. If I ruled badly, if in my house I allowed luxury and unfair grandeur, if I listened to flattery and calomnies, it is my fault and let Heaven send a punishment on me. If a man must be sacrificed, let me be that man."

Other examples of virtue are the scholar-king **Wen** and his sons, King **Wu** and the **Duke of Zhou**. Wen is also the author of the famous comments to the 64 hexagrams of the *Yi Jing*, and the Duke of Zhou is said to have written the detailed comments for each of the 384 lines of those hexagrams.

Martini also interprets in a Christian sense a splendid episode in *Qiun Qiu* (*Spring and Autumn Annals*). It is about Confucius weeping when he sees a *Qilin* killed by a hunter. The *Qilin* is the Chinese version of the **unicorn**, a wonderful, harmless legendary animal, associated with meekness and innocence (the equivalent of the **lamb** in the Christian traditin). Chinese Christians have even translated "the Lamb of God" by "*Qilin*". Martini interpretes this episode as Confucius' prophesy regarding the Incarnation of the Logos, the *Qilin* being a figure of Christ. "After this episode Confucius never wrote anything any more, saying he had ended his work as a teacher. These are signs he knew about the coming of Him Who was to bring the true Law, end wars, before Whom all philosophers will withdraw." The *qilin* killed outside the "Western gate of the city was a sign of Christ Who like a Lamb would exit the Western gate [of Jerusalem] to be sacrificed."

9.3. Philippe Couplet: „*Tabula chronologica monarchiae sinicae*"

Another missionary-sinologist who tries to reconcile the Chinese chronology with the Biblical one based on the *Septuagint* is **Philippe Couplet**. He considers Fu Xi the heir of Sem, son of Noah. Therefore the Chinese would be Semites. That heir would have arrived in China after the confusion of tongues at Babel – Couplet believes. He also considered that in the early antiquity the Chinese, as descendents of Noah, had inherited from him religios truths kept from the Adamic revelation. With the passing of millenia, the memory of truths revealed in the primordial perios had grown dark. Couplet also expressed the opinion that the history of China preserved reminiscences about the creation of the world, the first people after the Flood – vestiges which can be explained through Biblical accounts.

CHAPTER 10:   THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND SOURCES OF FIGURISM

10.1. The historical context

The system of **"figurative reading**" as a hermeneutical method was not new in Christian theology. St. Ap. Paul often speaks about "figures", „images", „examples" or „resemblances" of true or future things (Heb 9:9; 9:24). Origen, Theodoret, Philon, St. Irineus of Lyon, St. Ciril of Alexandria

(*Glaphira*), St. Gregory of Nysse, St. Gregory of Nazians, St. John Chrysostome and other Holy Fathers interpret in th Old Testament figure or prefigurations of the New Law. The method was in use by rabinic Judaism. Pascal also found in the Scriptures a "figurated", spiritual sense, as proof of Biblical truth. In the 17th century there was in Europe a fashio of interpreting passages in poets and philosophers of pagan antiquity in an alegorical key, in a Christian sense. From finding in the work of ancient poets and philosophers oracular prefigurations of Christian truths, explained as reminiscences of the primordial Adamic Revelation kept in more or less veiled forms, to finding similar „figures" in the Chinese *Clasics*, was only a step.

It had already been made by some precursors. In 1585 Juan de Mendoza said China was populated by Noah's nephews. Ruggieri had seen „prophesies" and „oracles" about Christianity in the ancient Chinese beliefs. Longobardo identified Fu Xi with Zoroaster. Magalhães showed the *Yi Jing* was attributed to Fu Xi, China's first king who ruled after the Flood. Louis Le Comte wrote about „vestiges" of the knowledge of the true God, transmitted by Noah's sons, which exist in Chinese histories. Also Le Comte, taking the cue of Martini, gave king Cheng Tang as an example of the „ancient true religion" of the Chinese. But these references were spread in various writings without being given central importance or set up as a **coherent, comprehensive system** – as the Figurists will do. Their project aimed at proving with evidence from the *Classics* that in China „vestiges" of the primordial revelation had been preserved and that its history was a „figurated" version of the history of mankind before the Flood. Thus chronologies would be reconciled, European sceptics (free-thinkers preparing the Enlightenment) would be convinced of the Biblical truth by unexpcted evidence coming from... Chinese history, and the Chinese would face the shocking fact that their own history and canonical books prefigured the religiaon brought by the missionaries. In short, Figurism is an attempt to save both „Moses" and „China" and to elude the conflict between chronologies by reducing „China" to „Moses".

10.2. Sources: La Peyrère, Vossius, Horn, Pezron, Beurrier, Thomassin, Huet, d'Herbelot

The Figurists take inspiration from currents with a wide audience in Europe in their time, applying it to the context of the mission in China. It is relevant that many of the authors were French, their works being in vogue in 17th century France, since all Figurists were members of the French mission in China.

One of the works with a wide circulation was **Isaac de la Peyrère**'s *Les Pre-Adamites* which by tendentious reasoning reads into Romans 5:12-15 that people had existed on Earth nefore Adam. Other references for the Figurists are **Isaac Vossius** and **Paul Pezron**, who plead for the *Septuagint* chronology. **George Horn** equates Fu Xi with Adam, Huang Di with Enoh, and Yao with Noah. For **Paul Beurrier** all religions are „mirrors" of Christianity, the key to all non-Christian mythologies and religions being the primordial Revelation received by Adam from God, transmitted through the Patriarchs down to Noah and his heirs, and spread after the Flood to all peoples of mankind. Beurrier finds traces of the Christian revelation in the Greek and Latin classics, chronicles of Egipt and China. He offers the Cabbala, the teachings of Hermes Trismegistus (identified with Patriarch Enoh), the Sybiline prophecies and Fu Xi's64 mystical symbols as proofs of the Adamic revelation, transmitted to the Egyptians by Sem, son of Noah, founder of the first Egyptian dynasty. He considered the Chinese descendents of Sem, who populated China after the Flood. Fu Xi was Sem himself, or if not, one of his sons or neohews, after Babel. Confucius is the prophet who announces thre New Law. The proof is the unicorn *Qilin* (from Martini).

Another source is **Louis Thomassin**, who finds in ancient poets and philosophers remains of the Theology of the Patriarchs before the Flood. Their works were misinterpreted by those who came after them, corrupted by demons, mixed with false doctrines; but who knows how to read them correctly finds in them clean sources of the Revealed Religion. Its tradition was preserved through Noah and Sem (who was the peoples which appeared after Babel). It was transmitted through the sons of Noah up to Homer. By cleaning the fables of misconstrued distortions, the originary truths can be discovered, the mysteries of the true Religion. Homer is an apprentice of king Solomon.

Another author is Daniel **Huet**, who finds vestiges of the Mozaic doctrine in writngs of Greece, Rome, Egypt and India. His method will influence the Figurists. The Bible is true history, other religions are but degenerated versions of the Mozaic religion – which can be used as a key. Moses is

identified with the Egyptian Thoth, Taautus of the Phoenicians, Hermes–Mercur, Bachus, Zoroaster.

10.3. *Corpus Hermeticum* – an esoteric syncretism which may lead astray

St. Justin the Martyr and Philosopher, St. Clement of Alexandria, Lactantius, Eusebius, Augustine and other patristic authors and apologetes speak about an originary knowledge, received by Adam through divine Revelation from God Himself before the Fall, and about vestiges left from that primordial Revelation preserved in pagan religions, more or less corrupted by polytheism and idolatry. The argument of these „**seeds**, or **cores**" is used by the apologetes of the primary Church in controversies with Greek-Romans of pagan, including Helenistic, tradition, in order to show that the Christian teaching was not so new, having been anticipated, even if in a veiled form, by pagan traditions.

But later the idea of vestiges from the pristine Revelations kept in other religions became corrupted itself, coming to incorporate pagan elements from the very religions in which Adamic traces were looked for. Initially Adam, Enoch, Noah, Sem, Avraam and other patriarchs were seen as vazuti ca repositaries of the primordial knoeledge. Then the list comes to include figures such as Hermes Trismegistus, Zoroaster, the Druids, Orpheus, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, the Sybils, Indian brahmans, the Queen of Saba, the Magi and others, turned into „pagan saints". By the degradation of the very idea of these reveled vestiges, it becomes itself a doctrine of an esoterical, heterodox and even heretical type, associated with an eclectical body of pagan teachings, many of them of Helenistic and Gnostic nature.

After Platonism was brought to Europe by Gemistos Plethon, Marsilio Ficino used the phrase *prisca theologia/sapientia* associating it with Hermetism. He translates the Helenist treaties brought by Leonardo da Pistoia and published them under the title *Corpus Hermeticum*, with an impact on Renaissance alchemy and magic through Pico della Mirandola and Giordano Bruno, and later the Protestant Reformation through the Rosicrucian order. *Hermetica* includes texts like *Pimandres*, *Asclepius*, *Tabula Smaragdina*, supposed to have originated in the school of Amonius Saccas (Plotin and Origen's teacher), supposed to have been of Indian descent (the Śākyas clan), with more ancient sources in the syncretist-Helenist Alexandrine literature of the 2nd-6th cent. B.C., with Egyptian elements, Pythagoreism, Orphic mysteries, (neo)Platonism, Gnosticism (demiurgs, reincarnation). Giorgios Sincelos attributes to Manetho of Sebinnetos (3rd c. B.C.) an account in which Hermes /Thoth would have written the Hermetic texts in the primordial language on a stele in the Land of Seiris. For Joseph Flavius, the Land *Šir* was the land where the descendants of Seth would have raised 2 steles with the „heavenly wisdom". In an apocryph, „*Boi Sēres*" were a paradisiac people of the primordial epoch, their name being connected to the Chinese *sī* 坔 (絲) „silk". In a Syrian legend the Sethians were the ancestors of the Magi, and the Land of *Šir* – China. The Land of *Šir* is associated by the apocryph *Revelation of the Magi*, Strabon, Plinius, Bardaisan, with Seth, silk and the Magi.

Prisca Theologia is different from **Philosophia Perennis**, although sometimes the two are confused. *Philosophia perennis* does not recognize the degradation of the ancient Revelation, claiming that the true religion were periodically manifested in various periods, places and forms. In the Hermetic-occult form in which they circulate today, both are to be regarded as heresies. The Figurists were marked by this esoteric, hermetic-cabbalist streak, brought from Byzantium before the Renaissance, with a rezonance in the 17th-18th centuries, which interpret in an occultist way the primary Revelation as an ultimate source of some secret doctrine which would latently exista in pagan religions.

10.4. Athanasius Kircher: the Chinese are Hamites

Another source of the Figurists is Athanasius Kircher, the erudite proto-sinologist in baroque Rome also named „the lastr man who knew everything". In his ***China illustrata*** („the 17th century Chinese encyclopedia") he used works by Martino Martini and other missionaries, but the data about China taken from them is introduced forcibly into the pattern of his pown ideas. The book is obsessively dominated by the theory that the language, religion and writing of China derived from

Egypt. His view is marked by Hermetism or *prisca theologia*. A section part of the book describes the Xi'an Nestorian Stele recently discovered in his time, also with a translation of the inscription.

The Chinese are **urmasii lui Ham**. Dupa traditie, lui Ham, prin intelegere cu fratii sai, ii revenise Egiptul and restul Africii. Dar incalcând intelegerea, Ham ar fi migrat din Egipt cu neamul sau spre rasarit, in Persia, apoi in Bactria. Kircher il identifica pe **Ham** cu **Zoroastru** „regele Bactriei". Din Bactria au plecat colonisti in China. Deci dupa Kircher, **Chineseii sunt hamiti**, **ca and vechii egipteni**: ei erau inruditi, fiind and unii and altii descendentii lui Ham. Aceasta ar explica aparentul izomorfism de tip pictografic gasit de Kircher intre scrierile Chinesea and egipteana. „Inventatorul hieroglifelor" egiptene, dupa Kircher, e Mercurius Trismegistus, sfetnicul lui Nimrod, urmasul lui Ham. El e diferit de Fu Xi, dar originea pictografica e comuna. El ilustreaza aceasta pictorialitate reziduala a caracterelor Chinesee cu etimologii ce urmüresc sensul lor simbolic.

The Figurists were influenced by Kircher's works such as ***Noah's Arch***, about the dispersion of Noahts sons in the world, and ***The Tower of Babel***, postulating Hebrew as the „Adamic" primeval language of mankind. Kircher considered Hebrew as the primordial *lingua sancta*, the matter of Biblical revelation, and that Adam understood the nature of animals and named them in Hebrew in keeping with their nature. The confusion of tongues at Babel engendered the dialects of Hebrew – Chaldean, Samaritan (from which the Phoenician will emerge), Syrian, Arabic and Ethiopian –, and thence other tongues. Along with the transformation and multiplication of tongues, also idolatrous religions and gods multiply.

According to Kircher, **Enoch**, son of Jared, is „Hermes Triplex" (king–sacerdote–prophet who reigned in Egypt after the Flood), named by Egyptians Thoth/Hermanubis, by the Arabs - Adris, the Greeks - Atlas. Enoch received from God revelations which he transmitted orally and in writing. Enoch, says Kircher, invented writing and mathematics.

10.5. John Webb: Chinese as the Adamic language. Are the Chinese Semites?

John Webb's interest in China is linked to his concern for the „Primordial Language". It was believed that this „language of the Creation", *Lingua Adamica* or *lingua humana*, had been a „clean", simple, precise, proto-language, inspired by God to Adam on the Sixth Day. Naming the animals, Adam became – under the work of grace – the first creator of language, i.e. a **Nomothete**. For a long time Hbrew was considered, particularly in the West, this originary language. Webb argued that not Hebrew but **Chinese was the Primordial Language**.

Webb claimed that the Biblical Flood was the Flood placed by the Chinese annals in the time of Emperor Yao; so Yao becomes for Webb the central figure, and Yao is Noah.

After Webb, China is originally populated by the heirs of one of Noah's sons, yet not Ham is the ancestor of the Chinese, but Sem: Sem's descendants populated the East of Persia, China and India; Ham's – Babylon, Palestine, Arabia and Africa; Iaphet's – Little Asia and Europe. When Sem's descendants reached China, they brought the ancient language and wisdom of the Logos. Webb refuted Kircher's „Ham-ist" theory, citing Raleigh (Ham never left Egypt), Peter Heylin (Bactria was populated too early to be populated by colonists from Egypt) and Joseph Flavius (Sem's descendants, not Ham's, lived in Asia from the Euphratus to the Indian Ocean). Webb claims that Sem's sons arrived in China not *after* but *before* **Babel**, drawing the conclusion that, although the originary language of the Logos had disappeared everywhere, it survived in China. Not all the peoples participated in the building of the Tower; those in the East (the ancestors of the Chinese) stayed home, thus keeping uncontaminated their originary language which they had before, the Adamic language – which therefore is Chinese. Webb argues the extrem archaicity of Chinese, dating it from before the Flood.

CHAPTER 11:   IN SEARCH FOR THE „PARADISIAC" LANGUAGE AND THE „UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE"

11.1. the concern of Patristic authors for the „Primordial Language"

I dedicated a chapter to the **Edenic** or Ancestral **Language**, the „mother of all tongues". Some patristic authors believed this *Ursprache* was **Hebrew** – a hypothesis (which is a dogma in rabinic

Judaism) supported by Origen, Jerome, Augustine. Most are reticent, avoiding a clear-cut identification: St. Clement of Alexandria, St. Irineus of Lyon, St. Ciril of Alexandria, St. John Chrysostome, St. Gregory of Nazians, St. Basil the Great, St. Procopius of Gaza, St. Epyphanios of Salamina, Eusebius of Caesarea, Diodor of Tarsus. Others refuted it: St. Gregory of Nysse. Still others claim that language was **Syrian** (Theodoret of Cyr, indirectly St. Ephreme of Syria) or **Aramaic**.

In the *Targumim* is mentioned that on the Tower of Babel an **idol** was raised to „make war with God". To the vanity of defying God, idolatry was added. The punishment of the multiplicatioon of tongues was given for the multiplication of gods. Then, instead of the single God, people fallen into polytheism started to venerate a multitude of false gods. Therefore, instead of the single sacred language, God gave them a multitude of languages fallen into the prophane relative. The arbitrary proliferation of false, powerless divinities, was matched by the arbitrary proliferation of diluted, debilitated languages, derived from mere semiotic convention. The power of the originary words, inspired by the Logos, the Word of God, was replaced by the weakness of arbitrary-sign-words propherated by decayed logothetes, serving the fallen spirits.

Hebrew exegetes also speak of an eschatological reunification of all languages into Hebrew. Jerome says that the „Hebrews interpret the passage in Zephaniah 3:9 as refering to the Messia Whom they are waiting to come: just as it was before the Tower, when all spoke the same language, all will speak Hebrew after they are converted to the veneration of the true God and the entire world shall serve the Lord." Jerome rejects this "Judaic invention", citing the passage in the sense of an anticipation of the reunification of tongues at the **Pentecost** when the Apostles spoke in tongues and the single language of witness was on all lips.

St. Irineus of Lyon connects the **72 languages and peoples resulted after Babel** with the **72 generations from Adam to Christ**, interpreting them as a recapitulation of all peoples and languages by Christ within Himself and their reintegration with Adam. Eusebius observes that names such as Adam, Enoch, Cain, Abel, Avraam, Isaac, Jacob, Israel, Eber, find their meaning (ethymology) in Hebrew. But for lack of evidence, most of them avoid to clearly identify the pre-Babelic language with Hebrew. Diodor of Tarsus, Procopius of Gaza and St. John Chrysostome say that Hebrew comes from Eber who did not agree with those who built the Tower, keeping their language and faith. St. John Chrysostome saw in the dispersion of languages God's love of people.

Augustine's theologumena about Hebrew as the Adamic language is important for understanding the concern of the Latin West for the primordial language. Augustine's historical ecclesiology emphasized the blessing given by Noah to Sem and Iaphet and the curse placed on Ham and Canaan, read as prophecies about the future races born from them. The „City of God" was perpetuated through the formert, primarily through the Sem-Arfaxad-Eber-Avraam genealogical line, mounting through them up to Abel. Also through them (and then the Egyptians and Greeks) was also transmitted the sapiential treasure of the primordial Revelation (*translatio divinae sapientiae*). In opposition to them is placed Nimrod, „famous hunter *against* the Lord God", an exponent of the „Earthly City", who instigated the buiding of Babel. Of the 73 descendants of Noah's sons (27 from Sem, 15 from Iaphet, 31 from Ham), Augustin deducts Peleg who kept the language of his father Eber, after Babel remaining 72 peoples and languages – a number become standard.

St. Gregory of Nyssa rejects the „naturalistic" view of the Arian Eunomius, prefering the thesis of the conventional nature of the linguistic sign. He considered Hebrew to be a newer language. The Hebrews would have started to speak Hebrew, miraculously created on the spot for the use of the Israelite people, only after the exodus from Egypt. St. Gregory concludes: „The language of God is not Hebrew. God did not speak Hebrew". Casaubon will take his irony saying that the primordial language, if it existed, was lost. If God inspired the words uttered by Adam, later mankind developed its own autonomous language, Hebrew being only one of the post-diluvial matrix-languages.

Also **Theodoret of Cyr** denies Hebrew this status, claiming that the Edenic Language was *Syrian*, arguing through the Syrian etymology of names in *Genesis*. He considered Hebrew appeared after the exodus from Egypt, and the name of the Jewish people is explained not after Eber but after Avraam.

St. Ephreme of Syria leaves the matter open, speaking of a lost originary language with the exception of a single people which preserved it, but avoids to specify which is that people – Jewish or Syrian. The *Cave of Treasures* clearly takes the side of the Syrian (Aramaic) thesis: „From Adam

to the Tower the Syrian language was spoken". The **Adamic language was** the **Aramaic** spoken by the Saviour Christ in His earthly life. Anyway, Aramaic and Hebrew are related Semitic languages, indicating a common origin, a unique proto-language similar to them.

All patristic authors agree that **Pentecost** is the **simetric**al event to **Babel**: the linguistic dispersion of the human race at the multiplication of tongues is countered by the unifying power of grace starting with the descent of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. The punishment of polyglossy inflicted for the Babelic pride is abolished by the miracle of glossolaly given as a gift for the Apostolic humility. The tendency toward communicational disintegration and semiotic fragmentation due to the linguistic dispersion at Babel is stopped and reversed by the reintegrating effect of the charisma of translation in the Spirit at the founding of the Church. As a divine-human edifice founded by the God-Man, the Church is the oppusite of the Tower of Babel as a human edifice founded by the Godless man-god. The narcisistic *Hybris* of the builders of a Babel erected from burnt clay, inspired by the Luciferic spirit, which threw the world into polyglotal confusion, is redeemed by the Apostles' missionary zeal, who make themselves into living stones of the building of the *Eclesia* which shall endure eternally as dwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Other languages have also competed for the status of Adamic Language: Samaritan, Chaldean, Pheenician, Gothic, Chinese.

11.2. The Universal Language. The „Chinese Hypothesis"

For Eunomius of Cisic the is an onthological link between the intrinsec nature of things (*physis*) and the words designating them, since both things and words were created by God. This was an extreme„gnoseological optimism" (named even „unprecedented epistemological arrogance"), based on a sophistic, technicist speculative approach. I called „onto-semiotic" this theory of language, characteristic for Neo-Arianism.

The Arian streak was continued in Western thinking. St. Justin Popovici said that until today the shadow of Arianism „heavily weighs on the European culture: Christ is lowered to the rank of a mere human, European man is raised to the rank of measure of all things. Arianism, the „matrix of rationalism and relativism" set up on the rejection of Christ's divino-humanity, leads to the „triumph of Protagoras' sophistic principle over St. Maxim the Confessor's ontological one („Christ the God-man is the goal and measure of all things"). About the Western Arianizing humanism he says: „The culture of Europe hides Arianism: everything in it is reduced to man, Christ the God-man is reduced to the limits of man. The philosophy, science, civilization, partially even religion of Europe, were grown with the ferment of Arianism."

Then follows a section dedicated to the concern of 17th century Europe for a *lingua universalis* („**Universal Language**"), with a lexic formed of „**Real Characters**". The assumptuion was that „Real Characteres"could be found – written symbols representing the thongs of the world and notions of thinking in a „real", „natural" way, graphic signs motivated by the qualities of objects and ideas expressed, in contrast to the conventional signs of the words of existing languages. These „real" symbols had to signify things based on the true nature of these things, not be arbitrarily invented conventions. It was still another version of the Eunomian onto-semiotic theory; however, its premodern variants no longer insisted on the divine origin of the real characters, but a replacement of human origin was also accepted. For instance Kircher considered that Adam received from God the Primordial Language in an integral form, without suffering any linguistic evolution, and tha=is had been a truly Universal Language. It had been an archaic form of Hebrew, transmitted to the Jews through Eber. But they too had at some point stopped using it, and its originary characters could no longer be reconstructed. therefore Kircher proposed the artificial creation of a completely new Universal Language, scientifically invented.

Proponents of the Universal Language were **Francis Bacon** and Leibniz. They also gave Chinese as a possible model of Universal Language, linking non-sinologic research to the field of proto-sinology.

Kircher considered **Chinese** as a **model of universal language**, and the Chinese characters – models of „**Real Characters**". „The hieroglyphic characters of the Chinese", he says, were composed from the things of thos world", by applying the principle of a visual rendering of the image of the things of nature. Just like Egyptian hieroglyphs, Kircher says, Chinese characters

symbolically represent the meaning of things by similitude with their visible form, from which they were inspired. They render directly the thing, not the sound-form of the word designating them – as is the case of writings with phonetical alphabets. Every Chinese character, Kircher said, directly corresponds to a word, a notion. Hence his European readers deduced that between the Chinese written characters and things in the real world a total bi-univocal correspondence existed. Umberto Eco observes that „Kircher realizes that **Chinese characters have an iconic foundation**, but at the same time also noticed that it's a **very stylized iconism**, where the trace of the initial resemblance got almost lost."

As shown by Paul Rossi and Frances Yates, the 17th century enthusiasm for the Universal Language was a continuation of the tradition of the Renaissance treaties on memory and mnemonic techniques aimed at using symbols as auxiliary images for faciliting memorization – based in their turn on **Ramón Llull**'s *Ars Combinatoria* which integrated the Judaic *Cabbala* and the Areopagite's *Divine Names*.

In the 17th century proliferated schemes aimed at a **"philosophical language"** – a **Universal Language** reflecting not the sound-form of words but the nature of signified things. Descartes suggested the creation of a general language which, using codified symbols, should cover the entire knowledge, sistematically organizing all ideas of humanity. Auch a non-arbitrary language was proposed by George Dalgarno, who believed that the Egyptians and the Chinese used Real or Universal Characters.

Another is the scheme of **John Wilkins**, in whose system words were not arbitrary signs, but each letter had to signify some gender, category or species, in a descending arborescent taxonomy. He cited from Alvaro Semedo's *Imperio de la China* examples of Chinese characters illustrating their link to the real refferent. He correctly quotes Semedo's observation that the Chinese writing did not invariably apply a principle according to which characters should always derive from real objects. He regards the link between characters and objects as rather accidental than systematic, being the exception and not the rule, and observes that in general „no analogy seems to exist between the form of Chinese characters and represented things".

Starting from Wilkins' scheme, the essay by Borges *El idioma analítico de John Wilkins* illustrates the opposite thesis – that every taxonomical system is the more ilogical as it has more generalizing ambitions. Borges cites a fictitious classification from an invented Chinese encyclopedia - an ironical apocriphal zoology which deny the very possibility for any exhaustive classification to exist.

It is significant that Borges chose as the object of his imaginary taxonomy the animal regnum – the same field of the real on which Adam exercised his nomothetical function *in illo tempore*. The subversion operated by Borges is applied on the Biblical episode of the foundation of language as an institution of divine order. The Adamic language was a "noema" applied to the animal regnum under divine authority, a "point" given to the universe by man, instituted by God as the crown and master of Creation. By contrast, the fictitious author of the Borgesian *Celestial Emporium* is a decayed, perhaps decrepit, Adam, in the Gnostic manner, incapable of discerning the divine order of the world, who can no longer institute anything but disorder in a universe governed by chaos and arbitraryness.

These schemes were based on logico-taxonomical systems, with the ambition of reducing the known reality to a set of Aristotelic categories interconnected by deductively established „natural" relations. The assumption was that the world is rationally structured, completely classifiable, and language can reflect this rationality in logical, universally accepted structures. LEIBNIZ added an epistemological dimension to these proposals, claimig that a Philosofical Language would allow a communication sheltered from the errors caused by imprecision and ambiguity. Moreover, it would respond to the requirements of an ideal euristic instrument, making possible the finding of truth with mathematical precision, like geometry, since its morphology, syntax and semantics would be characterized by perfect exactness and logical rigour, reflecting the structure of real objects and the natural relations among them. Such a language should be written with **Real Characters** – signs which would not transliterate words phonetically, but would directly represent things and notions. Although he recognized that Chinese characters rendered ideas, yet initially Leibniz considered them inadequate for serving as veritable „Real Characters", since they could not be sufficiently abstract to facilitate reasoning. Only after his correspondence with Bouvet and the study of the *Yi Jing*, Leibniz pozitively reconsidered his opinion on the possible use of Chinese characters for building a

„Universal Characteristic". Leibniz searched for a symbolic language similar to the mathematical one. He proposed a Universal Characteristic inspired from Chinese characters, Kircher's *Polygraphia*, Lull's *Arta Combinatoria*, and the infinitesimal calculus created by himself. More than a language, it had to be a calculation matrix, transforming linguistic expression into a mathematical calculation procedure, with all the advantages of precision deriving herefrom. As a writing, it could be read by anyone in one's own lamguage, since it would use „Real Characters" which anyone could directly decode, like the Japanese can read Chinese characters in their own language, for they would directly render primary notions of human thought.

Leibniz' interest in **China**, the relevance of Chinese ancient religion and writing in his research for a universal language and binary calculus, his hope that this calculus shall contribute to the conversion to Christianity of the Chinese Empire (starting with the Emperor), are amply documented, including his correspondence with Fr. Bouvet.

If Leibniz regarded his „dyadic" calculus as an *imago creationis*, exactly in the same way Bouvet regarded the binary-visual system of the *Yi Jing*. The affinity between the thinking of the two savants is striking. Bouvet sent to Leibniz in a letter the diagram of the 64 hexagrams in the *Yi Jing* known as *Former Heaven*, *Natural Order* or *Shao Yong's Arangement* (*Xian Tian Zi Xu*). As a mathematician, Bouvet recognized in them Leibniz' binary („dyadic") arihtmetics and points this to him as such, giving them as an example of mathematical encoding by Fu Xi of the principles of the Creation, 3000 years before Christ. It is shocking that Leibniz recognized in them the series of the first 64 integer numbers expressed in the numeration basis 2!

CHAPTER 12:   THE FIGURISTS: A „COMANDO" OF SINOLOGISTS FOR A THEOLOGY OF THE *CLASSICS*

12.1. The members of the movement and their tribulations

Although the **Figurists** are treated as a relatively homogenous group, there are great differences between their approaches. What they all have in common is the certainty that they can find the „mysteries of Christianity" hidden or encoded in the Chinese *Classics*. However, their methods for „decyphering" these mysteries differ so much that the divergences among their hermeneutical systems give the movement a very heterogeneous character. To this lack of coordination among them was also attributed their failure.

I gave a history of the term „**Figurism**" and of the various names given to the movement (**Enochists** etc.), as well as a summary of their theories and the main *Classics* they chose to focus on: ***Bouvet*** looked for **prophecies** about Christianity in the *Yi Jing*; ***Prémare*** supports the historical veridicity of all *Classics*, in which he looks for **vestiges** of the primordial Revelation; ***Foucquet*** claims, based on the *Shu Jing*, that the history of Chinei is but an **alegory of Figures** in the Old Testament). The convictions shared by all members of the Figurist current, and the types of sources they used are enumerated, as well as the causes of the hostility they encountered (the radicalism of their claims, the exaggerations, national divergences between the French and the others, provincial rivalries among the French).

Emperor **Kangxi** himself is shown as a „Figurist" due to his sympathy to them as a patron of the movement. As an educated sovereign, with a wide worldview, Kangxi always kept an admiration for Bouvet. But criticism against them are devastating. Yet there are voices today rehabilitating them, for instance by comparing their theses with those of Karl Rahner on the „Anonymous Christians".

CHAPTER 13:   JOACHIM BOUVET: „ONCE A TEACHER – ALWAYS A TEACHER"

This chapter is dedicated to the life and work of Bouvet, the initiator and main exponent of Figurism.

13.1. Life: a „hyphen" between two worlds

Bouvet is one of the few people in history to have simultaneously served under two sovereigns –

the most powerful and enlightened, of the two most powerful countries in Europe and Asia of his time: Louis XIV of France and Kangxi of China. Sent to China as a "mathematician of the king Louis XIV, he becomes teacher and counselor of Kangxi, returns with the latter's gifts to Louis and goes back with the French king's gifts to Kangxi. His double loyalty was always meant to be a bridge between two great countries, France and China, but also between two great cultures, the European and the Chinese. All his life he endeavoured to unite these two cultures – the Confucian Chinese one and the Christian European one, looking for converging elements in their canonical books.

Bouvet's **biography** is presented from his education, to his sending to China in 1685 as a „Mathematician of the King", his carreer as advisor and mathematics teacher of the sovereign Kangxi, the 43 years spent at the imperial Chinese court with the exception of 6 years in Europe. He is sent by Kangxi in 1693 as ambassadorto Louis XIV, returns to China in 1699 and works on his system and study of the *Yi Jing*, plus an ample cartography project, till his death in 1730 in Beijing.

Bouvet hoped all his life to see a Christian Chinese emperor and a Chinese empire converted to Christianity.

13.2. The work: a bridge between too far cultures. Accomodationism in extreme form

None of Bouvet's "Figurist" writings was published in his lifetime; his and the other Figurists' works lay hidden in the Vatican Archives, being considered unscientific, some even bordering madness, and rediscovered only in the 20th century. Bouvet's work is still unpublished, nor is there any critical edition. Waiting for it, researchers are still studying his manuscripts kept in various archives.

His first published work, *Portrait historique de l'Empereur de la Chine présenté au Roi*, presents Kangxi as an ideal sovereign, including his faith (an optimism justified by the Decree of Tolerance issued in 1692), a kind of Louis XIV of China.

The border between **accomodationism** and **Figurism** is **uncertain**, Figurism being often hard to distinguish from the mere accomodationism before it.

Bouvet wished to remain faithful to the accomodation policy, but the cultural and political context in his time had changed from that in Ricci's time. The syncretism of the final decades of the Ming dynasty had now been replaced by a much more narrow Confucian orhtodoxy, defined along the line of revitalizing Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism from the Song dynasty. The most orthodox Confucianism is now seen the one of the Chen-Zhu school. For the known reasons, Bouvet cannot take is as a basis for a new accomodationist approach, being forced to look for this basis elsewhere. But the changes of the cultural climate impose a change of the accomodationist strategy – yet without renouncing the fundamental objective of a Christian Confucianism.

Bouvet did not depend on the *Ru*-ist mandarins' elite, but enjoyed Kangxi's proximity and appreciation. Therefore he does not have to adopt Zhu Xi's Neo-confucianism, now fashionable among the mandarins; in exchange he has to find a tradition acceptable to the emperor. The answer is the tradition of the ancient wise emperors, claimed as models by the Confucians and unanymously respected, even byu the first sovereigns of the Qing dynasty. The „Good Kings" in the pre-history of China could serve as basis for a new accomodationist synthesis, a new kind of Christianity „with a Chinese face". Bouvet will dedicate the rest of his life to elaborating this new synthesis.

Next comes a description of Bouvet's figurist works, with a summary of their content, by periods: the first period (1699-1710) and the second (1711-1730).

CHAPTER 13:   FIGURIST THEMES IN BOUVET'S WORK

14.1. Universal history and the three „states" of mankind. Theandrism and renewal

Bouvet is a promoter of a theology of religions which we would call today „inclusivist". He not only was an exponent of an inter-religious dialogue of an (*avant la lettre*) inclusivist type, but dedicated his whole life to this dialogue. More than just stating its possibility, he always looked for common themes on which such dialogue could be built, illustrating them with examples from the *Classics*. His excelent knowledge of classical Chinese gave him the possibility to enter the intimacy of the ancient classical texts, which makes the exegesis of his work extremely difficult, involving

multiple levels of in-depth textual interpretation.

Bouvet divides the history of mankind into three epochs or „ontological states”, so as to equate them with the periodization in the Chinese tradition:

1) The state of originary innocence (identified with the Golden Age or Way of Heaven, *Tian Dao*);

2) The Fall and state of corruption of the world (identified with the second Age, the Way of the Earth, *Di Dao*, after sin had entered the world at the Fall);

3) The ontological regime of salvation (the third state of the world, after the Incarnation and Resurrection, the state of the human condition authentically restored by the embodied, crucified and resurrected Logos, correspunding to the „Christian Era”. He identified this with the Human Age, *Ren Dao*).

Since there are mismatches preventing the Biblical periodization from overlapping with the Chinese one, Bouvet qualifies his system of correspondences. I described them in detail in the respective sections.

A still insuficiently researched connection is Bouvet's attempt to transpose his theory on the first „state” of mankind into the form of the so-called „**Pascal's Triangles**”. Bouvet finds everywhere in the *Classics* the triadic motif. He creates some diagrams whose interest lies in their implicit link with the fractalic theory, respectively with the figure known as the *Sierpinski Triangle* – a fractalic set given as an example of an infinitely auto-reproducible mathematically generated pattern. On this basis it may be speculated that Bouvet intented to suggest, *avant la lettre*, that the primordial state was an ontological one, not just a moral one, and that it was „fractalically” perpetuated during history, at the scale of large communities, but also at the smaller scale of smaller communities and human persons, of social and individual behaviour. The concept of fractals would be introduced by Mandelbrot only in the 20th century, but Bouvet had an intuition of a possible link of such an infinitely reiterative binary pattern with the hexagrams of the *Yi Jing*. It is interesting that the Sierpinski Triangle, the fractalic theory and binary language are used in current research concerning Artificial Intelligence. Considering the contributions of Leibniz and Bouvet in the field of binary calculus, the link between the *Yi Jing* and A.I. does not seem forced.

Out of passion for the ternary symbolism and his wish to find equivalents in the Chinese tradition, Bouvet distinguished three moments in each of the three states or epochs. He equates them with themes from the *Classics*. For instance, he subdivides the second state into: the **Rebellion and fall of Lucifer and his angels**; the **originary sin and Adam's fall**; the **Flood**. He finds in the *Classics* parallels to these. The third state of mankind is not interpreted in a chronological sense, but an ontological one, as a new regime became *accesible* to man by *choice*. It started with the Incarnation and Rwsurrection of Christ and, unlike the two preceding states, has lasted until the present and shall be continued until the *Parusia*. Bouvet is certain that the ancient Chinese had the revelation of the mystery of salvation, a knowledge about the future coming of a Saviour, which they had received in the form of signs, figures, symbols or „riddles”. He „finds” elements in the Chinese tradition bearing reference to the future salvation of mankind.

14.2. Figures of the Saint in China

Also before Bouvet, other Jesuits had found alusions to Jesus Christ in the ancient Chinese literature. Figurists find references to Him in all the *Classics*, under the name of the „Saint” (*sheng ren* or *shen ren*). They give examples from the *Yi Jing*, *Shi Jing*, *Zhong Yong*, *Meng Zi*, Confucius and even comments from Song dynasty such as *Xingli dachuan*. Bouvet is the first who tried to articulate a doctrinary construction, a system to incorporate the *Classics* into Christian theology. To him, the main figures of the Saint in the *Classics* are the Three Augusts (*San Huang*), the Five Emperors (*Wu Di*) and the Three Kings (*San Wang*), models of virtue, wisdom and grace. But there are also other characters such as virtuos and wise princes, ministers, philosophers like Laozi and even fabulous animals like the *qilin*.

In order to explain the **identification** by Bouvet of **Fu Xi** with **Enoch**, I dedicatd a section of the thesis to this Biblical patriarch and the apocryph *Book of Enoch*, an enigmatic book mentioned by Biblical (St. Ap. Jude) and patristic authors (Clement of Alexandria, Irineu of Lyon, Tertulian, Origen, Justin the Martyr and Philosopher, Ciprian, Hypolite, Lactantius, John Cassian).

Bouvet associated as prefigurations of Trinitarian Persons (God the Father of the Son), or as

Messianic figures, characters in the *Classics*, firstly the Three Augusts (**Huang Di**), or sovereigns and wise men like **Shun**, **Hou Ji (Prince of Sorghum)**, **Yao**, **Yu**, **Cheng Tang**, **Wen**, **Zhong Shanfu**. I presented in detail the arguments he brings in support of these equivalations.

The conclusions are overall favorable to Figurism and Bouvet. Their studies and enormous erudition opened fields which sinology was going to approach only much later, including an anticipation by two centuries the vogue of the *Yi Jing* in the 20th century. Also they anticipated modern approaches of the theology of religions. Some assumptions, generally accepted in the pre-modern era, may seem today obsolete and even ridiculous. But at least they explicitly declared them. How many modern exegetes are just as indebted to their preconceptions, which however they try to disguise under a so-called objectiveness? The Figurists' system is to be regarded through their intention of facilitatibg for the Chinese an access to the Christian doctrine through the mediation of the only notions they knew – those in the Confucian canonic books (they lso use Daoist works, but like their precursors avoid Buddhist sources.) their project of articulating a „natural theology" of the *Classics* could not be accomplished. Yet the questions they posed may be more valuable than the answers found (or not). The challenge launched by the Figurists to theology still waits for a reply.

CHAPTER 15:   OTHER FIGURISTS

Other members of the Figurist movement are here discussed: Joseph de Prémare, Jean-François Foucquet, Jean-Alexis de Gollet and Antoine Gaubil.

Certainly, Figurists committed many errors. Nevertheless, some of their theses may have an interest from the point of view of an Orthodox theology of religions.

PART IV: THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX MISSION IN CHINA

(17th – 21st CENTURIES)

CHAPTER 16:   THE FIRST WAVE (1683-1956)

The missions of the Russian Orthodox Church between the 17th and 20th centuries could be regarded as either the first or the second Eastern Orthodox evangelization of China, according to how we regard the mission of the Syrian Church of the East, and to a future possible confirmation or infirmation of the hypothetical Apostolic evangelization.

In 1665 a Russian Orthodox church and monastery were built in the fort of **Albazin** on the Amur. The valley of this river is the point where the two neighbouring empires first came into contact in the 17th century. The geographical contact entailed the religious one, even before the military one. Albazin was captured in 1685 by the Chinese, becoming part of North-East China, the church being distroyed. In 1683 a group of Russians from Albazin, including the priest Maxim Leontiev, are captured and taken as hostages to Beijing, where they build a church on the place given by Kangxi. This church is the start of what was to become the **Russian ecclesiastic mission in Beijing**. The mission was always limited to caring for its own Russian faithful, never engafing in any attempts at active proselitism among the Chinese. Therefore it never underwent any persecution (with one exception), becoming „the most enduring sino-foreign institution" in China's modern history. The assessment of the role played by this mission varies according to the author, country and epoch. It has been claimed that it „brought the two neighbouring monarchies closer to each other" and that „it promoted the strengthening of cultural ties between the Chinese and the Russian peoples." In the Maoist era it was accused of having been a „tool of aggression against the Chinese state", the Russian missionaries being called „the pack of greedy functionaries used by the tzarist government for invading China".

In 1695 the metropolite of Siberia, Ignatie Rimski-Korsakov, sends to Beijing two clerics to sanctify the St. Nicholas church. In 1700 the Tzar Peter the Great issues an *ukaz* urging at the preaching Orthodoxy in Siberia and China. In 1702 Filoteus of Kiev is elected Metropolite of Tobolsk and the entire Siberia to "guide the people in China and Siberia toward serving the true living God". In 1713, after the death of Fr. Maxim, Kangxi invites Rusia to send other priests to its

colony of hostages. These misions become a constant practice during the next two centuries.

Altogether there were **20 mission**s of the Russian Orthodox Vhurch in China. They served as a pioneering factor of the cultural meeting of the two empires, giving a silent continuity and stability to the Sino-Russian diplomatic relations in the 18th and 19th centuries. The district where the ecclesiastic mission was located eventually became the territory of the world's largest embassy. I presented the 20 missions which continued uninterruptedly between **1715** and **1956**, with the exception of the **Boxers Rebellion** in 1900 when **222 Chinese Orthodox** are **martyred**. After 1917 the Orthodox Church in China was separated from Russia, growing with thousands of anti-Bolshevic emigrants settled in Harbin and entering under the jurisdiction of ROCOR (Sinode of Russian Bishops Outside of Russia). In 1934 John Maximovich, arriving from Serbia, is annointed Bishop of Shanghai, and is finished the Orthodox Cathedral in Shanghai, where the Association of Chinese Orthodox is set up in 1935. In 1941 the Annunciation Church in Harbin is rebuilt (destroyed in 1970 by Mao's communists). Between 1946 and 1949, St. John Maximovich is Archbishop of Shanghai and of all Russians in China. In 1949 the communists stop the missionary work. There were in China 106 Orthodox churches, most believers being Russian refugees, and 10.000 Chinese faithful. Russian churches were handed over to the Chinese state and demolished.

CHAPTER 17   THE SECOND WAVE: FROM 1984 TO THE PRESENT

In 1984 is reopened the church of the *Holy Pokrov of the Mother of God* in Harbin (the only Orthodox church in the PRC where services are held), with a parish of 144 Russian refugees and Orthodox Chinese and two clergy: the hieromonk Simon Bai Zenglin and the priest Grigori Zhu. The latter fied in 2000, leaving the church with no preest. A church is built in 1986 at Urumqi.

In 1996 is set up the **Orthodox Metropolitanate of Hong Kong and South-East Asia** (OMHKSEA). In 1997 the Sinode of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchy) decided to take in care the Orthodox faithful in China under the Patriarch of Russia until a primate of the Chinese Orthodox Church is elected. The *Holy Sophia* Cathedral in Harbin is renovated. Jiang Zemin and Vladimir Putin signed in 2001 a Sino-Russian friendship treaty. The Russian Orthodox Church tried, also through interventions of president Putin, to obtain legal recognition of Orthodoxy in China before the Olimpic Games in Beijing in 2008. In 2011 Archbishop Ilarion Alfeiev declared that China had 15.000 Orthodox faithful in Beijing, Shanghai, Heilongjiang province, and Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia autonomous districts. Patriarch Kiril made in 2013 the first visit ever of a Primate of the Russian Church to China. In 2014 the Metropolite Ignatie of Habarovsk and Amur annointed Anatoli Kung Cheung Ming as priest for the Orthodox Church in Hong Kong, the first Chinese priest made in 60 ani. Yet, after 330 years of presence of the Russian mission in China, Orthodoxy is still ilegal and there are only two Chinese priests.

I end this part with some questions: when shall there be an Autonomous Chinese Orthodox Church? Shall the Chinese „Dragon" be tamed by the Christian „Lamb", or swallow it? At present a „tectonic shift" or revolution is taking place in global politics, also determined by religious factors. But what is the real direction of this shift? In the next 30 years one third of China's population may be Christian, making China one of the largest Christian nations in the world. But what kind of Christianity will that be? Will it be in majority Protestant? Those Christians might also be China's future leaders, ruling the largest economy in the world. But will they be Christians, or belong to some syncretistic sects of some yet unseen type, like China has always produced? What will happen if China becomes the country with the largest Christian population? What share and what role shall the Orthox have within it? And finally, can and should the Romanian Orthodox Church get involved in the mission in China? And if yes, how exactly?

PART V   HIEROMONK DAMASCENE CHRISTENSEN: AN OUTLINE OF AN ORTHODOX THEOLOGY OF THE CHINESE RELIGION

CHAPTER 18:   THE RECORDED HISTORY OF CHINA IN LIGHT OF THE BIBLE

The contemporary sinologist and Orthodox hieromonk Damascene Christensen offers an interesting approach to the history of China. Although some elements may seem similar to those of the Accomodationist and Figurist missionaries, his hermeneutics is significantly different from theirs. The *Yi Jing* plays no role in his analysis, the emphasis being on Shang Di, the archaic supreme divinity, and the evidence in *Dao De Jing*, *Shu Jing* and *Shi Jing* in the sense of primary Chinese monotheism. He regards as forefather of the Chinese not Enoch but **Sineus**, **son of Canaan**, nephew of **Ham**. The land of Sinim appears in prophet Isaia 49,12: „Behold, these shall come from far: and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim." The moment of Sineus'„emigration" to China is not the Flood, but immediately after the dispersion of the peoples at Babel. The only necessary correction refers to the *Vulgate* chronology used by Fr Damascene.

Fr. Christensen shows that the Great Sacrifice or Solstice Ritual (translated by James Legge) is the **Border Sacrifice**, which he calls „the most ancient theology and cult of God in ancient China". He emphasizes the explicitly **monotheistis** significance of this ritual, highlighting that it was thus called because at the summer solstice the Emperor performed it at the Northern border of the empire, and at the winter solstice at the Southern border. Later the emperor stopped travelling to the borders of the empire, but brought the sacrifice in the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, built in 1420 A.D. This ritual, dating at least from 2230 B.C. continued to be performed in China for over 4000 years until the fall of the last dynasty, Qing, in 1911.

Christensen relates the **Border Sacrifice** with the **Adamic Sacrifice**: after Adam and Eve's banishment from Eden, a Cherub with a fire sword was guarding the Eastern Gate of Eden, so they could not re-enter. Eden, according to tradition, lied on a high ground. Adam and Eve remained „in the proximity" of Paradise, watching it from afar and weeping for their loss. They brought sacrifice to God to earn forgivance for their Fall, and this sacrifice was brought at the gate of **border of Eden**. Their sons Cain and Abel also brought sacrifice to God, and the tradition was perpetuated down to Noah, who also brings a sacrifice of thanks immediately after he descends from the Arch. Noah's descendants (through Sineus) take to China this Adamic tradition. The prayers made in the Border Sacrifice in China present a remarkable similarity with the prayers of the ancient Jews, because both come from the same source: the religion of Noah. It is possible, Christensen concludes, that the **Border Sacrifice in China** were based on the tradition of the **„border sacrifice" in the time of Adam**.

18.4. A pioneering work: *Christ the Eternal Dao*

An element of originality of my thesis is the chapter dedicated to the Hieromonk **Damascene Christensen**, the **biographer of Fr Seraphim Rose**, and especially to his book *Christ the Eternal Dao*, unknown in România. In this treaty Fr Christensen undertakes an exceptional interpretation of Chinese religion based on the foundation of Patristic teaching and the heritage of the Eastern Orthodox Church. His knowledge of sinology give his work a high scientific level. His hermeneutics, unique in the Orthodox world as far as I know, aims at an Orthodox understanding of the fundamental book of Daoism, *Dao De Jing*, and in general of the ancient Chinese tradition, through a patristic reading grid. He summarizes his project as follows: „the truths in all ancient religions shine in the light og the supreme revelation of Christ, but they are not that light itself, nor are they equal to it. If we regard them with the eyes of the faith, they can give witness about the Light of revelation".

Fr. Damascene shows a paradox: Western modern man, sophisticated and *blasé*, living in „multicultural" societies, is assaulted by ideologies, philosophical theories and faiths of the world religions, all claiming to be the truth. Knowing that they cannot be all true, he tends to relativize not these views, many disseminated as mere propaganda and manipulation, but truth itself. He is pushed to that even by the relativizing, agnostic, secularist postmodern ideology. Fr. Damascene's project is proposed as an antidote to this tendency to his Western contemporaries. He dedicates his work to those who find the Western variants of Christianity full of „banal and boring cliches, yet have a longing for Christ".

His book may also be useful to some Romanian readers who are tempted to look in the Eastern religions for the truth they could not receive from their own Orthodox tradition, but for which their soul is thirsting. Many intellectuals, particularly the young, are tempted by the exotism of Asian

traditions rather than deepen an Orthodox spirituality only superficially considered. In Fr Damascene's book they shall discover that, at the deep level, those religions also refer to Christ – the Unique God Who dwelled among us bodily – and His Revelation. But that does not mean that the teaching of other religion were salvific in itself. This is not Fr Damascene's message. It only means they can also contain valuable elements, which deserve to be studied and can help us better understand opther cultures.

His analysis is not **syncretistic** but **apologetic**: syncretism regards all religious paths as equal, claiming they all have the truth to the same extent, mixing them into an indistinct mass. On the contrary, Fr. Damascene calls his own approach an *apologetic* one, following in the footsteps of the apologetes of the first Christian centuries, who approached with discernament, naturally and organically, the wisdom of the ancients before them, where they identified prefigurations, intuitions and even prophecies of the coming of Christ. I am therefore also placing Christensen **in the descenedence of those apologetes**.

I present a range of concepts in the Chinese tradition, equated by Christensen with Christian concepts understood in an Orthodox dogmatic sense:

- *Dao* – *Logos*;
- *Shang Di*, *Tian* – **God;**
- *De"* (德) – **uncreated Grace**;
- **Qi – created energy**;
- **Golul (*Wu* 無) – divine *Kenosis* and Trinitarian *perichoresis***;
- *Ling* (靈) – **Spirit**.

Fr. Damascene goes, on an Orthodox line, beyond a strategy of indigenization or contextualization of Christianitu in China. His book lays the **foundation of an Orthodox theology of Chinese religion**. I consider that his comparative, **interdisciplinary project**, dedicated to the Chinese religion and Christianity, can fit within the new discipline called „Theology of Religions". It could illustrate the direction called „**Comparative Theology**". At the same time, i beleve it could also be an illustration of the type of approach to the Theology of Religions which I call „**Empathic Exclusivism**". I find his projectul interesting for the originality of approach and width of hermeneutical horizon. I belioeve that a full translation of his book would be useful for the Romanian school of theology of religions, currently in progress. The chapters which I have translated and published in the Review *Altarul Reintregirii* in 2012-2013, together with the chapters included in my thesis, may be a start for the reception in Romania of Fr Damascene Christensen's work in this field.

PART VI: HIGHLIGHTS OF AN

ORTHODOX THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

CHPTER 19:   THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS: TAXONOMIES AND CRITICISM

19.1. Theology of Religions: between witness, *Welt-Ethos*, and *New Age* syncretism. A criticism of pluraliste and pluralist-inclusivist models

The efforts made by Christian missionaries in China may also be regarded as attempts at outlining a Chinese theology of religions. Thie chapter extrapolates these unsystematic attempts to what today has emerged as a self-standing discipline: the theology of religions. The context is that of a cultural and religious globalization and the decline of Christianity in Western societies.

In respect to other religions, the question regarding the possibility of salvation outside of Christianity involves the reconciliation of two „theological axioms": a) the exclusivity of salvation in Christ and His Church, and b) God's love of people and His universal salvific will, of saving all.

I have given a motivation for which I consider that the discipline "History of Religions is inadequate / insufficient for the Orthodox theological education. I briefly presented Mircea Eliade's „comparative-typological" method and his triple methodological approach: <u>historical</u>, <u>phenomenological</u>, <u>hermeneutical</u>, with the universal systems which make up its <u>hermeneutical</u>

framework (the structures of the dialectics of the **sacred**, through which Eliade distinguishes religious *phenomena*, and the structures of religious **symbolism**, in terms of which he interprets the *significance* of these phenomena). I presented some reasons for which I am **proposing** the **replacement of the <u>History and Philosophy of Religions</u>** (HPR) with the **<u>Orthodox History and Theology of Religions</u>** (OHTR).

19.2. Taxonomic matrixes of the Teology of Religions

I made an outline of the current situation at European and global level of the discipline called Theology of Religions, presenting some conceptual matrixes, schools of thought, major orientations or dominant paradigms. The better known are:

- **The tripartite clasification** proposed by Alan Race (with its models: *exclusivism*, *inclusivism*, *pluralism*);
- **The quadripartite clasification** of Paul Knitter (*replacement* of other religions by Christianity; *fulfilment*, completion or perfecting pther religions by Christianity; *reciprocity*, mutual „enrichment" or „fulfilment"; *acceptance* of all religions as such, as equally valid salvation paths).

I also gave two variants of these classifications, proposed by Marcello Di Tora and Gavin D'Costa.

19.3. Paradigms of the Theology of Religions: detailed presentation

I presented the models included in these paradigms, jointly with a critique of their problematic aspects. Theology of Religions is by definition a „mine field", an area of intense controversies among adepts of various orientations. My critique is undergone from the positions of Orthodox theology, in compliance with the two principle defined under. 20.1.

I started with **exclusivism**, which comes in two variants: a radical one (of total replacement: *„Only one true religion: Christianity"*), and another, moderate one (of partial replacement: *„God is present in the other religion as revelation, but not as sa,vation"*).

The **inclusivist** model (of <u>fulfilment</u>: *„Christianity is the fulfilment of the other religions"*): Christ is God's normativ revelation, but salvation is also possible outside the „explicit" Christian Chuirch (as a visible institution). Christ is exclusively necessary for salvation, ontologically and causally, but not necessarilyalso epistemologically (not necessary to be known): *Solus Christus*, without *fides ex auditu*. This also has two variants: a *restrictive*, and a *structural* one (D'Costa).

Structural inclusivism is illustrated by Karl Rahner's concept of „anonymous Christians".

The **pluralist** model has an *inclusivist* variant (of *reciprocity*: *„Many true religions, called to mutual dialogue and enrichment"*), represented by Hans Küng or the Neo-Rahnerian Jacques Dupuis. The other variant is that of *pure* pluralism (of *total acceptance*: *„Many true religions: and that's it!"*). Representantives include John Hick, Paul Knitter, Raimon Panikkar (later work).

Another classification of pluralism is proposed by Gavin D'Costa: **unitary**, **pluriform**, **ethical**.

John Hick's **Unitary pluralism** is grounded in a noumenal / divine Real of Kantian extraction, „existing independently and outside human perception of it", called by Hick „the Eternal One". D'Costa's critique is devastating: he shows that Hick's unitary pluralism is a new form of triumphalism and imperialism, of an agnostic type. „Ironically, in trying to accomodate, with his pluralist perspective, all the world religions, giving them an equal status, [Hick] ends by not accomodating any of them, since he vannot accept them in his system except on his own terms, not theirs." Other representatives are Alan Race, Roger Haight, Perry Schmidt-Leukel.

Pluriform pluralism is represented by Raimundo Panikkar, Catholic priest claiming he was a Christian-Hindu-Buddhist. For him everything is grounded in a *cosmoteandric* reality in which the divine, the human and the Earthly are kept together indivisibly but distinctly. The Holy Trinity is the Christian way of defining this reality, but the Trinity is not exclusive to the Christian revelation. He rejects the idea that the Logos were limited to Jesus Christ, for that would make the Incarnation an object of „Christo-idolatry". He also rejects the idea that any salvation comes from the historical Jesus Christ. For him, the other religions can also be „salvific". Panikkar heretically breaks the inextricable relation between the eternal, transcendent Logos, and the Logos embodied in Jesus Christ. He wrongly argues that Christ the resurrected One is not necessarily present everywhere the

Logos acts. This theory subordinates the „historical Jesus" to a Christ seen as a distinct „principle". From an Orthodox viewpoint Panikkar's position has enormous Hristological and Trinitarian dificulties, being unacceptable. other pluriform pluralists are Mark Heim, John Cobb, David Ray Griffin.

Ethical pluralism is represented mainly by Paul Knitter, who tries to elude the issue of normativity, of the doctrinal framework in which the notion of salvatin (*soteria*) has sense, and of the ontological grounding of ethics, argueing that all religions must be judged by their fidelity to what Christians call „God", to the extent that religions promote the „Kingdom" through social struggle for „justice", „peace", „tolerance", „equality." He looks for a common denominator where doctrinary differences should be overcome, but cannot concretely define this denominator as long as its terms are not defined by a certain tradition. And traditions define them in different ways. Other exponents of this position are Aloysius Pieris, Felix Wilfred, Michael Amaladoss.

An interesting paradigm is that of „**Compared Theology**". The adepts of this new approach say that we ought to give up trying to create general frames *about* religions and, instead, we should concretely engage each religion, analyzing it in its specificity. We need not a theology *of* religions, but **multiple theologies *in* specific interaction *with* religions.** Its main representatives are Francis Clooney, Jim Fredericks, John Berthrong, Robert Cummings Neville, David Burrell, Klaus von Stosch.

CHAPTER 20: THE NEED FOR AN ORTHODOX THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS. „EMPATHIC EXCLUSIVISM"

20.1. The Object of the Orthodox Theology of Religions

In this last section I am outlining the general lines of an Orthodox Theology of Religions (OTR). The object of OTR is the systematic theological study, on Biblical and Patristic bases, the other religions. It analyzes other religious traditions in relation to the Christian doctrine and tradition, trying to answer questions regarding the way they see (or not) the Godhead, God's work in the world, Hristology, Pneumatology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, Missiology, Eschatology, and other aspects specific to Christian (Orthodox) dogmatics. OTR should envisage in its approach two fundamental principles:

1. Orthodoxy is nbot just a religion among others, but *the keeper of the fulness of revealed truth*. therefore, the first principle is total **fidelity to the** Biblical and patristic teaching and the tradition of the Orthodox Church. It has to avoid any dogmatic, doctrinal, liturgic or moral compromise. I have called this the *Orthodoxy* **principle**.
2. The second principle is that theological reflection should **not** conceptually **force** the overlapping of specifically Christian notions over those of other traditions. It should enter as deeply as possible into the ways of thinking of the respective cultures, seizing with objectivity and discernment, in their own terms, and respecting, their specificity. I have called it the *Empathy* **principle**.

20.2. Wider Ecumenism versus an exclusivist OTR

Orthodoxy is incompatible with pluralist and inclusivist models, which are meta-perpectives with a relativizing finality. It is definitely **contrary to an understanding of** the Theology of Religions as a way towards what is called „*Wider Ecumenism*".

TOR is **not** meant to open a road toward a forced unification of all religios into a globalizing conglomerate of a syncretistic type. It cannot serve as a pretext for forging a single world religion, without Christ, or with a "Christ" understood in a falsified way.

Its purpose is **not** to prepare the way for a 'New Age' **pan-religion**, denying the unicity of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

It cannot promote the „Branch Theory", nor can it extrapolate it to all religions, which were „branches" of some single pan-religion. On the contrary, the purpose of OTR is to promote the opposite teaching, emphasizing the **exclusivist** model.

OTR must facilitate a fair inderstanding of the other religions from an Orthodox perspective, in

close connection with the missionary dimension.

Therefore OTR cannot be of any but an *exclusivist* type. Christianity is uniquely founded on the divine revelation through the Incarnation. God revealed Himself exclusively through Jesus Christ. Salvation in only in Christ,like in the exclusivist model (*solus Christus*).

20.3. Universal Access Exclusivism. The issue of posthumous salvation and Christ's Descent to Hell

The *restrictive access exclusivism* model is too narrow: a predestined choice made by God for salvation or damnation would limit man's freedom of choice. Neither can we say that all non-Christians would be predestined for eternal damnation. Such a verdict would set margins to God's salvific will and His absolute freedom to save whomever and in whichever way He wills. Therefore, the model which would correspond to the Orthodox position is that of **universal access**.

More exactly, it would be the one based on the possibility that Christ should be confessed also at the moment of death or evenafter that. The possibility of post-mortem salvation is argued by D'Costa by Christ's descent to Hell after His dath on the Cross. The icon showing Christ pulling Adam and Eve out of hell is the canonical Orthodox icon of the Resurrection. For the application of this model to the posthumous salvation of the „righeous" pagans is quoted St. Clement of Alexandria.

20.4. The „Empathic Exclusivism" Model. The missionary dimension of OTR

I have called „**Empathic Exclusivism**" the model which could be the one of an Orthodox Theology of Religions. The attitude of Orthodoxy to the pagan faithful ought to be one of **empathy**. OTR shpuld try to identify, understand and theologically interpret, in the light of the Biblical and patristic tradition, the „seeds of the Logos" (St. Justin Martyr and Philosopher) which their religious traditions may have preserved from the originary, Adamic monotheism.

The goal of such an approach would be for the Theology of Religions to facilitate the Orthodox mission, to help „graft" Christianity onto those traditions, by buișding bridges across cultural differences for the pagans who may wish to become Orthodox Christians. Orthodox mission is to be passionately pursued, and the Theology of Religions should be an instrument facilitating it. I consider that today this is a major challenge for Orthodox theology. Given Romania's position of an interface between civilizations and its valuable heritage, I believe that Romanian Orthodoxy could be well placed for rising to that challenge.

CHAPTER 21:   CONCLUSIONS

The lessons and conclusions derived from thr work are grouped in seven types of aspects: cultural, religious, linguistic, political, scientific, internal (ecclesial) and those linked to the OTR as a new study discipline.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: TIBETAN BUDDHISM – A NIHILIST PARADIGM OF A GNOSTIC TYPE

I have included this essay in the thesis for two reasons:
- It is linked to the topic of **Buddhism**, as one of the three religion of China. I am arguing **against** certain aspects of Buddhism from a Christian perspective, like it was also criticized by the missionaries presented in the thesis. My arguments are in part others than those they used, but the general sense is the same: the Buddhist doctrine is incompatible with the Christian one.
- It is an original contribution, based on my personal experience in Tibet.
  I am somewhat directly familiar with the Sino-Tibetan culture, because I spent in China three years, of which 6 months in Tibet (december 1993–June 1994). Although travel is severely restricted in Tibet for foreigners, I took advantage of my resident permit in China

and my modest knowledge of Chinese language, and I travelled through isolated, officially inaccessible areas, where I lived in Lamaist monasteries (reopened after 1985) and I witnessed various rituals, including the one presented in this essay. All the photos included in the text were taken by myself (with the exception of the two exteriors of Drigung Til monastery).

The essay has two parts:

1) a detailed description of the ritual called „Sky Burial", which I personally witnessed near a monastery in Tibet. The ritual consists in the preparation of the body of the deceased by a Buddhist monk, and the lifeless body being devoured by scores of vultures.

The text is accompanied by photos taken by me during the ritual.

2) An essay explaining the significance of this ritual, according to the Bon chamanic tradition, and to the Vajrayana Buddhist doctrine.

Another original contribution consists in the elements of interpretation of the Buddhist doctrine from an Orthodox theological perspective, such as the doctrine of reincarnation, and that of the Interdependent Origins.

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