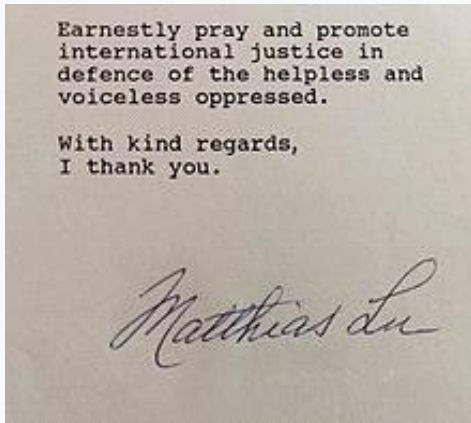


Matthias Lu

was a Roman Catholic priest and internationally-recognized Thomist philosopher. He served as vicar to Chinese and East Asian Catholics for the Diocese of Oakland from 1969-1986. He was awarded a *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* award by Pope Pius XII, and a *Benemerenti* Medal by Pope John Paul II. .

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| Born | June 2, 1919 |
| Died | June 25, 2008 |
| Resting Place | Mont La Salle, Napa, CA |
| Signature |  |

Biography

Fr. Lu was born in Baoding, in the province of Hebei, China, to Paul and Rose Lu. He was ordained a priest in 1942 and left China in 1946 to study at the Pontificia Universita Urbaniana, where he received a Licentiate and, later, a Ph.D.[1]

In the 1950s, Lu emigrated to North America and lectured at the University of Notre Dame (Indiana), Saint Bonaventure University (New York), University of Ottawa (Canada), Saint John's University (Minnesota) and others. His longest-running association was with Saint Mary's College of California, a university under the direction of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. He served as professor, researcher, and chaplain. He was also founder and director of the International Saint Thomas Aquinas Center, a study group that had several chapters in the East Bay Area. In 1988, he was named an affiliated member (AFSC) of the Christian Brothers order.[2]

Translator

Fr. Lu translated numerous works by the Apostolic Fathers, Aristotle, and St. Thomas Aquinas into Mandarin.[3] For Latin terms such as *esse*, he created new ideographic characters. In assessing Fr. Lu's impact on the field of philosophy, historians will have to contend with the question of whether he is to be ranked with William of Moerbeke and Demetrios Kydones in the transmission of ideas across cultures.

One anecdote bearing on this matter is that Lu, on one of his early return trips to China, was granted a visa that was far superior to the category for which he had applied. When he inquired about the reason for this remarkable freedom of movement, the matter was referred through a succession of officials until the answer came back that Chairman Mao owned copies of Lu's translations and had personally authorized the visa.

Philosophy

For Fr. Lu, the three great obstacles to the *vis cogitativa* are verbalism, conceptualism, and culturalism. They present themselves as ultimate goods, darkening the intellect, and leading to sin. Critical theory, for example, is opposed to human solidarity and frames existence in terms of base desires and political power. Another example is the concept of material "success": it will lead a husband and wife to frustrate the natural procreative order. A further example of the "weeds of sin and error" is the perception of the Priesthood as a mere job, or that the Pope is a mere head of state. This not only ignores the sacral nature of these offices, but also leads to misunderstandings about their paternal role. Proponents of a mixed-gender priesthood deny both the reality of apostolic unity and gender itself.[4] To avoid these obstacles, he held that "Contrition, prayer and self-giving prepare us for wisdom."[5]

In keeping with the best of the successors of Sts. Albert and Thomas, Lu's ideas are at once familiar but also exhibit a certain freshness and originality in emphasis. Reflecting on the suffering of the Chinese people Fr. Lu's Thomism placed great emphasis on 1) the transcendental of Being, 2) the incompleteness of human existence, 3) the reality and implications of Christ entombed, and 4) the 8th Beatitude. He was, however, quick to point out that Thomism is optimistic by its nature and that even a prisoner is truly free whenever he is united with God through contemplation.

Concerning union with God, Lu stated that although earthly life is fraught with contingency and natural limitations--a stumbling block for modern philosophers--God is present in creation through "essence, power and action."[6] Among the many

conclusions that follow from this is that God and our purpose are knowable.[7] We are not orphans. God, who directs human life through “apocalypse” to participation in the divine life, has both sent His Spirit to bestow Wisdom and created us as rational animals:

Our intellect is open to the infinite. We can know God perfectly according to our intellect but imperfectly according to the way God knows Himself. What is received, is received according to the mode of being of the receiver and according to the nature of the thing received.[8]

Aristotle and St. Thomas’ simple and yet sophisticated (as Lu deemed it) account solved, as Thomas himself noted, myriad issues that dogged philosophers from Thales to Plato.

Aquinas’ exhaustive method of inquiry--uniting the quest for truth by distinguishing between Faith, Knowledge, and Wisdom--also avoids the mistakes of the Averroists. The act of philosophizing alone should not be confused with the terminus of our spiritual growth. As Lu would insist, "wisdom begins with faith and reaches its full bloom in piety." [9] The Eighth Beatitude describes “a cause for joy that transcends the power of the physical world”--the consummation of the search for truth in God as both “Beloved and Truth”--for a Thomist or for a Confucian, as he noted.[10] Sacramental and devotional life, which finds its fulfillment in the Kingdom of Heaven, is also the fulfillment of the philosopher’s quest: “creation is the process by which what God knows is put in the order of existence,” and as we come to possess the truths of existence we are willingly or unwillingly called to unity with the One to whom these truths give testimony. This dialectic within the sensible world either ceases, unfinished, or leads to renewal, reconciliation and peace.

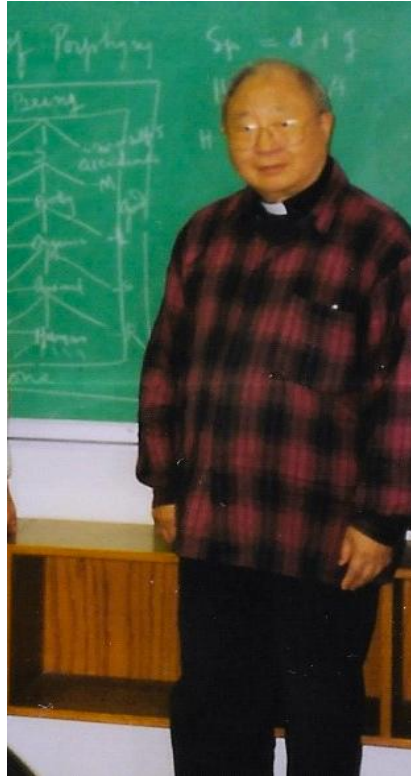
Select Works

A Critical Theoretical Inquiry on the Notion of Act in the Metaphysics of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas (in Latin), Peter Lang, 1992.

"Hypocrisy or Tactful Machination?", The Cardinal Kung Foundation, Spring 1996.

"Fifty Years of Chinese Philosophy, 1898-1950," *New Scholasticism*, vol. 32, 1958.

"On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith," *New Scholasticism*, vol. 27, 1953.



Matthias Lu discussing the “Tree of Porphyry” circa 1990.

Select Addresses

"Christian Martyrdom For Truth and Liberty in the People's Republic of China (1949-1996)," The 5th World Congress of Christian Philosophy, Lublin, 1996.

"Human Family and Human Children for a Human World," World Forum of NGOs, Malta, 1993.

"Doctores Tres, Unus in Amore" Congressus Internationalis De Beato Joanne Duns Scoto, Rome, 1993.

"Saint Thomas Aquinas in China," The 8th International Congress of Medieval Philosophy at the University of Helsinki, 1987.

"The Common Man of Today Needs Saint Thomas Aquinas as a Whole Person," Convention on the 100th Anniversary of Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris* at the Angelicum University, Rome, 1979.

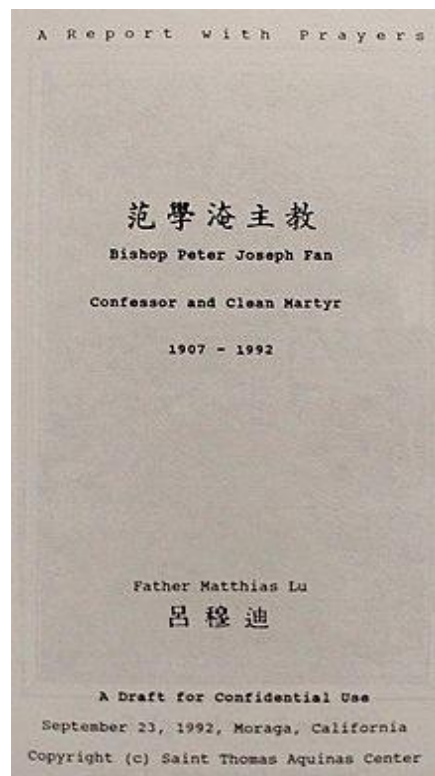
Activist

Fr. Lu was a tireless advocate for peace, the family, and for oppressed and imprisoned Catholics in China. Through his network of contacts in China, he acted as

a conduit to the West for information about, and appeals from, prisoners of conscience such as Bishop James Su Zhi-Min (1932-?).

Lu's long essay, Bishop Fan [11], was written to educate the Anglophone public about the lack of religious freedom under the Chinese Communist Party. The tract is partially a biography of Peter Joseph Fan [12], bishop of Baoding from 1951, as well as an indictment of the Catholic Patriotic Association.

Fr. Lu also ministered to the Bay Area's East Asian community through the medium of radio on KUSF.



References

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2. <https://www.stmarys-ca.edu/former-smc-professor-and-affiliated-member-of-the-christian-brothers-dies>.
3. Personalities of America, American Biographical Institute, Raleigh, 1992.
4. Letter to the editor, *Inside the Vatican*, June 6, 1994. Some further examples of these sort of errors are mentioned by St. Albert the Great, in *Super Dionysii Mysticam theologiam* 5.5-6.

5. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Super ad Galatas*, 5.3; *Super ad Colossenses*, 2.3; *Scriptum Super Sententiis*, 3.35.2.1; *Summa Theologiae* 2.2.45.2, 5-6; Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, vol. 2, ch. 36.
6. Lectures on St. Thomas Aquinas' *Expositio super Iob ad Litteram*.
7. Cf. Bl. Ramon Llull, *Ars Brevis*, 9.1. Lu admiringly described Llull as the "father of computer logic."
8. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Sentencia libri De anima*, 3.9 & *Summa Theologiae*, 1.2.93; St. John of The Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 2.26.
9. "The Common Man of Today Needs Saint Thomas Aquinas as a Whole Person," 1979. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2.2.45, 1, ad 3; 2.2.121, 1, ad 2, and St. Robert Bellarmine, *The Art of Dying Well*, 1.6.
10. "Christian Martyrdom For Truth and Liberty in the People's Republic of China (1949-1996)," The 5th World Congress of Christian Philosophy, Lublin, 1996.
11. *Bishop Fan*, (Moraga: St. Thomas Aquinas Center, 1992, 50 pages).
12. <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/04/25/obituaries/peter-joseph-fan-84-a-bishop-imprisoned-by-china-for-beliefs.html>.