

## Forum in the Netherlands on Religion in China and Indonesia

Christopher Davies and Wim Koetsier  
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Utrecht, Netherlands - UPF-Netherlands held an Ambassadors for Peace meeting on Aug. 28, 2014, in the School of Catholic Theology in Utrecht.

The meeting was described as having an informative character and was opened by the Chairman, Jhr. Dr. P.A. Beelaerts van Blokland, with a Bible reading and some general comments. This was followed by a report of the World Summit in Korea entitled "Peace, Security and Human Development," August 9 to 13 in Seoul, written by Ms. Joy Pople, director of the Office of Publications, UPF International, and read by Christopher Vipond Davies, UPF-Netherlands rapporteur [for the report, [click here.](#)]

There then followed presentations under the general heading of religion in China and Indonesia:

“The Catholic Church in Today's China” was the topic of the presentation by Father Jerom Heyndrickx, former Roman Catholic CICM missionary and senior advisor to the Verbiest Foundation at the Catholic University of Leuven. He gave a quick overview of the history of the Catholic Church in China and spoke from personal experience of the great difficulties of Christianity in China, and the particular challenges of dealing with the Communist government, which wished to approve, and even appoint, members of the clergy, and also of mediating with the Vatican. Father Jerom indicated that in the course of time the Chinese Communist leadership and the Vatican had started to have more and more dialogue. Some of the Christian churches are underground and some are official under the umbrella of a "patriotic" Chinese organization. The recent explosive growth of Christian churches in China is a hopeful sign, and he said this should not lead to confrontation with the Chinese authorities but to constructive dialogue, aiming at a better China.

“How Can You Be ‘Christian’ and Chinese in Southeast Asia and Shape Your Identity?” was the question raised by Dr. Charles Steenbrink, professor emeritus in intercultural theology at Utrecht University, with particular reference to Indonesia, a predominantly Muslim country. Some scientists think that Islam came to Indonesia through Chinese Muslims, while others have the opinion that it came through trade relations with Muslim countries in the Middle East. Islam in Indonesia, where for instance there are women in high positions, is quite different from the norm. In the past, Chinese people were distrusted, being seen as connected to Chinese communism. Often they became the scapegoat when Indonesia went through difficult times. It looked like the Chinese in Indonesia integrated completely, but since 1998 there has been more freedom for other religions like Confucianism and a greater recognition of Chinese identity. There is, for example, a development of a Chinese strain of Islam, which includes a beautiful Chinese mosque.

After a short break and fortified by refreshments provided by UPF activists Rudy and Thea Ryntjes, the program continued with animated discussion, questions and answers.



A UPF perspective on “Navigating between Loyalty to God and to the State” was provided by Drs. Wim Koetsier, UPF-Netherlands secretary general, who talked about the challenges in Europe as well as in China. He asserted that the struggle between God and the State reflected the struggle between God and fallen mankind. In history, God reaches out to mankind in order to bring people back to God's original plan. With love and care, God, as a Parent, stays in dialogue with His children, sending prophets, His own Son Jesus and people such as Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Mother Teresa, who are examples of loving the enemy. Progress in history comes when people on the side of God can win the enemy to the side of goodness. This is the challenge for all religious people, also for the Christians in China.

Wim Koetsier then drew attention to future UPF events: Prof. Dr. B.P. Vermeulen talking on Freedom of Religion on November 13, and Eric van 't Zelfde on the “Superschool” on December 11; there would also be celebrations of United Nations days: September 21, International Day of Peace; and December 10, Human Rights Day.

Finally, Wim Koetsier presented Ambassador for Peace certificates to the two speakers, and Dr. van Blokland closed the meeting in his usual jovial manner.