

## NOISE MAKERS: CATHOLICS

Excerpts translated by Emilija Ferdmanaitė

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### *Introduction*

Nobody has time for long stories anymore. So I've cut off some of the time for you, which felt nice. You can choose what you like in your own time.

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### *The Beginning*

Not far from the centre of Brussels, in Laeken, there is an old cemetery where the chapel of the original church is still standing. The wife of King Leopold I of Belgium, Louise Marie Orléans (1812-1850), expressed her wish to be buried there. However, the King found the church too small for his liking. Just three days after the funeral, he commissioned the construction of a grander church worthy of the King (the Belgian kings, queens and princes now rest in its crypt). As time passed, both aristocrats and common folk wished to be buried in Laeken Cemetery, to be closer to the royal family. The cemetery expanded rapidly and, when space became scarce, the *bürgermeister* decided not to look for a new location, instead opting to expand vertically. Today, the cemetery extends perhaps eight storeys below the ground.

While strolling through the cemetery, a particular monument caught my eye: an open bronze book. On one page, there was a letter in French addressed to a deceased wife, and on the other, a Chinese version of the same. The letter bore the signature of a certain Célestin OSB, with the abbreviation suggesting he was a Benedictine monk. Why is one of the letters in Chinese? Why would a Chinese man become a Catholic monk? And why would a monk be writing a letter... to his wife?

### *The Hero*

The quest led me to the central character of this book, Lou Tseng-Tsiang. Born and raised in China, he received his education there and was sent to serve as a translator at the Chinese Embassy in St. Petersburg. It was here that he met and fell in love with Berthe Bovy, the daughter of a Belgian general. His political journey was nothing short of remarkable, progressing from a translator to the position of Chinese Prime Minister. However, after his wife died, he chose to forsake his political career and worldly affairs, embracing the life of a Benedictine monk, dedicating precisely two decades to serving God. Not all Catholics were pious apologists; there were also bold missionaries and

extraordinary personalities who aspired to change the world, and indeed succeeded in changing certain aspects of it.

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### *Time and Space*

'The Noisy Ones: Catholics' revisits centuries-old, long-forgotten tales. The narrative canvas stretches across China, Belgium and Lithuania, encompassing a timeframe from the missionary Andrius Rudamina's sermons to the Chinese people, up until January 1949, when the Communists took over Beijing.

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### *The Story*

Fragmentary yet historically cohesive, 'The Noisy Ones: Catholics' draws from biographies and correspondences of missionaries, monks, and priests, as well as historical and museum records. The history of Church, language, and wine. The First World War and the Treaty of Versailles, examined from a relatively unexplored perspective within Lithuania. This book offers you the freedom to read it according to your preferred time period or theme, or to traverse its pages sequentially, crafting your own narrative and writing your own historical novel.

### *Zhuangzi*

A drunkard remains unscathed even after a harsh fall from a wagon. His bones and their compounds are no different from others, yet his injuries differ, for his soul is whole. He boarded the carriage unwittingly and tumbled out unwittingly. Thoughts of life and death, awe and dread, have found no place in his chest. Thus, when he encounters an obstacle, he does not collapse in fear. If wine can bestow such wholeness upon a man, what innate wholeness must he possess by nature?

### *Rabbi's Tale*

When Noah finally landed, he decided to plant a vineyard. The devil offered to help him. He used a knife to prod a lamb, cut a lion, butcher a pig, and pierce a monkey. The soil, thus fertilised, was ready to plant grapes. After the first glass, the man is calm as a lamb, bleating happily. After a few, he is like a lion – full of pride, tossing his mane. In the third stage, the lion is gone, only a pig is rolling around, puking on itself, and at the very end there is just a drunken monkey, a screaming naked ape.

The first time Noah had wine, it was rosé. Not red and not white – the colour of a midway rose.

**1656-1730**

Joachim Bouvet (a Jesuit mathematician sent to Asia by Louis XIV) engages in correspondence with Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. In their exchange, Bouvet introduces Leibniz to the Yijing, or 'Book of Changes'. The German philosopher and mathematician concludes: these Chinese hexagrams are a proof of binary mathematics.

***Opium***

Relieves pain. Reduces hunger and thirst. Immerses you in a healing sleep.

**1721**

Élixir Asthmaticum, an opium-based medicine, was formulated. It was available in French pharmacies up until 1986. It is still available in the US, but only to babies of drug addicted mothers.

***Élixir parégorique***

A remedy for diarrhoea in both children and adults, and for babies to prevent them from crying during teething. The formula was registered by Jacob le Mort, a resident of Leiden from 1650 to 1718. The ingredients of the miracle cure include honey, liquorice, lindera, opium, camphor, anise, and more.

**1691**

St. Casimir's relic was brought from Vilnius to the Jesuit College of Mechelen.

***Peace Collapses and War Ensues***

A tale of endless sorrow.

***Army of Saints***

Archangel Michael spears Lucifer. Saint George spears the Dragon. Saint Martha spears another Dragon. Saint Margaret holds the Dragon by a chain. The beast, black with a gleaming collar, devours Margaret, but she wears a cross around her neck. The cross pierces Satan's palate, making it belch, and the Dragon regurgitates Margaret. Saint Margaret is the most excellent patroness of madmen.

Saint Barbara also has a sword. And Saint Catherine has a sabre. Summon all the saints with their cutlasses, bayonets, firearms and incendiaries to form a squad. What a cloud, glittering with lightning bolts, is the army of holy virgins! And at the front of the army walks the Virgin, crushing the head of the Serpent-Beast with her bare feet.

O grant me wings like a dove; I would fly to seek thy servants, O God.

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#### **1848. *The Mission***

WHO: Joseph Gabet

WHOM: the Pope

The missionaries do not know the language (Chinese) well enough and do not pay any attention to Chinese culture as they ought to.

Indigenous priests are scarce and not considered equal to the missionaries, whose teachings often clash with local customs.

Missionaries from different orders are constantly quarrelling over territories, drawing the attention of local authorities.

This turmoil perplexes the faithful.

WHO: The Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith

The letter should be prohibited from being read and should be destroyed.

#### **1849. *Bishop Motiejus Valančius***

Pope Pius IX appoints Motiejus Valančius as the Bishop of Samogitia.

#### ***Hildegard of Bingen***

Wine is the lifeblood of the earth, flowing within it much like blood flows through a man's veins; hence it absorbs the heat with a swiftness akin to a whirring mill-wheel, drawing it from the bladder down to the marrow of the blood, and produces the hottest of heat, so that the marrow gives to the blood the hot warmth of delight.

That is why, when a man desires to drink strong wine, he must temper it with water, so that the potency and heat may be at least somewhat dulled and mellowed. When consumed undiluted, wine scorches, harms, compromises health, and drives one towards carnal pleasures.

***Teachings of Shu King-Shen***

Europe's power, its true strength, does not lie in its armaments or even its scientific advancements, but rather in its religion. Throughout your diplomatic career, you will have the opportunity to explore the Christian faith. It has many branches, each with its own distinct societies. I encourage you to delve into the oldest branch, one that traces its origins to the very beginning; go there. Study its doctrines, adhere to its commandments, observe its leaders, and closely examine its artistic achievements.

Later, when you have finished your career, you may have the opportunity to delve even deeper. Choose the oldest community within the faith's oldest branch. If possible, get inside it. Become a disciple and gain insight into its inner workings and secrets. Once you have grasped and embraced the mysteries of that life, when you have reached the very heart and power of Christ's religion, then bring and gift it to China.

***Shu King-Shen***

Shu King-Shen is a Mandarin from the old imperial regime. He speaks only Chinese, spent only a few days in Rome, and has never personally interacted with anyone from the clergy.

**1893**

Sister Agnes enters the Benedictine convent of Maredret on 14th September. She soon sets up a drawing workshop.

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***1934. Japan. Chiune Sugihara leaves the Manchuria Railway***

I resigned due to the cruel treatment of the Chinese by the Japanese. They do not consider them human beings. I couldn't bear that.

***1934. The Adventures of Tintin***

11th May

WHO: Father Neut

WHOM: Hergé

To achieve an even greater impact than Tintin's previous adventures, send him to China. That could substantially contribute to fostering interracial comprehension and genuine friendship between the races.

16th May

WHO: Hergé

WHOM: Father Neut

There are many things that need to be changed about our attitudes towards China and the Chinese, especially those of our children.

For quite some time now, as I've been preparing for my stories, I've pondered how many misconceptions I myself might have and how literature could alter these notions. Presently, I find myself developing a growing fondness and admiration for this nation, and a burning desire to understand and embrace it. Dearest Father, thank you once again for your encouragement and reassurance that what I am about to embark upon will not be useless.

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**1946. *The Mission to the Belgian Congo***

A novice Belgian missionary. Sent by the monastery with their blessings, she sets off for the Congo. To teach the ignorant. To nurse the sick. To pray and work.

On the plane, she becomes overheated, gasping for breath and air. So, just before landing at a stopover airport in Morocco, she quickly unwraps the newspaper, which is tightly wound not only around her head but also around her face.

The newspaper was meant to shield her from the harmful atmospheric pressure that weighs down on you during the plane journey, a precaution advised by the sisters who had either embarked on flights themselves or heard tales of such travels.

As the newspaper became soaked with fear-induced sweat, its inked letters began to run, tracing lines upon her forehead and cheeks. Oh, and the nose. If she had a pocket mirror, she would have seen herself looking like a chimney sweep. As if she had indulged in too much ash on Ash Wednesday. But the nun doesn't have a mirror in her pocket.

Once the newspaper was removed from her head, the remainder of the journey became rather enjoyable. Free from pressure and constraint. She tried not to look out of the window, devoting her time to prayer and introspection instead, the clouds outside being denser than on the rocky peaks of her village.

It was scary to watch. It was scary to see. Scary to discern anything within those clouds.