



FRIENDS COMING
FROM
A FAR DISTANCE

by Beatrice Leung

I. Homecoming of Bishop Dominic Tang

A few months ago (5th November, 1980), the Hong Kong Catholic Church was excited by the homecoming of its hero, Bishop Dominic Tang, S.J., Bishop of Guangzhou. After being in jail for twenty-two years, he was released the previous June and then returned to Hong Kong to visit his family and receive medical treatment for an intestinal ailment.

Bishop Dominic Tang arrived by himself, accompanied by no one and carrying his own simple hand luggage. At the age of seventy-two, far from physically well, he came to Hong Kong. The exact date and time of his arrival were not disclosed in Hong Kong until the evening before his arrival. Consequently on the following morning, the Vicar General of the Hong Kong diocese, the Provincial of the Society of Jesus in Hong Kong (as Bishop Tang is a Jesuit) and two other priests hurried to Lowu Bridge to greet him immediately on arrival, and to help him through immigration formalities. Bishop Tang calmly stepped across the border at Shumchun and was greeted by a handful of his brothers in the Church. He then was taken directly to the Hong Kong Bishop's house and began the activities of his short stay in the place where he was born and received his early education.

Bishop Dominic Tang looks frail and diminutive. His appearance never varies from that of a humble pastor. During twenty-two years in Wong Wah (黃華) and Tam Kong (潭崗) prisons, he was deprived totally of titles of any nature by the Chinese government. After he was released in 1980, he was restored to the position of being Bishop of Guangzhou, though as far as the Catholic Church is concerned, the rank of bishop and all the rights of that office can never be removed by any civil government. He appears exceptionally alert for his age. Perhaps as a result of his long imprisonment, he displays great humility and friendliness to anyone who approaches him. With deep serenity and placidity, he appears above disturbance and turbulence, as if he has attained a state of complete union with the Holy One. In spite of the fact that he is highly educated and studied humanities and philosophy in Spain and Portugal and theology in Shanghai, he refers to himself as "a simple man," who needs to learn from the beginning after being separated from the outside world for so many years (Sunday Examiner 7/11/80; Press Release, Hong Kong Catholic Information Office 5/11/80).

Bishop Dominic Tang was born in Hong Kong. His trip from Guangzhou to this city was not regarded as an official visit but as a homecoming. When he returned to his own people he was invited to join in the ordinary activities of the Church and the normal celebrations for Sundays and annual feasts (H.K.Catholic Chinese Weekly, 20/2/81, 27/2/81, 30/1/81, 6/2/81, 23/1/81; South China Morning Post 26/12/80). His appearance of course attracted many people who have always considered him an extraordinary hero who defended the faith, and who represents the victims of political campaigns in China over the last three decades. In addition, he can converse freely in Cantonese. All of this explains why he was never considered an outsider by the people of Hong Kong.

It is inspiring to observe how he was highly praised in public by Pope John Paul II, on the occasion of his Golden Jubilee of joining religious life. When the Holy Father spoke to the pilgrims who gathered at Castelgandolfo for the noon prayer, the Pope mentioned Bishop Tang and expressed his admiration and gratitude to him (L'Osservatore Romano 11/9/80, H.K. Catholic Chinese Weekly 12/9/80, South China Morning Post 8/9/80). When the Bishop's health did not permit him to travel to Manila or Tokyo to meet the Holy Father on his pastoral visit to Asia last February, the Pope instructed the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal A. Casaroli, to make a detour from Tokyo to Hong Kong, to visit the bishop in the Pope's name, in order to show his special personal interest in and esteem for Bishop Tang and what the Bishop represents - the Church and people in China. In the press conference held by Cardinal Casaroli and Bishop Tang on 28th February, when he was asked about possible conflict between the three-self policy (self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating) of the Chinese Church and the policy of the Vatican, Bishop Tang pointed out that the divergence mainly lies with the question of "self-governing." The explanation coming from the Vatican does not equate "self-governing" with "independence." If this problem can meet with common agreement, then the "three-self" policy advocated by the Patriotic Association would be very similar to "indigeni

zation" in the Catholic Church. Bishop Tang expressed confidence that this problem would be solved sooner or later. He also observed that the Chinese government had changed its attitude recently towards religion. The reopening of churches and the development of religious freedom gave immense encouragement to the Chinese Catholics. When he was asked by some journalists whether he would be the middle man between the Chinese government and the Vatican, Bishop Tang replied that this kind of important work could not be done by such a person of low rank as himself. It could only be done by an exchange of opinions of the top officials of both sides. If there is need for his assistance, then he would very willingly offer his services. (Official press release, H.K. Catholic Information Office 28/2/81, Wen Wei Po, Sing Tao Wan Pao, Sing Tao Jih Pao, Kuai Pao, Shang Pao, Hong Kong Standard 1/3/81) Thus when Bishop Tang left by air for Rome on 28th April, he was not preparing for just another routine personal report to the Pope which a Bishop must make every five years. He would be the first Chinese Bishop to have had the chance of making such an "Ad Limina" visit since the 1950s. In addition, he is a Bishop singled out by the Pope for special praise and affection. Therefore on April 30th Bishop Tang met the Holy Father in Rome. The February 28th talks of Cardinal Casaroli and Bishop Tang in Hong Kong centered on the possibility of the resumption of relations between the Catholic Church and the Chinese government. It must be of immense assistance to the Holy Father to listen to the views of this towering figure who is loyal to both the Church and China. (Ming Pao, Hong Kong Standard 1/5/81)

As soon as Bishop Tang arrived in Hong Kong, on 5th November, 1980, the Hong Kong Catholic authorities held a press conference and openly answered tough and penetrating questions from journalists (H.K. Catholic Chinese Weekly 7/11/80, Chung Pao 6/11/80, Sing Tao Jih Pao 6/11/80, Ching Po 6/11/80, Kuai Pao 6/11/80). In answering quest-

ions on how he spent the long years in prison, what impressed us, touched our hearts and drew our admiration, was the Bishop's observation that he learned a great deal about politics during the twenty-two years of imprisonment. But he also declared that the Catholic faith had been deeply rooted in his mind and heart, and therefore he remained a faithful Catholic. He also admitted that the spirit of love is very important in the Catholic Church, and thus in these twenty-two years, he harbored no hatred, and had been taught to forgive (Sunday Examiner 7/11/80, Ming Pao 6/11/80). He not only pronounced this beautiful doctrine, but he also put it into practice at the press conference by refusing to expose the ugly side of prison life. Too, he has declined to write an account of his imprisonment depicting the treatment he suffered behind bars. A scholar, who describes himself as no more than a simple man, has he not attained the state illustrated by the old Chinese saying, "the greatest wisdom appears as simple"? He told the journalists that his concern was confined to the Church and his Catholics in Guangzhou. Hence after his release, he hoped to resume his work for the Church, and had no plans to write up his experiences in prison (Sunday Examiner 7/11/80; Ming Pao 6/11/80). He expressed the desire to go back to Guangzhou after his recovery, and start uniting the priests and faithful of the diocese, and fortifying them in their faith.

After attending the press conference for Bishop Tang's arrival in Hong Kong, a non-Catholic British journalist expressed his feelings about Bishop Tang. He said, "Under normal situations it is impossible for me to believe that Bishop Tang has no animosity to the Chinese government, because the twenty-two years of prison took away the prime of his life, and nothing is left as far as the future is concerned. But by observing his expression and the way he spoke, I have to believe it is true, that hatred and animos-

ity are not with him." Both in his public addresses and in private conversations, Bishop Tang never accepts that there are two Catholic Churches in China, but insists there is only one Church in which the believers express their faith in different ways. One of the things to which Bishop Tang was specially committed was seeking to clarify the misunderstanding widespread within and outside the Church, of those who continue to speak of the Patriotic Association as a Church (Sunday Examiner 27/3/81).

II. Visit of the Chinese Christian Delegation

At the end of March 1981, the Protestant Church in Hong Kong saw an exceptional event. A grand welcome was given to religious visitors from China who for the first time since 1949 paid a friendly visit to Hong Kong. (Xinhua News 22/3/81).

Led by Bishop K.H. Ting (Ding Guangxun), the Anglican Bishop of Nanjing, the Chinese Christian delegation arrived in Hong Kong by express train on 22nd March, 1981. At the Hunghom station they were greeted by representatives of the Hong Kong Protestant Church and the Christian Asian Consultative Meeting (Ta Kung Pao 23/3/81, Wen Wei Po 23/3/81). A series of activities was scheduled for them. These included participation in the Christian Asian Consultative Meeting held from 23rd to 26th March, the ordination ceremony of Hong Kong's new Anglican Bishop, tea parties, seminars, press conferences and visits to various organizations. Their visit lasted only nineteen days, consequently their timetable was very full, leaving very little free time. On 8th April, the day before their departure, at a tea party, they extended a return invitation to the concerned people, as a token of their gratitude for the hospitality received. At this party, they also issued a thousand-word statement, "To All the Hong Kong Brothers and Sisters in Christ." In the statement the delegation not only expressed their

gratitude to God who had granted them so much success in this visit, but also set out the "Three Self" policy - self-governing, self-propagating and self-supporting - of the Chinese Christian Church. (Ta Kung Pao 9/4/81, Official Release, "To All the Hong Kong Brothers and Sisters in Christ, 8/4/81). Then in the midst of good wishes from hosts, friends and officials from the Xinhua News Agency, they took the north-bound train for Guangzhou.

Bishop K.H. Ting, the leader of the Chinese Christian delegation, is the leading figure in the Chinese Christian Church in China. From the name list of the Chinese delegation, we learn that he is president of the Chinese Christian Council and Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Association, Rector of the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary and Vice-Chancellor of Nanjing University. From other sources we also know that he is the senior member of the standing committee of Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference ("China Handbook" ed. by Ta Kung Pao October 1980, p. 81). He received a B.A. degree from St. John's University, Shanghai, and later, an M.A. from Columbia University, U.S.A. He received his Doctorate in Divinity from Derecen, Hungary. He is a very learned and accomplished man. The rest of the delegates also hold important posts, either in the Three Self Association, the Christian Council, or the YMCA. Most of them have been very active in Chinese Christian circles since the 1950's. They included Han Wen-zao, Rev. Hung Chan-pui, Lo Kuan-chung, Shen De-rong, Rev. Matthew Tong, Rev. Peter Tsai, and Tsao Seng-chieh.

Bishop Ting visited the U.S.A. and Canada in 1979 and aroused great excitement there among people concerned for China, who received him warmly. Throughout all his many activities in Hong Kong, he invariably appeared smiling, with gentle gesture, neatly dressed. He has thick silvery hair, together with keen darting eyes. He speaks perfect English. When participating in seminars and conferences, he prefers to listen rather than to speak. He talks carefully at the proper time, on appropriate subjects, and chooses the right expressions. He skillfully manages to

avoid even covertly embarrassing questions. He is able to handle any situation with great calm and serenity. In fact, one got the impression that he rivals a senior member of the diplomatic corps in his coolness and calm demeanour.

The visit of the Chinese Christian Delegation was one of friendship and dialogue. Since they could stay in Hong Kong for only less than three weeks, they could not visit all the numerous Christian organizations, or participate in all the religious activities to which they were invited. Inevitably therefore, they had to devote most of their time to meeting Church leaders and representatives of organizations, and attending the more significant church activities, such as preaching during Sunday services. (Wen Wei Po, Ta Kung Pao 29/3/81, Wen Wei Po 27/3/81, 30/3/81).

As soon as the Chinese Christian Delegation arrived at the Hong Kong railway station, they held a press conference to reply to questions from journalists. A second press conference was held at the YMCA hall, Waterloo Road, on 26th March (Wen Wei Pao 27/3/81). A number of seminars were held on their behalf. At the seminars and press conferences, they replied to a stream of questions on the situation of the Christian Church in China. In their replies the delegates manifested their determination to uphold the "Three Self Principles" - self-governance, self-support and self-propagation (South China Morning Post 27/3/81, H.K. Standard 27/3/81, Ta Kung Pao 23/3/81, A Call for Clarity: Fourteen Points from Christians in the People's Republic of China to Christians Abroad, by K.H. Ting, 'Official Release by Chinese Christian Delegation' Point 5).

They explained that the "Three Selves" are an effort to avoid a return by the Protestant Church to the pre-liberation era when Christianity was regarded as a "foreign religion." In order to destroy this adverse image, the Christian Church in China has decided to shoulder its own responsibility to preach the Gospel to its own people, this no matter how large the population of China and how small

the Protestant Church (A Call for Clarity: Point 8; Wen Wei Po 23/3/81, H.K. Standard 27/3/81). They reported that Christians in China bear witness to the Lord through their actions ("Christian Witness in New China" by Tsao Seng-Chieh, a talk given on 24/3/81 at Christian Asian Consultative Conference). They stated their opinion that any missionary and church activities, including radio broadcasts, carried on "wilfully and unmindful of Chinese church authorities," are an expression of disrespect and unfriendliness (A Call for Clarity, Point 8, South China Morning Post 23/3/81, 27/3/81). As far as finance is concerned, they emphasized that they feel the strength of their position lies in the fact that they will not do anything beyond their own capacity. However, they are pondering the wisdom of accepting certain contributions from friendly church groups and persons overseas, who give with no string attached and with due respect for the independent stance of their church, simply as an expression of the universality of Christian fellowship (A Call for Clarity: Point 13, South China Morning Post 7/4/81). They also reported that the Chinese government advocates the policy of "emphasize the common ground while preserving the differences" (A Call for Clarity: Point 2, South China Morning Post 7/4/81).

The above-mentioned points coincide with the fourteen points edited from the conversations of Bishop K.H. Ting, Rev. Andrew Chiu and Rev. Arthur Wu of Hong Kong, in December, 1980.

III. Looking Towards the Future

The Chinese Christian Delegation and Bishop Tang both bear Chinese Christian witness in different circumstances. The visit of the Chinese Christian Delegation, besides increasing the understanding and exchange between the Church in China and the Church in Hong Kong, reminds us of being

mature Christians and carrying our mission in the construct of our society. The clear message of Bishop Tang is a readiness to accept without rancour the sufferings which devotion to the faith has demanded over so many years, and a cheerful willingness to seek every opportunity to serve the Church and China without regard to self, even when weighed down by years and illness.

Our Holy Spirit Study Centre was greatly honoured by the visits of Bishop Ting and Bishop Tang. Despite their different roles and missions while in Hong Kong, when the two bishops return to China, we hope that their missions will be the same, namely, with the assistance of God, to serve as a "bridge" between the Chinese Church and the Churches of the rest of the world.

