

HOLY SPIRIT STUDY CENTRE: A REVIEW OF ONE YEAR AND FUTURE HOPES

by John Tong

translated by Mary Louise Martin

A. SHORT INTRODUCTION TO OUR WORK

To understand and show concern for China and the Church in China, the Hong Kong Diocese established the Holy Spirit Study Centre above the library in the Seminary. I was appointed Director and Sr. Beatrice Leung was asked to serve as Executive Secretary. The Centre opened on October 1st, 1980. As the Centre marks its first anniversary with a brief report on the past year, there are four aspects to be explained in greater detail:



The appearance of
the Holy Spirit Study Centre

1. Library

We established a small library in the Centre as a special adjunct to the existing seminary library. We subscribe to Chinese and foreign language newspapers or magazines which focus on the theme of Christianity and contemporary China, hoping to provide our brothers and sisters in the Church of Hong Kong with material that will increase our understanding of and concern for China and the Church in China. The Centre subscribes to 15 newspapers and 60 Chinese or foreign language periodicals. About half of the periodicals are publications of Christian China study centres throughout the world.



△ Magazines the Centre subscribes to.

2. Newsclipping and Classifying

To encourage study and facilitate search for materials, we set up a newsclipping and classification system for the daily newspapers received at the Centre. Articles are clipped and filed according to categories such as politics, military affairs, economics, society, culture, Chinese history and personalities. Since the religious and ethical areas are the special focus of the Centre, they are clipped and filed in detail. But since religion and ethics cannot be separated from the rest of society, we maintain limited files on other subjects according to their relevance and importance.



◁ One of the staff classifying newspaper articles.

3. Bi-monthly periodical TRIPOD

The Centre has published a bi-monthly periodical since January 1st, 1981.

The periodical tries to look at contemporary China's religious and ethical situations with an open but critical attitude, and report in a simple way on the recent movement in these two areas, so that we can reflect on our constructive contributions. Most of the writers for the periodical are Centre staff and research associates. Since readers are both Chinese and Western, the periodical is published in Chinese and English.



△ The five issues of TRIPOD published to date.

4. Contact and Dialogue

In order to expand our awareness and deepen our knowledge of religious and ethical questions in China, we maintain contacts with many persons, to exchange ideas and share insights. Two types of meetings are held at the Centre:

(i) Ricci Study Team Meeting. The purpose of this meeting is to deepen members' knowledge of Chinese Catholic history, share experiences of religious, lay Catholics and others who visit their relatives in China, and exchange reflections based on research. There are eighteen members representing the Centre's staff together with men and women's religious communities in Hong Kong. Meetings are held at the Centre on the fourth Tuesday of each month from 3:00 - 6:00 p.m.

The Ricci Study Team began meeting over a year to strengthen ties among concerned members. Guidelines were drawn up to encourage Hong Kong Catholics to be mindful of the country's laws regarding religious

practices and to express a Gospel spirit while in the mainland.

- (ii) Discussion Concerning Christianity and China. This gathering gives members an opportunity to exchange materials and information, share thoughts, report on research and cooperate in translation. There are 7 members, representing Tao Fung Shan Ecumenical Christian Study Centre, (Shatin, N.T.), United Methodist Church Liaison Office, YICK magazine and the Holy Spirit Study Centre. The group began meeting in October, 1980, and meets every second Wednesday monthly, from 10:00 to 12:30 p.m. either at Holy Spirit Centre or Tao Fung Shan.



*Ricci Study Team
meeting in session.*



Though we have met only a few times, we have definitely made a contribution in translation of documents and have shown a warm ecumenical spirit.

Besides these monthly meetings the Centre maintains friendly relations with the concerned people in and outside of Hong Kong, either through correspondence or visits.

During the year we have hosted scholars and other concerned individuals, from China or overseas. The Centre has arranged for them to meet and talk on special subjects with our brothers and sisters in the Church of Hong Kong.

Last year, the Centre's Staff and research associates conducted a course of 12 lectures on "The Catholic Church in Contemporary China" for seminarians and students of Holy Spirit Seminary. Both students and teachers manifested a keen interest in the subject.

Recently we have increased our staff. Besides the Director, Executive Secretary and 10 research associates, we now have a Vice-Director, and two other staff members. The increase is necessary to cope with the heavier amount to work in this endeavor.



*Rev. Pierre JEANNE, ▸
Vice-Director of the Centre.*

B. THE PROCESS OF ARTICULATING A POSITION

During the past year several unusual events occurred which have a close bearing on the Catholic Church in China, the Catholic Church in Hong Kong, and the Vatican. In brief chronological order these are:

1. On November 5, 1980, with the permission of the Chinese Government, Bishop Dominic Tang (Deng Yiming) arrived in Hong Kong for medical treatment and to visit relatives.

2. On February 18, 1981, while meeting with the Chinese Catholic community in Manila, the Pope addressed the Chinese Church in a speech exuding good will and reconciliation.
3. On February 28, 1981, at the request of the Pope, the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Casaroli, came to Hong Kong especially to visit Bishop Tang. On the same day the Cardinal stated that the Vatican was always searching for means of making contact with China and welcomed any opportunity for dialogue.
4. On March 22, 1981, eight delegates from the Chinese Christian Church visited Hong Kong and for three weeks had friendly meetings with Christians in Hong Kong. On April 7 the head of the delegation, Bishop K.H. Ting and Bishop Tang were invited to visit and dialogue at the Holy Spirit Study Centre and Holy Spirit Seminary.
5. On June 6, 1981, while Bishop Tang had joined many other Bishops for an international celebration in Rome, the Pope announced the appointment of Bishop Tang as Archbishop of Canton. On June 11, the secretary general of the Chinese Catholic Bishop's Conference, Bishop Michael Yang, made a public statement in Beijing, opposing and rejecting the Vatican's appointment of Bishop Tang, calling the action a rude and flagrant interference in the sovereignty of the Chinese Church. He also said that Bishop Tang's action evidenced his own lack of a sense of self-dignity. Following that rebuff, spokesmen for the Patriotic Assoc. of several cities, the Foreign Ministry, and the Bureau of Religious Affairs made similar statements supporting the position of Bishop Yang. On June 22 Bishop Tang returned to Hong Kong and held a press conference the following morning. In his prepared speech and answers to questions, he attempted to explain the good intention behind the appointment and his acceptance of the title for that very constructive reason.
6. From October 2 to 9, 1981, three Catholic representatives from China, together with seven Protestants, for the first time since 1949 took part in a meeting on China, held in

Montreal, Canada. Five Protestant and eight Catholic representatives from Hong Kong also attended. The meeting placed special emphasis on sharing the theology and the experiences of the Church in China and other Third World countries.

The above chain of events is directly or indirectly related to our attitude towards the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association. In order to arrive at a position, we have synthesized the Hong Kong Church's attitudes towards the Catholic Patriotic Association into three simplified viewpoints and have tried to make a simple analysis:

1. The first outlook is an attitude which accepts the Patriotic Association as much as possible. The people who profess this attitude not only maintain regular contacts with members of the Patriotic Association but also actively introduce them to outsiders. The periodical YICK manifests this kind of attitude.

This open attitude is a breakthrough. Through the magazine, some Westerners have arrived at a better understanding of the Patriotic Association. It has also raised the consciousness of some of Hong Kong's Catholic youth. Members of the Patriotic Association, on the other hand, through reading YICK, have gained a better understanding of the Churches outside China and have come to know that the Hong Kong Church is pluralistic.

However, an outlook like this has its limitations. This editorial perspective glosses over the unsavory facts and the sufferings of the Chinese Church throughout the years. It gives an impression of overflowing love without sufficient evaluation of complex happenings. For example, what is the relation between the Patriotic Association and the government? What is the relationship between Catholics who belong and those who do not belong to the Patriotic Association? Unless these questions are dealt with clearly, Catholics throughout the world will not feel entirely satisfied. True love demands positive criticism; otherwise, there will not be a great advantage to mutual understanding within the church.

2. A second outlook takes a position of extreme opposition to the Patriotic Association. Advocates of this attitude think that the Patriotic Association is an instrument of the Communist government. The present government policy of religious freedom and the reopening of some churches, are only false gestures to deceive the people outside. Their reasoning is that the very nature of Communism is atheistic, and Communists believe that religion will eventually wither away. This outlook can be grasped in some of the letters to the editors in both Chinese and English Catholic papers, KUNG KAO PO and SUNDAY EXAMINER. The points of these letters can be reduced to three: (i) only those who belong to the suffering church are loyal Catholics; (ii) having verbally attacked the Holy See, the Patriotic Association has become a schismatic church; (iii) religious faith and politics should never be linked. Since members of the Patriotic Association are linked to the government, the content of their faith has necessarily changed.

Many priests and laity now living in Hong Kong were at one time accused by the members of the Patriotic Association in China and still remain bitter over the historical conflicts. They remain entrenched in this perspective. There are people who cling to this kind of attitude because they are influenced by speeches and writings which originate in Taiwan.

Such an attitude not only reflects the lack of harmony among the Catholics who are members of the Patriotic Association and those who do not join, but also gives support and encouragement to the faithful who in the past, or perhaps even now, have suffered out of loyalty to their conscience.

This outlook, however, also has its limitations. First, have not members of the Patriotic Association also suffered? Is it not possible that some joined the Patriotic Association for pastoral reasons? Moreover, we cannot look only at the Patriotic Association's verbal accusations against the Holy See, but we must look for the historical factors behind their words and actions. Has not

the lack of communication between the Holy See and the Churches outside caused the misunderstandings to grow even greater? As to the question of separation of religion from politics, it is theoretically correct. In actuality, such a separation does not exist thus demanding that we examine the issue in greater depth. Lastly, if we can look at today's circumstances only from a bitter and negative perspective, will this outlook not give rise to a deep-seated bias?

3. The third outlook manifests an attitude of doubt. Most Catholics, including many of the clergy, are in this category. They stand at a crossroad of confusion. Even though they have had some contacts with Catholics in and out of the Patriotic Association, they lack deep understanding. Occasionally they are moved by the sincerity of Patriotic Association members whom they have met, but at other times they also listen to the accusations of Catholics who did not join the Association. Thus they cannot distinguish the true circumstances of the Church in China. Hong Kong Catholics in general, are apathetic with regard to political affairs. They face a crisis of Chinese identity. Their knowledge of Chinese history is often lacking. In addition, the atmosphere within the Hong Kong Catholic Church is not conducive to dialogue on this subject, because the people are fearful of divisions that might arise from argumentation. Due to these factors, the position of many people is not clear, and they easily become part of a vast 'silent majority'.

The Holy Spirit Study Centre, having gone through this process of observation, analysis and synthesis, has begun to discover its own stance and direction. Referring back to the attitude cited above, we are inclined toward the first. Our reasons for this position are:

1. The political system in China today is an undeniable reality. The problem which faces the Church is not whether this form of political system will change, but how can the church survive and grow within this system.
2. Since Vatican II urged us to accept views other than our own

and dialogue with those from other religions, why are we not able to accept our brothers and sisters of the same faith, who live under special political circumstances, respect them and communicate with them? Through this effort we hope to arrive at a greater mutual understanding.

3. Hong Kong people visit China often and have increased business or economic contacts with the Peoples's Republic. There is greater influence exerted between Hong Kong and mainland Chinese, and the ideological barriers are gradually being lowered in the process. Increased contact has lead to mutual influence and mutual influence has resulted in a closer relationship . This phenomenon is an inevitable trend. If we approach members of the Patriotic Association in a similar way, the same result might be realized.

But there are some differences between our thinking and the first outlook:

1. Although we maintain contact, respect and dialogue with members of the Patriotic Association, we are not necessarily in total agreement with them. If we feel that their thinking is not in accord with the insights we have gained from our research and theological reflection, we frankly express our own opinion in TRIPOD.
2. Besides trying to remain aware of movements in the fields and religion, we have a special interest in the history of the Chinese Catholic Church and have gained many insights from this study. In recent issues of TRIPOD we have introduced some important historical events and figures of the Chinese Church.

Through the cooperation of the centre staff and research associates in the past year we have cautiously gone through the process of articulating our positions. Evidently, these conclusions have been reached in the field of research, not at the pastoral level. Therefore we wish to concentrate more on the indifferent people of the third outlook, which includes the majority of Catholics. This will be our new emphasis and new direction for the coming year.

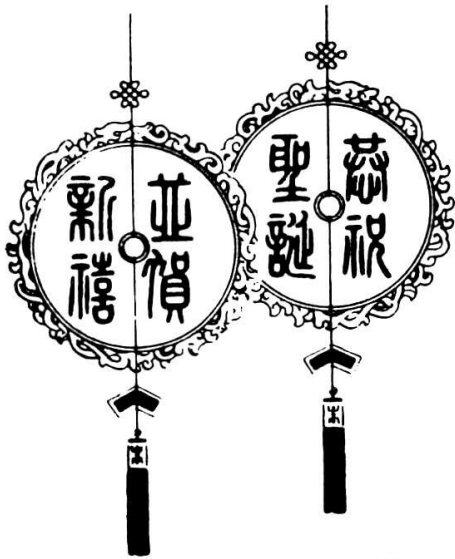
C. PLANS AND EXPECTATIONS

To achieve this end the Centre, though not yet having a complete and concrete plan, wishes to make greater efforts in the following topics:

1. Study of "The Little Flock". The Chinese Catholic Church has existed for 30 years under the Communist political system. The church has gradually become a 'de-institutionalized' and 'de-clericalized' body. We think it is worthwhile to study and experiment with the 'Little Flock' concept described by Karl Rahner in his book THE SHAPE OF THE CHURCH TO COME (NY, Seabury Press, 1974). According to his idea, such Catholics are scattered all over and still retain an authentic Gospel spirit. They witness to the Lord in their work, their families, and in their ordinary daily lives. This may be the future Church in China, and also the effective means of preaching the Gospel there.
2. Develop contacts in Gospel spirit. Since the policy of openness in the mainland, returning to China for tours or family visits is part of the daily life of Hong Kong People. In General, the majority are concerned with what spots they visit, the food they eat, what hotels they stay in, what gifts they take back to their relatives. Sometimes Hong Kong Catholic ridicule the backwardness of the liturgy in the Church of China and maintain an attitude of superiority over mainland people. They neglect to show a Christian spirit among their friends and relatives, and forget to learn from Christians in China. Acutally, we must approach our brothers and sisters in China with a spirit of great humility. The richness or poverty of the Church is not based upon material possessions, but on living faith. Therefore our contact with them is not one of 'giving' but of 'sharing'. From the people of China we can learn a spirit of simplicity, and what it means to witness for Christ in daily human affairs. Through common prayer we can share with them our experiences in spirituality, liturgy and theological reflection.
3. Promote a theology for the laity. Though many Catholics in

Hong Kong today attend extra-mural courses in theology, too few are able to reflect on what they learn. There are extramural courses in Scripture, dogmatic theology, moral theology and liturgy. However, there are no studies in contemporary Chinese history and the history of the Church in China. Therefore, if we are to help our Catholics understand the Chinese Catholic Church and reflect on their own Christian mission, we must supplement the present theology courses with study of the history of the Catholic Church in China, so that they can understand more clearly the important historical events and personages of the past.

In conclusion, the foregoing account is a cursory report on our personal experiences, reflections on recent happenings and evaluations of various issues confronting all of us at the Centre during the past year. In retrospect, we feel that we have made serious efforts and have realized some progress. However, much remains to be done in the future. Therefore, we ask you, all the brothers and sisters who are concerned with China and the Church in China, for your continued prayers, further suggestions and greater support.



*Best Wishes
for
A Merry Christmas
and
A Happy New Year*

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son . . ."

St. John 3:16

HOLY SPIRIT STUDY CENTRE

聖神研究中心