

MARYKNOLL'S CHINA RESEARCH PROGRAM

by Elmer Wurt h

China was Maryknoll's first mission field, but the time there was quite brief. Begun as the Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America in 1911, the first four missionaries went to China in 1918. During thirty years, from 1918-1949, more Maryknollers served in China than in any other Maryknoll mission area in the world. All except Bishop James E. Walsh left shortly after Liberation. Interest in China and a deep love for the Chinese people, especially by those who worked with them, has continued, although for the past thirty years almost no contact has been possible. During that time our ideas and impressions about China came chiefly from accounts by returned missionaries and press accounts from various news services.

With the normalization of relations between China and the U.S. in January of 1979 and greater availability of information, interest greatly increased. Some of our ideas about China, its government and the Church started to undergo change. As China looked to the West for help in its modernization and spoke officially of religious freedom as granted by the Constitution, hopes of a Christian presence in China grew. At the same time both the government and the officially recognized associations within the Christian churches made it very clear that no foreigners would be welcome for direct evangelization. Serious study of the real situation and future possibilities for the Church intensified.

In Europe and some Asian areas Church research centers were devoting considerable personnel, finances and efforts to learn about China's religious climate. Much less was being done in the U.S. Because of this, Maryknoll, especially through the efforts of Fr. John Cioppa and Sr. Rose Marie Franklin, encouraged several U.S. Catholic mission groups to initiate a critical study of their own China history and cooperate in on-going research. The CACC (Catholics in America Concerned About China) came into being, patterned on the CECC (Catholics in Europe Concerned About China). Maryknoll, New York hosted successful seminars on China sponsored by CACC in December of 1979-80-81. At the same time, with much of the impetus once again coming from Fr. John Cioppa, Maryknoll started to put into effect what it had encouraged others to do. A staff was hired to work with our MRPD (Mission Research and Planning Department) to begin

writing a critical history of Maryknoll's thirty years in China, and to draw up a Society plan of action for the future. This plan has been revised as different programs were initiated and personnel assigned. As a first step of the History Project a half dozen Society members personally interviewed nearly two hundred men and women members who had worked in China before Liberation. Their live testimonies, together with already existent archival materials, will be used as sources in writing the history. Special research papers have also been prepared, principally by Dr. Richard Madsen of the University of San Diego and Dr. Donald MacInnis of MRPD. Society members have been encouraged to renew and maintain friendly contacts with acquaintances in China by correspondence and personal visits when possible. A few members have volunteered to teach English in China, but to date only one has been accepted. A network of people interested in China has been set up both at Maryknoll, New York (Fr. Larry Murphy, Drs. MacInnis and Jean Paul Wiest) and Hong Kong (Frs. Peter Barry and Elmer Wurth). All of us work together in trying to understand better the religious reality in the broader context of the political, economic and social or cultural realities. Obviously Hong Kong is the ideal place for research because of its proximity to China and the relaxed and friendly attitude of the Chinese government and people to foreign visitors. Besides this Hong Kong is one of the most free places in the world, as far as doing research is concerned, allowing magazines and papers to come in from anywhere. There is also great freedom of speech and discussion.

Other things being done at Maryknoll, New York to enhance an appreciation and understanding of China are: 1) During the 1979-80 academic year a series of monthly lectures open to the public was held. Scholars who had written about or actually lived in China were invited to speak, 2) MISSION FORUM, a regular publication by the MRPD office, devoted its entire Series 8, No. 2 issue of 1979, entitled "China Looks Outward" to China. Another issue on China is planned for the near future. 3) Maryknoll Magazine carries frequent articles on China. 4) Orbis Books, a publication sponsored by Maryknoll, is planning a book of primary source material on religion in China. 5) A student exchange program through Seton Hall University in New Jersey has been sponsored and funded. A few U.S. students study in China and a number of Chinese study at Seton Hall or other U.S. universities. 6) Fr. Larry Murphy, a Maryknoller and former president of Seton Hall, is presently serving as the coordinator for all student exchanges with U.S. Catholic Universities and Colleges. 7) Ms. Julia Chang, assistant to K.H. Ding at Nanjing Seminary, is presently on a study fellowship at Maryknoll to increase her library, journalistic and archival skills.

Maryknoll will continue to encourage and support all efforts at reflection and positive dialogue and exchange with China.