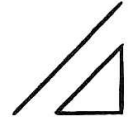


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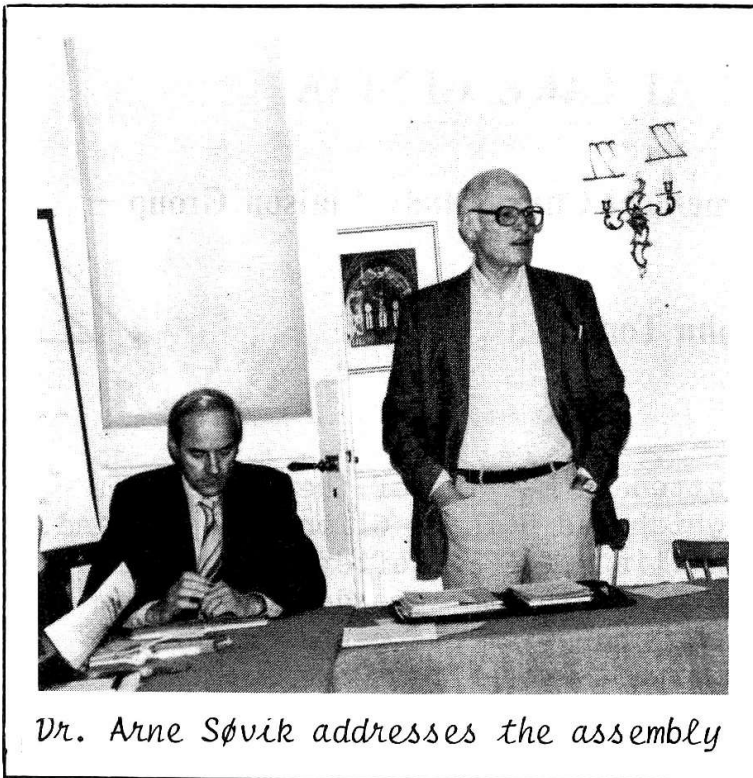
— The Sixth Meeting of the Ecumenical China Study Liaison Group —

by John Tong



Recently, I was invited to attend a meeting of the Ecumenical China Study Liaison Group (ECSLG) which was held in Glion, Switzerland, on May 12-14. This was the sixth meeting of ECSLG after the Louvain conference in 1974. Most of the 34 participants were delegates from Protestant and Catholic organizations and movements representing 14 countries. One fourth of the participants were from Hong Kong. As Dr. Donald MacInnis, a long-standing participant from the Louvain conference till now, described us: "We are a group of persons representing disparate Church-related China programs whose goals, purposes and projects range widely across a spectrum, and who have no agreed-on theological, ideological, ecclesiological or missiological consensus. Nor do we have formal membership, constitution, by-laws, budget, program, or a statement of goals and objectives."

As in the past, Dr. Arne Sjøvik of the Lutheran World Federation in Geneva and Mr. Edmond Tang of Pro Mundi Vita in Brussels made all the arrangements for the meeting. Before the meeting, each one of us was asked to prepare a self-evaluation and a brief account of his individual or organizational activities since the last ECSLG meeting in 1981. Rev. Robert Whyte, head of the China Study Project, Kent, England, based his evaluation of the China Study Program on these papers. He gave a very good summary and remarks. Admitting that in many respects the Louvain conference belonged to another era, he insisted that the Louvain conference was still progressive in its conviction that the secular revolution in China must be taken seriously. He urged Christians outside China to learn more than just the religious aspects of the contemporary China reality. Prayer for China and the Church in China is one of the common activities in nearly all the China programs, and this has grown stronger in the past three or four years. But effective prayer he insisted, is not possible without direct contact with our Christian brothers and



Dr. Arne Sjøvik addresses the assembly

sisters in China.

How do we understand the increase in the number of Christians in China? What are the reasons behind such achievements in evangelism and growth? These two important questions were raised by Raymond Fung of the World Council of Churches in his speech on "Evangelism". Raymond based his own answers upon the theology of the Cross. He insisted that evangelism could be achieved 'not through the power of the powerful, nor through the powerlessness of the powerless, but only through the power of powerlessness.'

In his paper on the "Ecumenical Dimension of China Studies", Dr. Donald MacInnis pointed out: "The Chinese internal political-social-cultural reality has been radically altered, and China has dramatically expanded international relationships. Therefore, our implicit purpose has been more than simply to conduct research and scholarly dialogue in order to understand the Chinese church in the context of new China -- that is, our real goal has been to open direct relationships with the Church in China, to restore the broken fellowship." He concluded by raising some meaningful questions. "Do we still have the same common assumptions, cordial understanding and desire for cooperation that brought us together in past years? How can we move beyond inherited missiological, ecclesiological and theological perceptions of the Chinese Church? How do we define the nature of the local Church? How can the local Church's authentic identity and selfhood be linked to its responsibility to and participation in the universal Church? How should the local Church respond in a socialist country? How do we comprehend God's salvific will as using both the Church and secular world as his instruments?" (Dr. MacInnis is currently the coordinator for the Maryknoll China Research Project.)

The address of Mr. Ross D. Paterson of Overseas Missionary Fellowship, United Kingdom, focused on the feelings of some household gatherings. On the other hand, Rev. Bud Carroll of the Hong Kong China Liaison

Office and Fr. Anthony Chang, consultant of Yi-China Message, Hong Kong, emphasized what we could learn from China's experience. In his talk on "Church and State", Father Angelo Lazzarotto, Research Associate of our Centre, offered a commentary on the article on the Party's basic policy regarding religious problems, printed in HONGQI (#12, 1982) which caused a debate in the meeting.

In the small group discussions, we noticed that establishing strong personal relationships is one of the most important factors in promoting dialogue. The groups were also unanimous in affirming the importance of continuing research into Chinese Church History. Such study helps us to have a better understanding of the past on which to build a broader vision of the future. When we shared our experiences as China researchers, we found that tension often arises from differences in ideology. This happens not only between Christian communities inside and outside China, but also between Christians within the Church outside.

Such pressure and tension can only be resolved in the context of Christ's own suffering which leads to resurrection. Such suffering can make a Christian more open to differences -- that is, pain can make a Christian more sympathetic to the pain of others, more understanding and therefore, more able to approach events with a broader vision.

Our final evening was given over to a farewell party in honour of Dr. Arne Sjøvik who will retire soon. At the end of the meeting, Mr. Raymond Fung agreed to take Dr. Sjøvik's place. He and Mr. Edmond Tang, will form a small committee to take responsibility for polling those invited to ECSLG about holding a seventh meeting in two years time.

The whole process of this three day meeting, I personally felt to be most satisfying. Although it offered no concrete resolutions, yet it certainly laid a deeper foundation for our future contacts. Another personal observation -- Prayer was the nucleus and that which linked together the different parts of the meeting. All sessions started and adjourned with long and fervent prayer. As the first day happened to be the Feast of the Ascension of Our Lord, we, members of different denominations, joined together in participating in the Eucharistic celebration. Despite differences of background, understanding and belief we were united as one in the Lord Jesus.