



# ***Catholics in America Concerned with China (CACC) Meet for Theological Reflection***

**by Mary Louise Martin**

The fifth annual meeting of the CACC (Catholics in America Concerned with China) took place at the Divine Word Seminary in Techny, Illinois on the week-end of December 2-4, 1983. Techny is located just outside the "Windy City" of Chicago, but the chilly winter weather was more than compensated for by the warm hospitality of our hosts. The CACC is a loose coalition of North American Catholics that share a general interest in China with a specific concern for its Christian communities. Many of the twenty-three delegates in attendance at the meeting represent religious institutions with a previous history of involvement in the China mission. Such a gathering, then, offers member organizations, as well as individuals, a valuable opportunity for exchanging information, up-dating research and learning more about what is going on among other groups engaged in similar studies. However, the fifth annual meeting departed from its usual format to introduce a new element - theological

reflection. While ample time was given to reports and the exchange of information on Friday evening and Sunday morning, Saturday was given over to a full-day colloquium on the topic, "The Theology of the Local Church and the Challenge of China". By introducing this strong theological dimension, members found a vehicle for moving beyond general information to consideration of deeper theological implications. The innovation was so well received that the assembly later moved to adopt it as a regular part of all future meetings.

The Saturday colloquium was open to the general public, thereby allowing for participation by a much larger audience. The two speakers selected by the Executive Committee to address the subject were well chosen. Father John Linnan, CSV, current President of the Catholic Theological Union, directed his words to a consideration of the "Theology of the Local Churches," while Sister Goretti Lau, who is assistant editor of Tripod, the journal of the Holy Spirit Study Centre in Hong Kong and a person familiar with the Church in China, took up the "Challenge of China" in the afternoon session. Together, they provided a happy blend of theory and practice that insured lively and enthusiastic participation in the discussions and question periods that followed each presentation. Since Father Linnan's and Sister Goretti's papers are printed in full elsewhere in this issue of Tripod, this report will confine itself to highlights from the discussion periods, as well as drawing attention to other aspects of the meeting that might prove to be of more than passing interest to the reader.

If the subject of the Church, and more specifically local Christian churches, has dominated Post-Vatican II theological thinking, nowhere can this issue be said to have more relevance than in present day China. For this reason, Father Linnan's remarks on the nature of the local church and its relationship with the universal church were received with great attention. Father Linnan preferred to use the term 'particular' church over 'local' church, seeing the latter as a particularization of the universal communion. It immediately became the term of preference used throughout the rest of the meeting. In two prepared responses following Father Linnan's talk, Father John Mankey, MSC, from Indonesia, and Sister Margaret Guider, OSF, formerly stationed in Brazil, broadened the scope of the discussion to include the experiences of local churches in their respective countries. They made the important point that the geographical context of particular churches has a great influence on its style and development. Both represent vast lands that embrace a multiplicity of cultures, languages, races and value systems. As the local churches necessarily reflect such diversity, reconciliation and com-

munion, the essential elements of the church, can pose many complex problems within the national unity. Sister Margaret, in response to Father Linnan's remark that particular churches have to have "a certain stability and firmness", went on to raise a few questions to which many of her listeners could relate. What is the measure of a local church's maturity? Who determines whether a local church can stand on its own? Is it the judgment of locals or outsiders, the educated elite or the whole community, the laity or the hierarchy? And does there come a time when a particular church should say to its foreign missionaries, as the Brazilian church felt called upon to say, "For a time you must leave us, so that we can become what God intends us to be."

After the prepared responses, small groups were formed for further discussion. Some of the questions brought back to the assembly allowed Father Linnan to enlarge on several points only briefly noted in his original paper. Again he emphasized that reconciliation and communion are essential for ecclesial life, adding that communion is not a theory but rather a process. Communion consists of human relationships which must give evidence of Christian charity -- the sign of the presence of the Spirit. This kind of charity is well described in chapter eight of the First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians. In communion with other particular churches, each church relives Jesus' experience of the Paschal mystery, constantly risking death for the sake of others. Further, this communion must be continuously nourished and re-established for it is a most fragile entity. There are many ways for particular churches to be in communion with one another. For example, Particular Church A is in communion with Particular Church B, which in turn is in communion with Particular Church C. Particular Church C is in close relation to the church of Rome and thereby brings churches A and B into a relationship with the Roman church.

Father Linnan also addressed the question: what and who is "Church"? "Church" is the congregated assembly of the disciples of Jesus, full of diversity, aware of itself as filled with the Spirit. It is a witnessing community, called to go forth in mission and give its life to continue the mission of Jesus. It is an ordered community, organized to enable the church to experience Jesus as the only Lord. Its life is centered around the proclamation of the Word, and through Baptism and the Eucharist, it is a participation in the Person of Jesus become Christ. Who is "Church"? All those people who believe and are congregated (called and gathered together) in order to become and to do.

Fr. Linnan's remarks bore intriguing implications for the church

in China. His own conclusion was that what unites all Catholics in China is more powerful than what divides. Catholics both within and outside of China should search prayerfully and diligently for those elements that unite all Chinese Catholics. If Father Linnan's remarks in the morning session led to a broader consideration of particular churches and the universal communion, Sister Goretti's talk on the church in China brought the issue into sharp and practical focus. Her open approach, historical perspective and undeniable optimism elicited quite a range of questions and comments from the assembly. How is faith transmitted to the younger generation, especially in Catholic families who neither attend the services nor participate in the activities of the recently re-opened churches? What are the ideological and theological implications of the perennial question: Is it possible to be a "good Chinese" and a "good Catholic"? To the question, can a socialist be a good Catholic? one member replied that there are many Christians who now think the only way to be a Christian in today's world is to be a socialist. Sister Goretti responded to all questions based on faith that God wishes and intends a united and authentic witness to Christ in China, and that our faithful, receptive and persevering support is important and necessary at this time. As for those assembled at the fifth annual meeting, they reiterated their conviction that Christians outside of China must not "take sides" with one or another group of Catholics in China. They also expressed regret that, in actuality, there are those who do take sides and thereby exacerbate an already delicate situation.

If the Saturday colloquium proved to be the main feature of the three day meeting, the members found much in the remaining time to stimulate and sustain their interest. On Friday night, sessions began with various reports on a number of important symposia and international conferences held during the past year. Judging from the wide range of topics and the level of scholarship involved, it is evident that China and its Christians continue to attract serious and thoughtful interest, especially among Christians in North America and Europe. Members were urged to continue to work towards sustaining that dedicated interest, especially in times when events in other areas of the world absorb much of the attention of the world media. The reports also revealed a growing emphasis on reaching out to the Chinese diaspora in Western countries, involving cultural and social exchanges with overseas Chinese as well as contacts with Chinese students now enrolled in Western universities.

Sister Goretti, while bringing the group up to date with what is happening at the Holy Spirit Centre also showed a sound-slide produced by the Hong Kong Catholic community and now being used there as a discussion

*In 1997 China will regain  
sovereignty over the territory  
of Hong Kong.*



guide for Catholics as they face the issue of 1997, when China regains sovereignty over the territory. Understandably, audience questions and comments here differed somewhat from those in Hong Kong. Some members reacted to what they felt to be a "doomsday" climate and wondered if this was the prevailing feeling of the people of Hong Kong facing an uncertain future. The desire to form small Christian communities seemed to arise from a presumption that many visible church institutions would be turned over to the government. But since viewers were not presented with a clear picture of the part these church institutions play in Hong Kong society today, it was difficult for them to arrive at a better understanding of the situation. One member suggested that positive approaches might also include a study of social justice issues and ways to correct present injustices in society.

On Saturday evening, members were treated to another sound-filmstrip. This one, entitled Ever Faithful Ever Sure: Christian Communities in China, was the work of Jean Woo and Gail Coulson. Produced for the China Program of the NCCUSA, it is available from Friendship Press in New York City, and is highly recommended to those on the look out for audio-visual resources for educational outreach programs.

Also on view that night was the Canadian Film Board's one-hour documentary, Gui Dao, Station on the Yangtze. The CFB has a well-earned reputation for turning out films of this kind. And this one is no exception. It offers a realistic, closeup look at life among the railroad workers and their families in Wuhan. Of further help to educators was the four-page list of recommended documentary films on China which was distributed to the members (and can be obtained by dropping a line to the CACC Office, 1233 Lawrence Street, N.E., Washington, D.C., 20017).

An interesting report was presented on Sunday morning by Father John Cioppa, MM. Based on written statements about China from a survey of North American religious communities, the report expressed quite a wide range of concern. Some communities emphasize prayer for and continual study of China; others stress personal visits of members to China and research into their own communities' mission history as aids to forming a realistic and objective understanding of that country. Some congregations encourage active involvement with Chinese people in the many communities in which they live, not only at home but also those living in Hong Kong and Taiwan as well. Several of the congregations as a matter of policy encourage their members to give sympathetic and prayerful support to all Chinese Catholics and all members of their congregations who still reside in China, both to those who are and those who are not members of the Catholic Patriotic Association. The seven written responses to Father Cioppa's survey have been printed in a 65-page report, Policy Statements and Reports on China from CACC Members. In subsequent discussions, it was disclosed that several congregations represented at the Techny meeting have yet to formulate a formal report or plan for their China concerns. However, in discussion, the CACC members concluded that for North Americans, this seems to be a time for serious study and increasing awareness of China and its role in the world today.

Following Father Cioppa's presentation Sister Mary Lou Martin and Don MacInnis brought the members up to date on the China Mission Study Project. Their report concerned an outline for teaching "Values and Religion in China Today". This teaching supplement will be offered to teachers of ninth and tenth grade students who study Asia and China as part of their Social Studies courses. Research has revealed an interest in and desire for updated background material to supplement what is presently available to teachers. The outline includes such topics as: Values and Human Relationships, Traditional and Contemporary Family Values, Ecology, Human Pressures on Land and Resources, Education Old and

New, Youth, Religion, Morality and Ethics, China and the Contemporary World. Committee members are in contact with Chinese living in the U.S. and expect to receive valuable input from them. A set of lesson plans based on the topical outline will be drawn up during the coming year.

The final session of the meeting was devoted to an evaluation of CACC's yearly gatherings. Members agreed that coming together annually has been a source of mutual encouragement and stimulation, especially since they work and live in isolation from each other throughout the year. Sharing resources, news about meetings and contacts in China, methods of historical research, has helped members after they return to their respective communities/centres.

Members again expressed particular satisfaction with the 1983 annual meeting, with its emphasis on professional, theological presentations and discussions. They agreed that this format should be continued for future meetings. Some suggested topics for the future are: theological reflection on the Church in a socialist state; evaluation from a Christian theological viewpoint of the current campaigns in China for social spiritual civilization and social ethics; religious political relationships.

CACC meetings, then, have provided opportunities for North American Catholics interested in China to share information and enlarge their primary and secondary research sources. However, in all of this is there any value for China itself and the Chinese Church? Members dare to hope that the deepening of their own awareness of modern China and the acquisition of wider knowledge about China to share with their friends and communities, will be a stimulation to further support, prayer and concern for our Chinese brothers and sisters, both for themselves and for others.