

# A Memorable Visit to Xiamen

by Elmer Wurth

The port city of Xiamen (Amoy), which lies on the mainland side of the Taiwan straits and has been reopened to foreigners since 1980, is a wonderful place to visit. By taking the popular overnight boat which leaves Hong Kong twice weekly, one arrives in the morning, well rested and ready to start taking in the sites of the city and the beautiful scenery of the surrounding countryside. A major tourist attraction here is Gulangyu Island, a unique scenic adventure only ten minutes by ferry from Xiamen. Since cars are banned and the narrow hilly roads make bicycle riding inconvenient, it is an ideal area for leisurely strolls. The Island is renowned for its parks, temples, and exquisite mansions built by foreigners and overseas Chinese of former days. Sunlight Cliff, the highest point on the Island, is where Koxinga over-saw the training of his navy as they prepared to liberate Taiwan from the Dutch in 1662. Xiamen University with its many museums is just a few minutes by bus from the port.

As Xiamen became one of the four Special Economic Zones in 1981 (the others are Zhuhai, Shantou and Shenzhen), commercial development, including many new hotels and restaurants that cater to tourists and other visitors, is going on at a rapid pace. The special zone also affords extra freedom for travellers, and train, plane, and bus trips to neighboring towns are easily arranged even for foreigners. Our small group consisted of four Canossian Sisters (who wanted to visit the former headquarters of their Community which was established here 100 years ago and subsequently turned over to the Spanish Dominicans who continued the work), a Canadian priest, and myself.

Xiamen is especially enjoyable for Christians to visit because a Catholic and a Protestant church have been newly reopened there. Fr. Huang Ziyu, pastor at the Catholic church made us feel most welcome and told us to pass the word along

that they're happy to have Christians come to visit and worship with them. We also met Sisters Teresa Su and Rose Lin, who work with Fr. Huang. All were most gracious with their time and shared with us much news about the church's situation in Xiamen during the past few decades.

Fr. Huang, who is 73 and partially disabled, is the only active priest in the Amoy Diocese. Three of the neighboring six dioceses which, along with Amoy, make up Fujian Province have neither priests nor bishops. For this reason no churches have been reopened there. When asked who his own bishop is, Fr. Huang smiled and answered: "I don't know." Fr. Huang entered Hong Kong Holy Spirit Regional Seminary in 1932 and was a member of its first graduating class. After his ordination at Propaganda Fide College in Rome in 1938, he returned to Xiamen. For many years he was the Vicar General for the Spanish Bishop Juan Velasco, O.P. When the Bishop and all the Spanish missionaries were forced to leave China in 1952, he became the Vicar Capitular of the diocese and has remained so until now. Nearly everyone calls him bishop. The story of Sisters Lin and Su was really inspiring. They came to Amoy from Taiwan in 1947 with the desire to become members of the Spanish Dominican Sisters Community, but they had not yet been professed when the Dominicans left in 1952. They have continued for more than thirty years to serve the people as dedicated women, although never formally taking vows. As they remained unmarried, everyone here considers them to be nuns. Living together with them in retirement are two other nuns who are in their 80's.

At present there is much interest among the youth of the area in serving their country and its people through the Church. We were pleased to hear that a forty year old deacon from the diocese will be ordained a priest in Shanghai in December and will soon return to help Fr. Huang. There are now three other seminarians from the area in Shanghai and one in Beijing preparing for the priesthood. Four others have already taken the seminary entrance exams for this year. Besides these young men, Fr. Huang estimates that 20 to 25 young women would like to dedicate their lives as consecrated virgins. Considering the present situation in Chinese society where there is no provision for salary or retirement unless one is in secular employment, and considering that the Catholic Patriotic Association offers

no salary to nuns engaged in church work, it seems likely that these women will hold regular jobs in society and dedicate their leisure hours to prayer and church service.

What impressed us most on our visit was the hope for the future of the Church that Fr. Huang and the Sisters see expressed in this outpouring of youthful generosity. They have experienced difficult times; their church in Xiamen was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution leaving only a small oratory where Fr. Huang now has 30 to 40 Catholics in attendance at each weekday Mass (about 150 worshipped at the one Sunday Mass at which we, ourselves, were present.) But that is all past now and they are beginning again, calmly awaiting the revelation of God's plan for them. They particularly expressed a hope that Chinese priests who left during the times of turmoil might be able to return to help them in this renewal of the Church.



The church yard is filled with materials being used by the CCPA to refurbish the former bishop's residence and chancery. It will be used as a hostel for visitors. The income will help support the church.



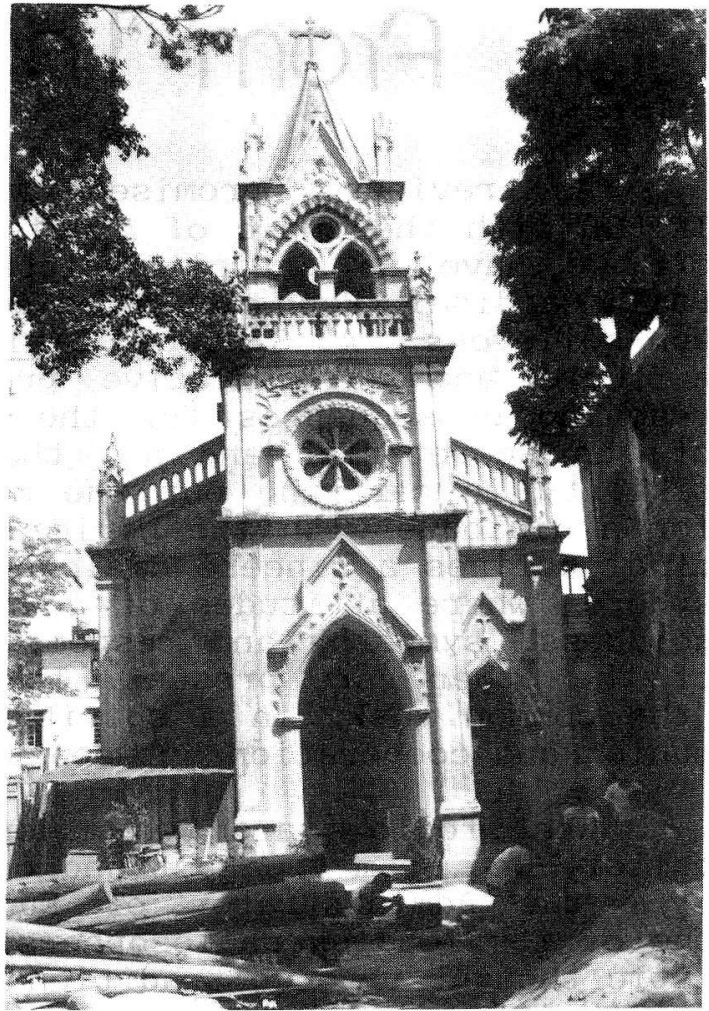
Fr. Huang with three of the Canossian Sisters and two CCPA representatives.



Our Group : From L to R; Sr. Marie Remedios, Sr. RoseAngela Cepati, author, Sr. Josephine Gamba, Sr. Agnes Ip, Fr. John Isabel, PME.



There is, at present, only one Sunday Mass on Gulangyu Island because the total number of Catholics there is only 300. At 7:15a.m. the people began chanting prayers, after which a man read a 10 to 15 minute doctrinal meditation from the back of the church. Fr. Huang then came to the Communion rail in street attire, and leaning on his cane, spoke animatedly for about 15 minutes about the meaning of Pentecost.



This was all done in the Fukien dialect. Confessions followed. The Mass began at 8:30 and was in Latin, with the congregation following in silence except for prayers chanted at the Offertory and Consecration in Fukienese. During the Offertory a young lady sang a Marian hymn which was also in the Fukien dialect.