

# *An International Conference on the Boxer Movement and Christianity in China: Closing Ceremony*

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*Bishop John Tong*

*Translated by Purple Kwong*

In his speech at the Opening Ceremony of this conference, Bishop Zen mentioned that on September 26, 2000 (five days before the canonization of the blessed martyrs of China), China officially promulgated a document entitled: “A Declaration by the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the Chinese Catholic Bishops Conference, on the Vatican’s ignoring of the sovereignty of the Catholic Church in China and canonizing the so-called saints.” I would like to share a short story with you.

Shortly after the Holy Father had announced the canonization of 120 China martyrs, Cardinal John Baptist Wu and Bishop Joseph Zen decided that the Hong Kong Diocese would hold a series of activities in celebration of the event. This included sending a delegation to Rome to attend the canonization itself. Father Ferdinand Lok and I were designated to organize and lead the delegation.

In September, when all the preparations had already been made, and we were about to depart for Rome, I suddenly received a phone call from the Deputy Division Chief, Coordination Department, Xinhua News Agency, (Hong Kong Branch,) who was responsible for liaising with religious bodies. She said that the Deputy Director of the Coordination Department and herself would like to meet with me at the Diocese Centre. In a show of friendliness, I countered with the suggestion that I visit them at the Xinhua News Agency.

When we met, the Deputy Director immediately revealed his purpose for the visit. He said that he hoped I could inform the diocese of Beijing’s response to the “canonization.” He pointed out

that the canonization in Rome on October 1 was a great humiliation for the Chinese people. Among those canonized were people who supported imperialism, evil persons, and those who did harm to the Chinese people. Moreover, to hold the canonization on China's National Day was also a disgrace. I responded that in order to canonize a person, the Church carries out a very thorough investigation. This was also a sign of the respect, love and admiration the Holy Father has for the Chinese people. In fact those who were to be canonized saints were already declared blessed, and they had the love and respect of the Church, both within and outside Mainland China. Many churches were named after them. Now the Catholic Church was elevating them from the category of blessed to sainthood. It was similar to academics moving from a master's degree to a doctorate. However, the Deputy Director still insisted that it was like slapping the Chinese in the face once, then again a second time. He continued that all in all, he hoped that all the celebrations in Hong Kong would be "low key." I responded that it was difficult to judge the difference between low and high key. All of the celebrations were of a religious nature. So it was not a question of "high key" or "low key." Since these celebrations were already planned and the announcements already sent out, they would be carried out as scheduled. I further explained that the Holy Father chose October 1st for the canonization because he could not find another suitable date around that time. There was no intention of challenging China. Moreover, October 1st is the feast day of St. Therese of Lisieux, the patroness of missionaries in the Catholic Church. St. Therese is loved and respected by Chinese Catholics. So choosing this date served a dual purpose: to enable us to learn from the faith of the martyrs, and help us emulate St. Therese's zeal for evangelization.

The meeting lasted for half-an-hour, and each side courteously presented its own view. The hosts saw me off at the front door of the Xinhua News Agency. The accusation of the Chinese government not only did not affect the canonization of the saints, but it also broadcast their names to the whole world.

I was very happy to have the chance to take part in this three-day conference, and I found it very fruitful. I was happy because this conference not only helped to facilitate communication among different sectors of the Christian faith, it also enhanced

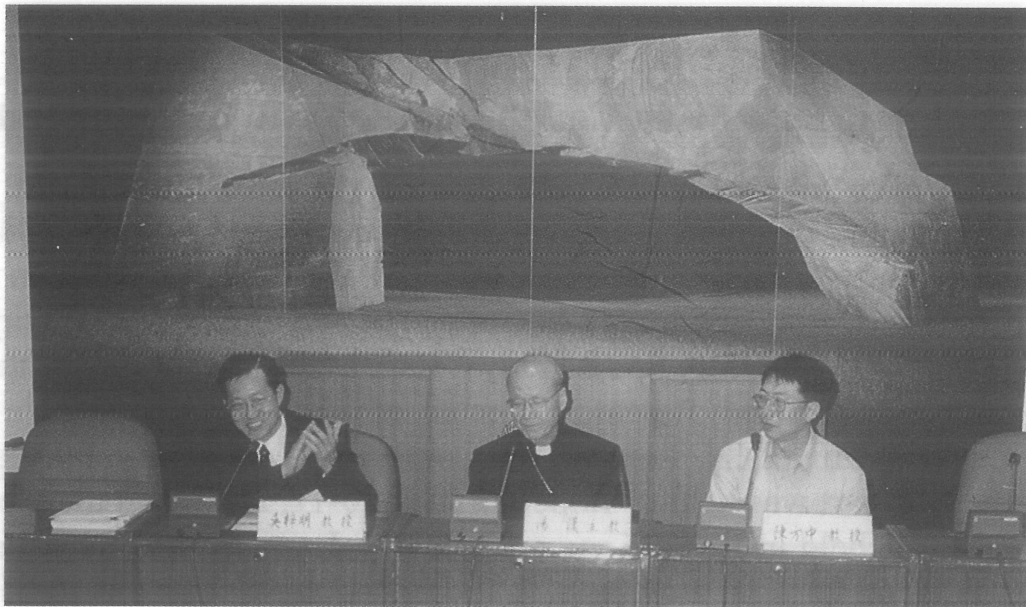
exchange among scholars from Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and other parts of the world. A friendly and harmonious atmosphere prevailed throughout the conference. The harvest from this conference is abundant. The speeches and responses on the important and popular topic, "The Boxer Movement and Christianity in China," amounted to 48 papers. They were substantial in content, of high quality, and positive and inspiring.

On behalf of the Holy Spirit Study Centre, I would like to express our deepest gratitude to His Eminence Cardinal Paul Shan, Mr. Bernard Li, Professor Rance Lee, and Professor Leung Yuen Sang. Without their support, this conference could not have been realized. I would also like to express my gratitude to Professor Chen Fang Chung of the Research Center of Catholic History at Fu Jen Catholic University, Taiwan, and Professor Peter Ng Tze Ming and all the staff of the Centre for the Study of Religion and Chinese Society of Chung Chi College, Chinese University of Hong Kong. Their experience in making all the arrangements for the conference, their efficiency in printing the papers, and their hospitality have made us all feel at home. My thanks also go to the chairpersons, speakers, and respondents; their support was invaluable and the sharing of the fruit of their research has supplied us with a broader and deeper view of this topic. I would also like to thank all the scholars and experts, and all the guests, who took time from their busy schedules to attend the conference. Your participation was a great encouragement for us, and it also provided a great contribution to the conference. Of course I must also thank Bishop Zen for his initiation of and support for this conference. Thanks must also go to Dr. Patrick Taveirne and the staff of the Holy Spirit Study Centre, who undertook all the hard work of preparation for the conference. I have only reaped the benefits.

All in all, the conference was a great success. I totally agree with Bishop Zen, who kept repeating "very satisfied" several times as a concluding response to the conference. Last but not least, I would like to repeat what Cardinal Shan said at the opening ceremony, that this conference is only the beginning, and that we still have a long way to go, to enable the truth of history to be unearthed. As the Holy Father has said: "Let the martyrs of China solve the problem of the Church in China." I sincerely hope that this prophecy of the Holy Father will soon come true.

Thank you very much. Friends from afar, I wish you a safe trip home.

May God bless you all!



**Bishop John Tong (center) delivering closing speech at the Boxer Conference, (left) Peter Ng and (right) Chen Fang zhong.**