

Introduction

ॐ *Amitié-Chine*

Amitié-Chine of Montreal has been in contact with the Catholic Church in China for the past seven years. After collaborating with the Canada-China Program in organizing the international and ecumenical conference "A New Beginning" in Montreal in 1981, we received our first invitation to visit China from the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association in the following year. We returned in 1985; this time with two heads of Canadian mission-sending societies and the director of the mission office of the Canadian Bishops' Conference. In 1987, we played host to a Chinese delegation of Catholics whom we invited to come to Canada, and in 1988 received a third invitation from the CCPA - the addition of a number of Brazilian theologians made this trip of more than passing interest.

The Canada-Brazil-China connection came about when a group of Canadian priests who had kept in close contact with their former mission in Brazil became associated with Amitié-Chine. The final delegation of seventeen members was made up of representatives from all three groups. Among the Brazilians were some of that country's outstanding proponents of Liberation Theology. The encounter of Third World theologians much concerned with social revolution and its potential for their own country, with China whose church, hampered by elements from its colonial past, struggles to find its role in building up an already established socialistic society made for stimulating and lively interchanges. Excerpts of these appear in this issue of Tripod.

While the name of Leonardo Boff was familiar to some of our hosts (they were aware of his involvement in certain controversies with the Vatican), most professed little knowledge about liberation theology itself. And they were anxious to learn more.

The Brazilians were impressed by China's booming economy, the extensive amount of land under cultivation, with rice paddies reaching up to mountain-tops. They compared this unfavourably to the still unexploited agricultural resources of their own homeland. Market stalls filled with fruit and vegetables offered further evidence to them of the progress economic liberation has made in China, in contrast to Brazil's faltering economy.

Descriptions of how Brazil's basic christian communities operate had great meaning for Chinese Catholics, who referred to their own inexperience and inadequate preparation when recalling the political turmoils of the past. For the Brazilians, feelings of the urgent need to prepare for the immanent political liberation at home were reinforced when they saw how much the Chinese church was still entangled in past

traditions that seemed to have little relevance for or correspond to present political realities. Observing the interchange between these two local churches, each dealing with its own cultural particularities, was most interesting for the Canadians.

We were for most of the trip outside observers. For me, however, this too was also a part of a developing missionary involvement. Quebecois were once missionaries in Brazil and China; now Latin American churches are talking about becoming more mission minded. Throughout our trip, there were many exchanges among us about this new style of missionary spirit. Would missionary work in the future consist primarily in the mutual recognition and acceptance of cultural differences among churches? And after inculturation, acculturation and the incarnation of Christianity was achieved, would there come about a recognition of the need for differences in the cultural expression of Christianity itself? These were our feelings as we introduced Brazilian Catholics to the Chinese Catholic Church.

*****by Fleurette Lagacé

A Dialogue

Between Liberation Theologians and Chinese Officials



Last October a group of theologians from Canada and Brazil toured China at the invitation of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association. The tour had been organized by Canadian diocesan priests who maintain close contacts with their former mission field in Brazil, and with the cooperation of Montreal's Amitié-Chine, who also sent four members along on the trip. What made this group special was the presence of some well-known exponents of liberation theology, who were anxious to study at first-hand the role the church was playing in the building up of China's socialist system. Among these theologians were Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, Frei Betto, Virgilio Uchoa, and Agostino Pretto. They were able to meet and discuss at length with not only members of the CCPA, but also government officials from the national and provincial bureaus of Religious Affairs, as well as prominent lay Catholics. When the group returned from China, it prepared a detailed report of their experiences. The report was in French, and the following excerpts were translated into English by Peter Barry, one of our editors.

While in Beijing, the group received a cordial welcome at the