

situation helps us to understand this. If you in Brazil have a theology which has emerged from your particular context and which is called the 'theology of liberation', it seems to me that there ought to emerge from the Chinese context some theological responses which would not be matters of faith alone. Such a theology would start from our Chinese context and would be phrased in categories which respect our specificity. In this first phase of socialism, religious phenomena are still called upon to endure and to develop.

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## The Brazilian-Canadian Trip to China

by Luisa Tan, M.I.C



I was privileged to be a member of the Brazilian-Canadian Catholic delegation which visited China October 3-29, 1988. The group was made up of three Brazilian lay persons, a Sister of Saint Augustin and eleven priests, six of whom were from Canada, Fleurette Lagace and myself. The seventeen of us, with Mr. Liu Bainian, vice-chairman of the Chinese Catholic Church Administrative Commission and organizer of the trip, visited eight cities. Leonardo Boff, as a member of the group, in explaining our trip to the officials at the Bureau of Religious Affairs in Beijing said, "We are here not only to visit churches but also to learn about Chinese society and to see the contribution of the Church to society here."

The presence of Leonardo Boff, a Franciscan well-known for his work in Liberation Theology, his brother, Clodovis Boff, a Servite of Mary, a theologian of the same thought, and Frei Betto, a Dominican brother, a specialist in Marxist-Christian relationships, ensured a high profile for the group and enhanced its opportunities of entering into discussions on church matters, social affairs and government policy on religious freedom.

Many aspects shared with us regarding the Church's functioning

under the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) in collaboration with the Catholic Administrative Commission are already known to many. I would like to touch on some aspects which might be of interest to readers of Tripod. I will try to be objective and without any pretense of being exhaustive. A trip of some 20 days can only give a superficial knowledge of the Church and society in China.

### The Catholic Church in China and the Holy Father

The issue of the Church in China's relationship to the Holy Father came up several times in our discussions. One of the CCPA members explained this briefly in this way:

Autonomy for us means a Church in which the believer's sentiments are in harmony with the country's customs and traditions; a church in empathy with China. We would like to have a church developed in China. Regarding the Holy Father our faith is the same as that of any Catholic. We respect and love the Pope. We are not against him. Our difficulty is on the political level. The Vatican still has diplomatic relations with Taiwan and not China. In this political dilemma, we opt for a position of non-contact with the Pope. We feel that this is for the good of the Church at the present time.

We were also told that many young intellectuals joined the Protestant Church in preference to the Catholic Church because of the non-recognition of the government of China by the Vatican. One lay CCPA member commented, "We would not be catholic if we did not accept the Pope." A religious told me she and her novices pray for the Pope every day. The shift from having no ties with the Pope to an open acknowledgement of his spiritual leadership was evident to all of us. The Catholics in China want to be in communion with the universal Church and there is no question of a severance of relationship with the Holy Father.

### Priorities

In the past four years much effort has been put into recovering and restoring churches and church properties, and into securing a stable source of financial income for the church, and for the clergy and religious. Language schools, hostels and clinics have been opened to provide service to the people. At present the two main concerns of the Church are the replacement of aging bishops and priests, and pastoral

work. There are 700 seminarians, but it takes time to train them for the priesthood. With a lack of priests, the formation of the laity for the preaching of the Gospel has become a source for evangelization. It is hoped that non-Christians on seeing the example of the Christians' lives will want to join the church. The shortage of manpower is acutely felt. This is particularly true in the formation of seminarians and women religious.

### The Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association

The Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association appears to have experienced some change in outlook. Towards the end of our trip one of the members told our group, "The Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association has its history. We admit that in the beginning errors were committed and persons were wounded. We see that mistakes were made. But now you can judge who we are by our actions."

### A Glimpse of Social Life

We had only a glimpse of everyday life in Chinese society. The cities were buzzing with life. A sea of people, especially young people, literally packed department stores, eateries and streets.

Our visits to three Catholic villages gave us an idea of what it means to be living in a commune. We visited a coal miners' village in Taiyuan in northwest China, and two fishermen's villages in Wuxi, three hours from Shanghai by train. Most families in these villages were nuclear families: father, mother and child. Some families had grandparents living with them. The houses were two storey brick buildings with running water. The first floor contained the living-room and the dining-kitchen area. A huge picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus meets the eye as you pass by the living room. Bedrooms are on the second floor. Each household owns a bicycle or two, a television set, refrigerator, and a sewing machine. All children attend school and many parents have a high school education. Some family members work in factories to bring in an additional salary. The commune owns the boats, fishing ponds, rice paddies and transport trucks. This means all production and investment is collective. At the end of the year the commune's net profit is divided among the villagers, allotted according to the work done. There is no distinction made between women and men in the distribution of the profits. These villages have been cited as model villages. Their members are law abiding citizens; not one has been charged with a criminal offense. Their standard of living is somewhat higher than that of other villages, as the Catholics have not

squandered their money on drinking and gambling.

### Religious Freedom

The government people we met affirmed their adherence to a Marxist-atheist ideology, but the present government policy is respect for religion. The officials acknowledged that during the Cultural Revolution there was misunderstanding regarding religion, and persecution took place. What is paramount now is for all to work together for the transformation of society, and religious belief is not a stumbling block to the advancement of this goal. The country's socialist orientation is to go forward and each one, believer or not, must be willing to participate in the modernization of the country.

### Contribution of the Church to the Construction of Society

Catholics in all walks of life, peasants, workers, professionals, intellectuals, and priests have all been honored for their efforts, and have been cited as exemplary citizens.

A social situation where every one has three meals a day, where homeless children are not loitering on the streets and where the elderly are not abandoned, impressed my Brazilian companions. Their own social reality is that 80% of the populace are classified as poor, 15 million children are abandoned, and 70 million people hardly have one meal a day. At the same time, along with them, I was impressed by the faith of the Catholics in China. We heard stories of imprisoned priests, religious and laity. They have no bitterness in their hearts; only forgiveness for those who caused their suffering. We saw hundreds of people attending Mass, still celebrated in Latin with the priest facing the altar. We saw about 400 seminarians and a number of young women wanting to become religious. That the faith was kept alive during those 30 or more years of persecution is beyond human comprehension. It is something only the hand of God could accomplish. If this is not a miracle, what is?