

and also make it possible for us to understand better what is being said. We must note, however, that the "bottom lines" established by the Chinese government for each campaign are not irreversible. They can be changed. For example, a few years ago when the mainland government was preparing to organize the drafting committee for Hong Kong's Basic Law, the head of China's Xinhua News Agency office in Hong Kong, Mr. Xu Jiatusun, said: "The Drafting Committee for Hong Kong's Basic Law will not have any citizens from Hong Kong as members." A few days later he said: "Most likely there will be Hong Kong citizens who will take part in the Basic Law Drafting Committee." It is clear from this that China's "bottom line" on religious policy can also change. As a matter of fact, if China would only extend its "bottom line"

in dealing with the Catholic Church and give it greater liberty, allowing it to operate on the same level and to enjoy the same freedoms that Catholics in other places enjoy, China would then not only not lose "face" but it would enable its Catholic citizens to serve their motherland better. They would win friends for their country and help further her stability and prosperity thus China would enjoy ever greater international prestige.

Notes

1. Li Weihau, *The United Front and the Question of Nationalities*, Beijing People's Press, 1980, pp. 508-9, 568-571.
2. *Mainland China Studies*, Taipei, Vol. 25, No. 10, p. 90.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *TRIPOD*, No. 52, pp. 73-76.

Holy Spirit Study Centre: Breakthrough and Response

by Angelo Lazzarotto, P.I.M.E.

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The launching of *TRIPOD* magazine ten years ago did not happen by chance. This new bilingual magazine was the result of historical events unfolding in Mainland China, in the Catholic Church and in society at large. Its success in Hong Kong, as well as in China and abroad indicates that *TRIPOD* was born at

the right time and in the proper context.

When Chairman Mao Zedong proclaimed the new republic on 1 October, 1949, he proudly declared that the Chinese People finally could stand up. In many ways that was true.



But Communist China, caught in an atmosphere of cold war and confrontation which pervaded all aspects of life, found itself practically cut off from the whole of the Western world. Premier Zhou Enlai, through skillful diplomacy, worked hard to break this isolation, and won a major victory by rallying the "non-aligned nations" at Bandung (1955). However, the Nationalist government, which had retreated to Taiwan, still held China's seat at the United Nations.

In the meantime, at home, the Chinese authorities' systematic campaign against the Christian missions, had in the public opinion of Western nations, reinforced diffidence and mistrust of a regime tightly bound to the Soviet model. Christian people of the West were particularly shocked by the harshness of the campaign. Yet, their love for Chinese people never waned. It had been nurtured by the hundreds of men and women who during centuries had volunteered to follow Christ's call and spend their lives on Chinese soil.

Soon after his election in the late '50s, Pope John XXIII announced the convening of an Ecumenical Council for the Catholic Church. This was the beginning of a new era whose far reaching repercussions nobody could then have imagined. While in view of Conciliar thought and documents, some contacts could be established immediately with the churches of the Soviet Union, the wall erected by China seemed impenetrable. In fact, with the establishment of the Catholic Patriotic Association and the consecration of a number of bishops in defiance of the Church's law, the tension between the

Church and China had reached a breaking point. Pope John was tempted to consider the Chinese Church schismatic, but Chinese Bishops in exile (some native Chinese and many foreigners) convinced him that it would be wrong to make such a harsh judgement on the Chinese Church as a whole. Particularly positive were Bishop Charles Van Melkebecke (expelled from Mongolia and subsequently Visitor of the Chinese Catholic communities abroad) and Hong Kong's Bishop Lawrence Bianchi (himself imprisoned twice by the Communist authorities): both pleaded personally with Pope John XXIII in favour of the China bishops and of the Chinese Church.¹

By the middle of the '60s, Mao was plunging China into a period of chaos known as the Cultural Revolution. Today the whole of China, including the leaders of the Communist Party, condemn the Cultural Revolution outright as a dreadful disaster; but in those days the repressive power of the totalitarian state did not allow for any expression of dissent. The same power succeeded in sealing off the country from independent observers and in manipulating the media, so that the whole world outside China was deceived about the significance and the truly destructive nature of the event.

Most countries of the West saw the Chinese Red Guards as a symbol of a new generation finally free from its feudalistic heritage and now able to create a new ideal society. In that same vein Paul VI, expressed the desire to reestablish contact with the Chinese people; "The Catholic Church is able to understand and favour the present historical turn in China.... her

effort to pass from the ancient...traditional forms of her culture to those, inevitable and new, that are born out of the industrial and social structures of modern life."²

During those years, the ongoing concern for the Chinese people brought about several initiatives from Church groups in the West. SEDOS, a Roman based documentation and study centre, established by the religious and missionary institutes organized special meetings of people interested in understanding the changing reality of China. Their focal point was the religious situation in Maoist China. In 1970 SEDOS, in coordination with the religious congregations working in Hong Kong, decided to undertake a more permanent and systematic project. Unfortunately, the plan was dropped. Negative and slanted press reports depicted the initiative as a secret papal plan to revive Catholicism in China.

In May 1970 the US Bishops' Conference issued a statement recommending that the US Government continue developing relations with mainland China. In August of that same year the Beijing government released Bishop James E. Walsh of Maryknoll who had been in prison for 12 years. In October, Pope Paul VI, while visiting the Far East, decided to make a symbolic stop-over in Hong Kong. There he again expressed his love for the Chinese people.

Many Western Catholic leaders, active in the political field, played a decisive role in setting up more positive relations with China. The Italian government, led by the Christian Democratic Party, reestablished diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China in

November, 1970. One day a year later, Senator Vittorino Colombo, himself a practicing Catholic and a minister of the Italian government, had a long conversation with Premier Zhou Enlai in Beijing. The following day, in response to a specific request of Senator Colombo, the Church of the Immaculate Conception (the Nan Tang Cathedral) was reopened for worship--the very first since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution; it was November 21, 1971.³

In October of that same year, the People's Republic of China had been admitted to the United Nations. Although conscious of the presisting diplomatic dispute between the Vatican and Beijing, the official newspaper of the Holy See lauded the event. It recalled that Pope Paul VI, before the United Nations General Assembly in 1965, had publicly affirmed the right of the People's Republic of China to be represented in that world forum⁴.

Following the renewal movement set in motion by Vatican Council II, some Catholic theologians, looking at China, felt the need for an indepth reflection on the experience of a society which had undergone, perhaps the most radical of all socialist revolutions. In an ecumenical context *Pro Mundi Vita*, a Catholic research and information centre based in Brussels and the study department of the Lutheran World Federation, based in Geneva studied some of the problems posed to traditional Christianity by the China experience. Also a five day colloquium, convened in Louvain in September 1974, provided 90 participants with the opportunity to debate the challenging

issues. The views expressed there⁵ ranged from scathing assessments of the Maoist revolution to uncritical praise of it as a model for authentic Christian development. The event had a wide ranging echo both in secular and Christian circles. A double follow-up developed from the Louvain colloquium: a bi-annual ecumenical meeting of experts, whose aim was to monitor the evolution of the Chinese experience from a Christian standpoint and "Catholics in Europe Concerned with China" another group which also met periodically in different countries to examine specific aspects of that experience.⁶ Later on, in Rome, some theologians from the Gregorian University and other experts were invited to reflect further on the issue⁷.

In Hong Kong the results of the Louvain Colloquium were evaluated immediately. Since then, the active presence of Hong Kong people has contributed substantially to the success of the meetings that followed in several countries. At the beginning of 1979, a group of Asian theologians gathered in Hong Kong to discuss some regional issues in a new perspective, including of course, those stemming from the Chinese situation.

Personally, rejoining the Hong Kong Catholic community about that time, after an absence of several years; I was fascinated by the climate of expectation prevalent there. With the overthrow of the ultra-leftist political leadership, everybody seemed to be looking at the new developments gathering momentum in the People's Republic of China with a mixture of disbelief and unexpressed hope.

In May 1978, in the course of a visit to China with an official Italian delegation, I was fortunate enough to offer Bishop Zhang Jiashu in Shanghai his very first opportunity to meet some foreigners (the condescending authorities had cloaked the encounter in a shroud of mystery and suspense!). During that trip to China and others that followed, I also had some enlightening encounters with intellectuals. Although the official structures left them very little margin to express personal views, it soon became evident to me that the fostering of scientific and cultural exchanges was one of the most important contributions that we, in the outside world, could offer to the positive development of Chinese society. Hong Kong, having highly qualified and motivated persons, was in the best position to offer such urgently needed help. Furthermore, Hong Kong people are, after all, *tong bao*, children of the same family.

Looking at the accomplishments of the Holy Spirit Study Centre set up ten years ago by the diocese of Hong Kong, one can see how fittingly *TRIPOD* has been developing as a privileged instrument of cultural dialogue. It has become a precious, though limited, contribution to the renewal of the Chinese Church and society. As for me, I confess to feeling happy and gratified contemplating the many programmes that have grown out of the seed planted ten years ago by a little group of friends who had fallen in love with the cause of China. I remember well September 1979. I eagerly prepared a paper for the Hong Kong Council of Priests and diocesan authorities in which

I pleaded with them to establish just such a diocesan structure with a full time Chinese priest in charge. In February 1980, I distributed another paper among religious superiors. This time I stressed the need for their full cooperation with the Hong Kong diocesan initiative and encouraged them to contribute in any way possible to improving the quality of life in China, particularly among the Catholic communities.

Professor Giorgio La Pira, the famous Mayor of Florence, who died 12 years ago, was bold enough to present his Christian vision and hope to the leaders of the Kremlin, to Ho Chi Minh in Hanoi and to Zhou Enlai in Beijing in the dark years of the cold war.⁸ We do not know the answers he received at that time. But the President of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, in a recent public address in Rome (18 November, 1990), acknowledged the importance of true humanism for the progress of humankind: "Your humanist Giorgio La Pira, who is known also to us, used to say at the time of the cold war that one of the basic trends of contemporary history is the search for a lasting peace between East and West--peace is the first sign of an authentic unity among nations and the peoples of the world, and among all the members of the human family. This prophecy is being fulfilled before our very eyes"⁹.

The march of history towards an interdependent and more human way of life has been providentially accelerated by the recent events in Eastern Europe. Aware that such a march can, in certain circumstances, be slowed down, but convinced that it cannot be stopped alto-

gether or reversed, we Christians have a specific duty to help advance that march. Happily, *TRIPOD* in its humble way has been doing just that.

Notes

1. L. Wei Tsing-Sing. *Le Saint-Siege et la Chine de Pie XI à nos Jours*, 1971, p. 278; P. Gheddo, *Lorenzo Bianchi di Hong Kong*, 1988, p. 184.

2. Words of Paul VI on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of establishing the ecclesiastical hierarchy in China and the 40th anniversary of ordination of the first 6 Chinese bishops of modern times, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, LIX (1967), No. 1, pp. 68-71.

3. *Mondo Cinese*, Milan, March 1985 (No. 88), pp. 3-11. In 1971 Mr. Colombo established the Italian Chinese Institute to foster economic and cultural relations between Italy and China.

4. *L'Osservatore Romano*, 27 October, 1971.

5. For the papers presented at the Louvain Colloquium, as well as at a preparatory seminar held in Bastad (Sweden), see *Christianity and the New China*, S. Pasadena, 1976, pp. 204-28.

6. Subsequently, a similar group was established among Catholics in the United States, from which the present United States Catholic China Bureau, linked with the United States Bishops' Conference, has developed.

7. *Esperienza Cinese e Fede Cristiana* (Ed. A. Lazzarotto). Bologna, 1976, p. 204. English edition: *The New China*, New York, 1977.