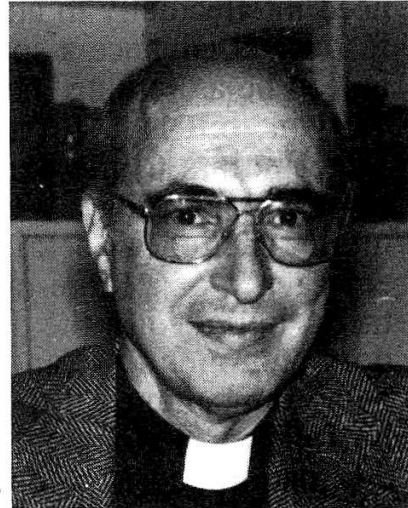


## *The Holy Spirit Study Centre Fifteen Years of Service*

*by John Cioppa, M.M.*

In 1979 as China began to open up to the world beyond its borders, the world outside knew little about the Church in China. Visits to China by church people were rare, news of the opening of a church made headlines and the release from prison of any Church person was a cause for celebration. Today, fifteen years later, although the situation has improved greatly with seminaries filled to capacity, clergy and Sisters able to travel abroad and over 4,000 churches open, a gap still remains between the Church in China and the Church outside.



### **Bishop Wu Establishes the Holy Spirit Study Centre**

In 1980 Bishop, now Cardinal, John Baptist Wu, the Ordinary of Hong Kong, had the wisdom and foresight to establish the Holy Spirit Study Centre as an organ of the Diocese that would serve to broaden understanding of the Mainland's rapidly changing situation and effect appropriate Christian responses to it. In many ways Hong Kong, like the rest of the world, was caught short by the opening of China. No systematic study or preparations had been made for the unexpected and dramatic changes which were about to take place.

Bishop Wu insisted that the newly established Centre be a joint effort of the Hong Kong Diocese and religious congregations. This has resulted in a rich and varied response from a wide spectrum of talented people: men and women, Chinese and Western, religious and lay. Religious from more than 10 congregations have served in the Center. From the original group of four priests who founded the Centre, the staff has grown to twelve. As happens with most organizations the challenge is to maintain the charism and spirit of its beginnings as it grows and

becomes institutionalized.

From the very beginning Bishop Wu saw the role of the Centre and the local Christian community as a bridge Church. In an 1994 interim report, *Proclaim the Gospel of the Lord, spread the Kingdom of God*, on his 1989 Pastoral Exhortation, he reiterated the commitment of the diocese to China by quoting St. Augustine saying, "Let there be unity in what is necessary, freedom in what is doubtful and charity in everything." It is only in this way, he said, that we can fulfill our mission as a bridge church and attain reconciliation and communion.

Mindful of that mission, the Centre has initiated and fostered a number of activities and works to increase and deepen understanding, friendship, communication and dialogue with the Church in China. In reviewing the past fifteen years, I would say that the Centre has been consistent in its aims and persevering in the pursuit of its goals, yet flexible in the way it has responded, adapting to the changing situation in Hong Kong and China.

### **The Centre Outlines the Scope of its Work**

Within the first year of its opening, the Centre had already set the scope of its work. It established a small library with over 100 periodicals and a documentation file of clippings of pertinent information. After fifteen years the library still remains small but a fine source of selected information on the Church and religion in China.

Publications were next on the list and *Tripod* was established as the anchor periodical. Concerned with Christianity in contemporary China, *Tripod* has maintained its Christian, ecumenical and Catholic style and content. However, at the tenth anniversary issue, the magazine took on a new "look". Smaller in size, with a standardized cover it took on the appearance of a professional research journal rather than the simple copybook format of its first years. Also while Fr. John Tong remains the Editor in Chief, in 1990 Sr. Betty Ann Maheu, MM, replaced Sr. Goretti Lau, SPB, and became Executive Editor of *Tripod's* English section and Mr. Anthony Lam Executive Editor of the Chinese part.

In addition to *Tripod*, for seven years beginning in 1987, the Centre published a monthly supplement to the local Diocesan

Chinese Weekly, the *Kung Kao Po*, with news, stories and features about the Church in China. This was terminated in 1994 and replaced with a Yearbook in 1995. A monthly column in English continues in the *Sunday Examiner* and a monthly newsletter with information about the universal Church is made available to China readers. Over the years the Centre has also published a number of books related to the Church in China including a volume of Papal addresses which refer to China.



*The founders of the Holy Spirit Study Centre. (Left to Right) Fathers Angelo Lazzarotto, Elmer Wurth, John Tong and Peter Barry.*

Another of the Centre's services is assisting Church related groups, both local and overseas, in their preparation for trips to China through lectures, briefings and periods of reflection. Members of the staff are frequent travelers to mainland Churches where through friendly visits they promote mutual friendship, understanding and unity.

### **Centre Takes on New Role**

In the last few years the Centre has taken on a new role of middle person in obtaining financial assistance for Church related projects in China. The Centre itself provides no funds nor

does it initiate projects. Rather it serves as a bridge between Church people in China and funding agencies in the West by providing translation, information, consultation and communication between all parties concerned. All of the projects are pastorally orientated with a heavy emphasis on formation and training of priests, and religious. The Centre has a close relationship with Caritas-Hong Kong which concentrates on social, educational and development projects in China.

Today there are over 30 seminaries and more than 50 Sisters' novitiates open in China. As these numbers have grown, the Centre in cooperation with others, has been instrumental in facilitating priests and religious from outside of China to go teach in some of these institutions, thus assisting with priestly and Sister formation. It has also helped Chinese priests, seminarians and Sisters to go abroad to study.

Although the works of the Centre are many and varied, one of its principal thrusts is to encourage and facilitate the efforts of others in their responses to China. Centre Staff people are in constant contact with other China Centres and educational institutions both in Hong Kong and in other parts of the world. It also provides services to the local Church and has been instrumental in establishing sister church relationships with parishes in Hong Kong and China.

The Centre has been consistent in its efforts to assist and support the whole Catholic community in China. The Centre is being true to its mandate to help build bridges; as far as possible to foster a spirit of unity and reconciliation and charity among all Chinese Christian sisters and brothers.

With its close geographical ties to the Church in Taiwan and Macau, and the historical circumstances of its immanent return to Chinese sovereignty, the Diocese of Hong Kong is a natural centre for increased communications with and service to the mainland. The Centre is very much aware of this unique opportunity for Christian ministry. After fifteen years of service, it is also mindful of the difficulties that lie ahead before a full reconciliation and unity among Catholics within and without China can be achieved. It is then with renewed dedication and well-founded hope that the Centre continues its second decade of Christian ministry, seeking out ever more effective avenues of Christian service to, for and with our sister Church in China.

Cardinal Wu in his recent interim report concludes the

section on China with these remarks: "We reaffirm our desire to entrust all our future endeavors to the Lord of history, and prepare ourselves to fulfill our mission as a bridge church. We hope that the Holy Spirit Study Centre, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in union with the relevant Diocesan organizations, groups and individuals will frequently conduct gatherings, to pray, to reflect and to give mutual support. We also desire, in union with all our compatriots wherever they may be, to discern the signs of the times, and to grasp this opportunity of fulfilling the mission entrusted by Christ to us: *Proclaim the Gospel of the Lord, spread the Kingdom of God.*

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