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THE REDEMPTORISTS AND THE CHINA MISSION

CONTENTS

Introduction

1. - *St. Alphonsus and China*; 2. - *The vice-province of China*; 3. - *Farewell to China*; 4. - *Hong Kong and Macao*; 5. - *The Australian Redemptorists in China*.

Conclusion

INTRODUCTION

With a recent return of Redemptorists to China - even though barely to the fringes of that land of mystery - it seems timely to recall a most deserving venture in Redemptorist missionary history that might otherwise be too long forgotten. China is a huge country with a similarly large population that has from time immemorial been unified as a single people. As such it has remained somewhat enigmatic and challenging to a world after so many centuries slowly expanding from a concentration about the Mediterranean. For Christians the existence of so many people seemingly removed from the message of redemption has always been a most urgent challenge. The Syrian Church with admirable missionary enterprise evangelised the country, leaving evidence of success that was to encourage Matteo Ricci and those who followed him. As was to be the fate of later ventures, this early Chinese Church was overwhelmed in the coming of an unfriendly ruler. When missionary zeal was awakened in Europe in the fourteenth century there was an enthusiastic response to the challenge from the East among the Franciscans. Their heroic labours after the daunting journey on foot across two continents was able to establish a Chinese hierarchy. Unhappily, so much promise was to disappear, as did the Syrian mission before it. Matteo Ricci reintroduced Christianity in the seventeenth century. Since then progress has been slow, but always attracting generous spirits to carry on the work so well begun. Among those drawn by the dream of the Chinese mission was St Alphonsus but it was not to be until the twentieth century that Spanish

Redemptorists were able to give substance to his dream.¹

The Spanish mission over twenty years laid solid foundations for the Redemptorist work of preaching in China. When the Maoists expelled them they continued with a remarkably wide-ranging apostolate from Hong Kong and Macao. Information on their work in China and beyond is fortunately available in the archives of the Canberra province. It was gathered by Father Gerard Neagle, who served in Malaysia and assisted in the foundation of the Australians in Hong Kong.² His material has been most helpful in the present summary treatment of our theme.

In very recent years the Australian Redemptorists have in a small way entered on the China mission. Opportunity was offered for work in Hong Kong some fifty years after the exiled Spaniards had attempted a foundation there. The scope for the work of Redemptorists in Hong Kong itself has been most rewarding. It is, however, proving hard to maintain owing especially to a sad dearth of personnel. Even though this small Australian mission is so very recent, it is included briefly in this account of the Redemptorist mission to China.

1. - *St. Alphonsus and China*

China has always been for Westerners a land of mystery. Even at the present time it remains so in spite of some centuries of contact, let alone the present modern technology which reduces the whole world into a "global village". The sense of mystery was especially perceptible in the 1990s when there was talk of the reversal of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty.³

Over the centuries the mystery of China has been a special challenge to the Christian Church. In their mission to China the Redemptorists have been latecomers. For their tardiness it is probably right to see as the cause the fact of their success in Europe. St. Alphonsus, their founder, was drawn by the appeal of China, but the demand close to home for the preaching of his Congregation kept him in Southern Italy. When his men crossed the borders to the rest of Europe they found

¹ On the work of the Spanish in China see R. TELLERÍA, *Un instituto misionero*, Madrid 1932, 557-575; *Analecta* 7 (1928) 44; 222-223; 292; 21 (1949) 28-30; J. CAMPOS, *Evangelio tras la Gran Muralla*, P.S., Madrid 1992.

² The material in the Canberra province archives (APC) is quoted as *Neagle Papers*.

³ In the literature occasioned by the hand over particularly enlightening have been Jonathon DIMBLEBY, *The Last Governor*, London 1997; Frank WELSH, *History of Hong Kong*, London 1933; P. CRADDOCK, *Experience of China*, London 1994; Mark ROBERTI, *The Fall of Hong Kong*, New York 1994.

themselves among people who had been long deprived of God's word by illuminist and Jansenist influences about them. Among them the Alphonsian mission met with success that rivalled the land of their origins. With so much to be done at home China had to remain a long way off.

The appeal of China for St. Alphonsus, or rather the demand the Chinese people made on him, lay in their being so far removed from the message of the Gospel. For him they were abandoned souls. His concern for those in need was for him almost instinctive. When he renounced his legal career, disgusted at the discovery of corruption among the judges, he began to prepare for the priesthood; but before his ordination he was moved by the wants of the poor. Poverty has never been a stranger to Naples. In the eighteenth century church attendance often had the appearance of a fashion parade as the wealthy displayed their costly clothing and jewelry. So it seemed at any rate to the poor, who were ashamed to appear in such company.

Nowadays we would speak of such people as marginalised. For St. Alphonsus being on the outer edges of the population meant being so especially in regard to the benefits of the Church's ministry, the word of God and the Sacraments. It was thinking like this that drew him to groups of working men who used to gather at street corners or other open spaces to study their religion together. Alphonsus joined them, and under his guidance the movement increased to such an extent as to attract the suspicion of the civil authorities. These "Evening Chapels" have come to be seen as the special creation of St. Alphonsus.⁴

No doubt Alphonsus would have been delighted to hear that the Evening Chapels had appeared in China during his lifetime.⁵ A fellow Neapolitan, the zealous missionary, Matteo Ripa, had brought them there. When his work in China had to be relinquished Ripa returned to Naples, where he established the College of the Holy Family, which became popularly known as the Chinese College, probably because of the young students Ripa had brought with him. The college was made available as a residence for clergy, and Alphonsus became one of the guests, as did a man who was to become his lifelong friend and associate

⁴ On the evening chapels see A. TANNOIA, *Della vita ed istituto del venerabile servo di Dio, Alfonso Maria de Liguori*, Naples, Book I, 1798, 47-50; Th. REY-MERMET, *St. Alphonsus Liguori, Tireless Worker for the Most Abandoned*, Brooklyn 1987, 173-183; F. M. JONES, *The Saint of Bourbon Naples*, Dublin 1992, 61-65; G. ORLANDI, *S. Alfonso de Liguori e i laici. La fondazione delle "Cappelle Serotine" a Napoli*, in *SHCSR* 35 (1987) 393-414.

⁵ REY-MERMET, 183

in his apostolic ventures, Blessed Gennaro Sarnelli.⁶ The friendship with Ripa was warm and rewarding. In particular Alphonsus was confirmed in his attraction to the marginalised poor, and it was probably from Ripa that he took the term “most abandoned” that became so distinctive a mark of his pastoral thinking.⁷

The association with Ripa continued with those who succeeded him as superiors of his Congregation of the Holy Family. Thoughts of China, however, had to recede into the background of Alphonsus’s dreams. After the foundation of his own Institute, soon to be known as The Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, he found himself fully occupied with the abandoned souls he discovered in such wild regions as Tramonti in the rugged hills above Amalfi and among those like the people of Cilento for whom the distracted bishop pleaded for someone to “humanise” them.⁸

Ripa declared confidently that Alphonsus had “the firm intention of preaching the holy gospel in China”.⁹ If that was so, then his extraordinarily full apostolate nearer home kept Alphonsus from the fulfilment of his intention. In fact, it would be nearly two centuries before his Congregation should attempt to give substance to his dream.

2. - *The vice-province of China*

In the 1920s China was opened to the Redemptorists when the Holy See invited them to assist a new Chinese bishop in establishing an Institute to be devoted to the evangelisation of the Chinese people. The charge was entrusted to the Spanish province, which readily and effectively cooperated in the foundation of the Disciples of the Lord, which has subsequently proved itself even in lands outside China.¹⁰

The work with the Disciples was merely the beginning. The Spanish province was quick to seize on the opportunity offered them. In that they met with the eager welcome of the Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Celso Costantini, whom the Disciples honour as their founder.¹¹ The well-meaning Delegate was unquestionably a man of zeal, but at the

⁶ See F. CHIOVARO, *Il beato Gennaro Sarnelli, redentorista*, Materdomini 1996.

⁷ REY-MERMET, 311.

⁸ M. DE MEULEMEESTER, *Origines de la Congregation du Très Saint-Rédempteur I*, Louvain 1953, 126.

⁹ Quoted by REY-MERMET, 190.

¹⁰ On the Disciples see TELLERÍA, 557-566; *Analecta* 7 (1928) 705; S. J. BOLAND, *A Dictionary of the Redemptorists*, Rome 1987, 111-112; *SHCSR* 47 (1999) 127-140.

¹¹ On Costantini *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York, IV (1967) 366-367.

same time he may have been somewhat lacking in sound judgment. He assigned to the Redemptorists the mission of Siping, a town of 30,000, of whom very few were Christians, in the northern province of Henan. The residence, such as it was, proved most unsatisfactory and it was exposed to the severe cold of those parts.¹² The early years were a time of considerable hardship. The plight of the little community was tragically exemplified by the deaths on successive days of two Brothers. They had been diligent and unselfish in their efforts to improve the wretched residence. Their death was reported as having been due to sunstroke, a diagnosis that two veterans of the China mission later associated with the province of Canberra found it hard to accept: they held that the Brothers had died of starvation. Whether or not their view is justified, it is still eloquent in describing life in Siping. As if the poverty of the place were not trial enough, the warlords, people we would nowadays call brigands, repeatedly occupied the little town. Testimony of the peril remained in the form of the two unexploded shells taken from the garden of the community and placed before the shrine of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in thanksgiving for her protection.¹³

From the purgatory of Siping a few of the community passed to a foundation in Canton (now Guangzhou) a small island in the Pearl River, which they called "the paradise island of Shamean". The work of the two Fathers assigned to the new foundation was confined to the Europeans, especially in the form of retreats to clergy and religious. It did not last long. In 1932 after only two years the two Fathers were summoned from their earthly paradise to the discomforts of Siping.

Thanks to the heroic labours of the Brothers conditions had become a little less challenging, There was a small chapel handy to the house, and it became the principal scene of their missionary efforts. There was no possibility of the campaigns of preaching that were the usual apostolate of the Redemptorists in Europe, but Siping provided another field of labour, which was surprisingly fruitful. The community was devoted especially to teaching the faith in their chapel. During the five years of their stay in the town they were able to claim five hundred converts, a remarkable achievement in a place where at their coming there were no more than fifty Catholics. This initial success in Siping was to indicate a promising apostolate in later foundations.

The problems of Siping ended in 1934, when the long-suffering community found a new home in the province of Szechuan in the far

¹² There is a brief account of Siping in *Analecta* 9 (1930) 257-159.

¹³ *Ibid.*

south west of the country. There they had some relief from the bitter cold of the northern winter, and they were now in a region where the Christians were more numerous so that there was reason to expect a more satisfying apostolate. They now had a convenient residence in the large city of Chengtu.

In their new home the Fathers were delighted in being at last able to begin the missions to the people. They had learned the Mandarin language during their sojourn in Siping. Letters to their provincial were filled with expressions of their enthusiasm.¹⁴ The missionaries were greatly edified by the piety of the people, who were to be found in the church of a Sunday at any time as long as it was open. It was an especially pleasant surprise to find the children so well instructed, a tribute to their clergy and their parents. The first missions were well attended with signs of fervour that gratified the preachers. The missions were very much in the style used in Europe with few special issues to claim the attention of the preachers. Fathers Belenguer and Arnaiz were edified, and no doubt not a little intrigued, by the men who insisted on handing over their pipes and opium to the priests in the confessional.

This was the pattern of life in Chengtu, and it continued so until the missionaries were unhappily expelled from the country. At the end of that first year (half year really) the community had a fine record of missionary work to report for 1934. In that short space they had preached twenty-four missions and thirteen retreats to clergy, religious, seminarians and others.¹⁵ The volume of mission work increased after the foundation of a second house in 1938. It was further to the west and not far from Tibet. Sichang was especially dear to Father Campos, who spent most of his China years there. He was moved to become even a trifle ecstatic whenever he wrote of it.¹⁶

The optimistic spirit of the Chengtu community, so apparent in the reports of their apostolate, led in September 1935 to the opening of what Redemptorists call a juvenate.¹⁷ The name derives from the Latin *juventus* meaning youth. The juvenate was what is now more commonly called a minor seminary. There were already thirteen young aspiring Redemptorists, all except two of them coming from families long established in the faith. The lads were under the care of Father José Pedrero, who was assisted by a pair of eager young missionaries as

¹⁴ For example a letter of 26th January 1935 describing missions preached by Fathers Belenguer and Arnaiz in *Analecta* 14 (1935) 71-78.

¹⁵ *Analecta* 14 (1935) 196.

¹⁶ CAMPOS, 125-131.

¹⁷ *Analecta* 14 (1935) 245-248.

teachers, Fathers Eusebio Arnaiz and Juan Campos.¹⁸

The spirit of confidence was increased by the foundation in Sichang. The foundations were now named a vice-province with Father Pedrero as superior. And at the same time the house in Sichang began to take shape as a place for preparing candidates more immediately for the priesthood. To give some effect to the plan two students of theology were sent out from Spain. One of them was José Campos, younger brother of Father Juan, who naturally was delighted to welcome him.¹⁹

The euphoria was sadly a little premature. Very difficult times for China were beginning. War with Japan had broken out in 1937, and it soon affected the Redemptorist communities. Communication with superiors in Europe became almost impossible, which caused some anxiety in Spain, where scraps of information came only sporadically in the few letters that arrived. In 1942 Father Pedrero reported on the state of the vice-province through the British ambassador in Chungking.²⁰ There was real danger, as was apparent from other letters that reached Spain. Chengtu was a particular target for Japanese bombs, and at times the bombs fell uncomfortably close to the Redemptorist house. One night in 1941 the death toll in the city was reckoned as 12,000. The Vicar Apostolic found it prudent to close both his major and minor seminaries. And the now flourishing juvenate had to be disbanded. Soon it was to be the fate also of the students in Sichang. After the Americans entered the war the bombing became less frequent and less devastating, but a heavy blow had been dealt to the flourishing China mission.

Quite remarkably, the preaching of the missions continued in spite of the danger. Much more remarkable still, was the opening of a third house. In 1947 a small community took up residence in Peking, now known as Beijing. It came about through a meeting of Father Manuel Gil de Sagredo, returning from Spain in 1946 as vice-provincial, with Cardinal Tien, newly installed as archbishop. The Cardinal was most cordial and invited Father Sagredo to send him some of his preachers. That led to the coming of three men in 1947. Father Sagredo took up residence with Father Juan Campos as superior of the house. Needless to say, Father Campos was jubilant and especially so when he was joined

¹⁸ CAMPOS, 115-123. Father Pedrero was to become the first superior of the mission and later in Rome a member of the council of the Superior General. Fathers Arnaiz and Campos remained so devoted to the China mission that both ended their days associated with the Canberra province so as to work on the apostolate they loved.

¹⁹ *Id.*, 126.

²⁰ *Boletín de la provincia española*, II, 8th December 1942, 111-112.

by his old friend, Father Arnaiz.²¹

The foundation in Beijing was made at a time when the future of China was extremely uncertain. In fact, it was to last barely a single year; but in that time it was able to compile a considerable record. The little church in their care served especially the Spanish community of the capital. The work fell to the two Fathers, the vice-provincial being constantly on the move in the troubled times. Even so, the two energetic missionaries were able to add a creditable record of retreats to clergy and seminarians to the report of the vice-province's apostolate in 1967.²² Father Campos has published the diary he kept of his time in Beijing, and in it he has recorded the progress day by day of a work that was always dear to him, the instruction and reception of converts.²³ He had good reason to be proud of his work. But the time was sadly too short.

3. - Farewell to China

The years after World War II saw China a prey to the further turmoil of civil war as Mao Zedung made his long march to tear power from the hands of the Nationalists of Chiang Kai-Shek. In the early years of the conflict, while the Maoists tightened their grip on the north, the unhappy country experienced a terror. Father Campos describes the years 1945 to 1948 as a time of "violent persecution", culminating in the "winter of blood" between 1947 and 1948.²⁴ Towards the middle of 1948 there was some easing of the savagery, as the Communists became more tolerant, as Father Campos puts it.²⁵ Perhaps it is too charitable to speak of the Maoist regime as a time of toleration. In particular, the new China was far from kindly towards the Church.

The time was a challenging one for the newly appointed vice-provincial of the Redemptorists. Father Sagredo, however, was clearly not daunted by the challenge.²⁶ He was whole-heartedly devoted to the China mission to which he had been sent immediately after his ordination in 1930 at the age of twenty-two. After a year in England to learn English he arrived in Siping in 1931. After the harsh initiation

²¹ CAMPOS, 205-219; *Boletín*, II, 15th August 1947, 480-481.

²² *Boletín*, Vol. X, December 1967, 458.

²³ CAMPOS, 187-219.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 223.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ On Father Sagredo see *Boletín*, II, 12th October 1946, 393-394; Vol. VII, February 1962, 173-179; July 1962, 242-247; BOLAND, *A Dictionary*, 335.

there he passed to Chengtu, where in addition to his missionary work he filled the charges of novice master and consultor to Father Pedrero, the vice-provincial. In 1941 he was recalled to Spain and he was detained there on account of the entry of the United States into the war against Japan. During that time he did not forget China. He established a group of devout women as associates of Redemptorist missionaries to assist both spiritually and materially. These Marías del Redentor have flourished and in 1975 were formally affiliated with the Redemptorists.²⁷ Appointed vice-provincial in 1946, because of the limited availability of transport he had to return to China by way of the United States.

The house in Beijing was closed towards the end of 1948. The chronicles record under the date of 29th November that the community with a Spanish Dominican, who was their guest, left for Shanghai and a few days later for Hong Kong and Macao. On 17th December Father Sagredo left for Chengtu, not yet in the hands of the Maoists. A final note signed by Father Arnaiz says that the Peking foundation begun “with glory” finished at the end of November 1948. “Its certain fruit was Alphonsian vocations”.²⁸ In 1952 the first Chinese Redemptorist priest, Father Matthias took his religious vows on 6th May together with the cleric Peter Mi.²⁹

It was the end in Beijing, but Chengtu and Sichang were able to continue in spite of the fate already seen as inevitable. During 1949 Father Campos was able to see for himself the vitality of the Chengtu missionaries. He was delighted by an invitation by Father Sagredo to visit the community, and while there he was able to join the vice-provincial in a mission on the outskirts of the city.³⁰ There is evident glee in his reporting the excellent results. By that time, however, many religious had left the city, as the Communist threat intensified. Eventually, the Redemptorist communities of Chengtu and Sichang in their turn were to succumb to the new masters of China.

The all-conquering People’s Liberation Army appeared in the province of Szechuan in 1950. It met with little opposition, promising anew and happier era: the terror of the “winter of blood” belonged to the past. The first months were deceptively peaceful; but in 1951 the Chengtu community met its fate. With Father Sagredo there were now

²⁷ Cf *Boletín*, IV, 20th January 1953, 135-140; BOLAND, *A Dictionary*, 226-227.

²⁸ The Peking (Beijing) chronicles are available in photocopy in APC, *Neagle Papers*

²⁹ *Boletín*, IV, 25th June 1952, 69.

³⁰ CAMPOS, 235.

two others, Father Alfredo Fuentes, the local superior, and Father Francisco Campano. The zealous vice-provincial had become particularly resented by the Maoists because of his preaching in the Redemptorist church to encourage the faithful to remain firm in the trials that were soon to come. Father Fuentes was sentenced to immediate deportation, leaving his companions to five months of imprisonment before they too were ordered to leave China.³¹ For Father Sagredo it was a time of considerable suffering, his health weakened as it was by his labours in circumstances of extreme difficulty.

In the prison just the same he gave evidence of the spirit that was the source of a life dedicated, as it was, to the China mission. He wrote down his reflections in the form of meditations very much in the style of St. Alphonsus.³² For Father Campano the imprisonment could well have been harsher on account of what might have been seen as aggressiveness in his outbursts when he was interrogated.³³ He was subjected to most unpleasant experiences, as in one session in 1951, which he has singled out.³⁴ An apostate woman was brought in and she attacked him fiercely as unfit to be a priest, even to be considered human but as an animal or even a monster. "This man is not fit to remain among us" she concluded, "and the Christian community of Chengtu ask the government to drive him out for the good of Christianity".

The imprisonment ended in a public trial in the prison yard on 24th October. On the following day the sentence of deportation was pronounced and the Fathers set out on the sixteen days' journey to Hong Kong. They were accompanied by a man appointed by the court. This man whether through boredom or kindness proved himself quite agreeable and helpful. He would often chat with them in friendly fashion. On one occasion he asked Father Sagredo where he intended to live now. The Father answered at once, "In the Philippines". "Why?" asked the cicerone. The answer was "To be near China so that as soon as the way is clear I can return".³⁵ The long walk ended on 9th November, when, as Father Campos puts it, "they breathed the air of freedom in the British colony of Hong Kong".

Of the two Fathers in Sichang, Father Segundo Rodríguez was the patriarch of the China mission. He had been the superior of the men who

³¹ *Id.*, 247; *Boletín*, III, 10th October 1951, 433-437.

³² *Boletín*, VII, February 1962, 173-179; July 1962, 242-247.

³³ CAMPOS, 248.

³⁴ *Boletín*, IV, January 1952, 25.

³⁵ CAMPOS, 248.

assisted in the foundation of the Disciples of the Lord. He passed to Siping and was always active in the houses of Szechuan. With him was Father José Miguélez, who had also been one of the hardy pioneers of Siping. They were not imprisoned, nor did they suffer the ill treatment that was the lot of their confreres in Chengtu, but they saw their fine house confiscated. Their life was like that of the many homeless in the city in those troubled times. It remained so, for some months until the beginning of 1952, when they were given permission to leave the city. They set out with a group of Franciscan Missionary Sisters, who rather depended on them. Their long march lasted three weeks. On most days Father Miguélez said Mass before dawn, giving Communion to Father Rodríguez and the Sisters.³⁶ The weary travellers at length passed into Hong Kong by way of the Lo Wu international bridge. The last of the party to cross, with evident reluctance, was the grand old pioneer, Father Rodríguez.³⁷

4. - *Hong Kong and Macao*

When the weary deportees arrived in Hong Kong they found a temporary refuge. Hong Kong had been in the minds of the Redemptorists almost from the beginning of the China mission. Father Arnaiz, one of the two men in the short-lived Canton foundation, reported of his companion, Father Bernard Fernández, that he had visited Hong Kong. Father Fernández held the post of visitor (equivalently vice-provincial) of the mission and in 1932, when the Canton foundation was about to be abandoned, spoke with the then Vicar Apostolic of Hong Kong, Bishop Enrico Valtorta, who suggested a home in his vicariate.³⁸ Bishop Valtorta already knew the Redemptorists from missions given by Australians coming from the Philippines. In 1948 Father Sagredo, compelled to leave Beijing, called on Bishop Valtorta and again discussed possible foundation. By that time the condition of the mission had become extremely critical. There was some correspondence on the occasion between the Vicar Apostolic and Father Sagredo. The bishop was most friendly in declaring that he would welcome a Redemptorist community, but he did make an important condition: the missionaries were to be able to perform their pastoral work in English and Cantonese. He suggested that they come from the United States, England or Ireland or other

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Boletín*, X, December 1967, 456-457.

³⁸ CAMPOS, 229-230.

English-speaking country.³⁹

There was at least a residence in Hong Kong by the time the refugees from China came there. Its status, it must be said, was somewhat dubious. Father Campos had found a refuge in Macao, and there Father Arnaiz had joined him on 1st January 1949.⁴⁰ The two were given a tiny apartment above the sacristy of the church of St. Augustine. Father Campos was not content with such a limitation to his zeal. He was convinced that it was only lack of funds that had prevented Father Sagredo from taking advantage of the good will shown by Bishop Valtorta.

Whether or not Father Campos was right in that view, Hong Kong remained very much a concern of the vice-provincial. He could scarcely have been unaware of the threat to his charges. He wrote to Bishop Valtorta in June of 1948 recalling the warm reception he had received on passing through the colony. He suggested now that a residence outside mainland China was becoming urgently needed. He assured the bishop that the Redemptorists in their apostolate had much to offer the local Church.⁴¹ The kindly bishop replied promptly, repeating his being ready to welcome a Redemptorist foundation on the terms already known.⁴² In his reply Father Sagredo emphasised the fact that the immediate need was to provide a refuge for his confreres should they be expelled from China?⁴³

The next letter from Father Sagredo was at a time even more critical. On 10th February 1949 he wrote again, asking for permission to establish a residence in Kowloon.⁴⁴ This may be seen as the beginning of an extraordinarily complicated story of the Redemptorists in Hong Kong. On the very next day Father Campos purchased a four storeyed building on Boundary Street, Kowloon. He was joined on the 14th by Father Arnaiz on the top floor.⁴⁵ That fact explains the rather strange post script to Father Sagredo's letter saying that the Fathers in Hong Kong could give further information. That top floor was to remain the Redemptorist home until the end of 1954. There was no Vicar Apostolic

³⁹ See, for example, Valtorta to Sagredo 8th July 1948, in Hong Kong Diocesan Archives (HKDA). I am happy to express my appreciation of the kindness of officials of the archives who made a generous collection of documents available through the Redemptorists in Hong Kong.

⁴⁰ CAMPOS, 230.

⁴¹ Sagredo to Valtorta, 26th June 1948 in HDKA.

⁴² Valtorta to Sagredo, 8th July 1948 in HKDA

⁴³ Sagredo to Valtorta, 28th July 1948 in HKDA.

⁴⁴ Sagredo to Valtorta, 10th February 1949 in HKDA.

⁴⁵ CAMPOS, 250.

on the spot to deal with what Father Campos ingenuously calls “a foundation that never existed”. It was left to the Vicar General, Mgr. Riganti, to unravel the tangled skein. He sought the advice of the Internuncio Apostolic, resident in Nanking. The poor man was troubled to the point of desperation by the numbers of refugee religious coming from the mainland. This word now of the Redemptorists simply added to his worries.⁴⁶ There is no record of further discussion of the mysterious foundation until 1952, namely after the coming of Father Sagredo and his fellow refugees. On 5th March Father Campos wrote to the Vicar General asking for approbation of a hospice for Redemptorists passing through the city to and from China.⁴⁷ Mgr. Riganti’s reply was written with a sense of urgency.⁴⁸ He was under considerable pressure, as pointed out by two communications, one from the Internuncio insisting that missionaries escaping from China should be moved on with as little delay as possible, and the other from the police and the immigration officials directing that the passage of transient missionaries be hastened, “even by air”.

The flood of refugees had created a severe crisis for Hong Kong, small Island as it was. The numbers themselves caused confusion enough, but there were also grounds to fear that the Liberation Army might well come in pursuit. By the end of 1950 it was calculated that as many as a million refugees had come to Hong Kong.⁴⁹ The vicar General permitted that the hospice remain, but temporarily “in view of its purpose”.

By the end of 1952 the correspondence was with Bishop Bianchi, now Vicar Apostolic, who had been detained in China by the civil war. He wrote to Father Campos in November of 1953 in answer to a letter of December of the previous year.⁵⁰ He had been overwhelmed by work since his return to his diocese, he explained. Taking up the matter of the request for a hospice, he quoted from records in the diocesan archives. He pointed out that his predecessor, Bishop Valtorta, had insisted that half the community to be established be English speakers, whereas there were only two Spanish Fathers. The Vicar General had approved no more than a temporary residence; and he concluded that the reason for the hospice, namely to be a refuge for Redemptorists passing to and from China, no longer existing, he considered that the permission for a

⁴⁶ Riganti to Mgr. Riberi, 24th February 1949 in HKDA.

⁴⁷ Campos to Riganti, 5th March 1952 in HKDA.

⁴⁸ Riganti to Campos, 17th March 1953 in HKDA.

⁴⁹ DIMBLEBY, 37.

⁵⁰ Bianchi to Campos, 14th December 1953 in HKDA.

temporary residence had ceased and he saw no reason for extending it. There ensued in the course of 1954 an exchange of courteous letters without effect. Eventually, in September 1954 Bishop Bianchi had occasion to visit Rome and he took the opportunity to put his complaint to the Redemptorist General government. He wrote to Father Ferdinand Lutz, Procurator General, pointing out that long ago he had informed Fathers Campos and Arnaiz that they should leave Hong Kong. "Unfortunately", he went on, "the two Fathers are still in Hong Kong".⁵¹ The response came promptly. The assistant procurator, Father Roriz, wrote to say that action would be taken immediately in the matter of the two problematic Redemptorists.⁵²

Father Campos takes up the story in his memoirs. The order to leave Hong Kong came at the end of 1954 from both the bishop in Rome and superiors in Spain to the two men in Kowloon.⁵³ The Spanish provincial told them to return to Spain, but that had to be modified because of events shortly before the order to depart. Father Campos had just finished a retreat preached to the clergy of Macao, and at its end the bishop had asked the preacher to take up residence in his diocese. If it was no more than a coincidence, coming when it did it was certainly providential. In any case it marked the beginning of a new phase in the mission to China. The work in Hong Kong ended with the departure of the two Fathers on 31st January 1955.⁵⁴

One would imagine that such uncertainty about the stability of their home would have troubled the Fathers in their Kowloon flat and prevented their doing any worthwhile work. The fact that it was so far from being so speaks volumes for the zeal and initiative of the two and deserves emphasis that is their due credit. They assisted in the parish work of a weekend whenever they were available.⁵⁵ What time they had to spare they devoted to writing. Father Arnaiz worked on a Life of Christ, while Father Campos with the help of Chinese friends translated the Life of St. Alphonsus written in English by Fathers D. Miller and F.X. Aubin. He also revised a Life of St. Gerard published in Chinese in 1934 by Father José Morán Pan. The two old friends were worthy followers of St. Alphonsus who was so faithful to his vow never to lose a moment of time. This apostolate of the pen was already an established work of the

⁵¹ Bianchi to Lutz, 20th December 20th 1954 in HKDA.

⁵² Roriz to Bianchi, 27th September 1954 in HKDA.

⁵³ CAMPOS, 259.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ CAMPOS, 247-257 describes life in Hong Kong.

men on the China mission.⁵⁶ The name of Father Arnaiz occurs frequently in the list, and Father Campos credits his companion with fifteen published works.

The two eager missionaries were far from allowing themselves to be slaves to their books, precious though they considered them. They were both men of the people. In Hong Kong Father Campos found a promising field, for a work he had already found rewarding in Beijing. He remained always devoted to a catechetical apostolate, and he found among the Chinese, especially the refugees, a ready audience. At first he fitted in with diocesan practice, reminiscent of the first centuries of the Church, of an annual communal baptismal ceremony on Holy Saturday. Father Campos happily records that his converts were well represented in the 150 baptised in the cathedral on his first Easter. Until the beginning of 1953 he kept no count of his converts, but he confidently declares that they numbered in the hundreds. For the years 1953 and 1954 his records show 200 converts. The official resume of the apostolate of the China mission attributes to the houses of Hong Kong and Macao 646 converts to the faith.⁵⁷ It is only just that the major part of that fine record be claimed by Father Campos.

At the same time his energetic companion was not idle. Father Arnaiz, as his confrere describes his activity, was like a latter-day Don Quixote as he roamed over Eastern lands in his tireless search for souls. Father Campos reports that he spent some time in Timor and during the Hong Kong years visited also Singapore, Malaysia and Vietnam. He preached retreats to clergy and religious, and wherever he could he even gave "very fruitful" missions. It was a wide-ranging apostolate in ways more than geographical. On his travels he preached in Chinese and Spanish where he could of course, but also in Portuguese, French, English and even in Latin. This was an apostolate in which he was joined by Father Campos when they moved to Macao. The two of them then worked in a rather broader field. Father Campos mentions Laos and Cambodia and even a visit of Father Arnaiz to Darwin, Australia. The campaigns of the two included naturally several visits to some countries.⁵⁸

It is not surprising men of such dedication were greatly admired by the people who benefited from their presence with them. There was profound concern when it became known that the Fathers were soon to

⁵⁶ There is a list of publications between 1934 and 1948, nineteen in number, in *Boletín*, III, 15th February 1950, 256.

⁵⁷ *Boletín*, X, December 1967, 458.

⁵⁸ CAMPOS, 260-262.

leave Hong Kong. A group of devotees appealed to the Apostolic Delegate. Bishop Bianchi was possibly startled to find himself addressed by “a herd of stray lambs who eventually found the true road to eternity after much rambling.”⁵⁹ The letter rambled further for almost a full page before the bewildered “dear shepherd” was able to learn what was troubling the stray lambs. What they wanted was that Father Juan Campos be commanded to stay in Hong Kong. Assuring the bishop that Father Campos was unaware of what they were doing, the petitioners spoke glowingly of his care especially of the many refugees, whose needs he understood so well and whose greatest concern he shared, namely that the faith they had discovered be shared with the very many unfortunates still on the mainland.

For his part Father Campos wrote a final letter to the bishop.⁶⁰ It is short, but in the circumstances appears somewhat fulsome in its protestations of gratitude for the kindness experienced in the diocese. As a token of his appreciation he left a thanksgiving gift of the more than 400 converts he had baptised.

There was no doubt sadness at leaving Hong Kong, where the Fathers had so many friends. The way, however, had been well prepared for their coming to Macao. The rector of the seminary had come with a deputation of clergy to invite them to take up residence in the diocese.⁶¹ One would have to say that Father Campos was exaggerating, and not at all in good taste, when he compared Father Arnaiz and himself with St. Paul expelled from Lystra. And it is hardly fair to suggest that the poor, long-suffering Bishop was like the unwelcoming people of Lystra.

Their new home was the large compound, which belonged to the Salvatorian missionaries. It was to be bought by the Redemptorists in 1957.⁶² From this base the two took up their campaigns of missions which were at once far-reaching, continuing as they did the apostolate of Father Arnaiz. It was possible to report a very creditable activity. The first year in Macao saw the impressive figures of ten retreats to clergy and others, six missions and 268 baptisms together with some publications, sermons and instructions “without end”. The report concluded with the remark that these exercises had been conducted in Mandarin, Cantonese, English, Portuguese and Spanish.⁶³

The Fathers were clearly far from idle, but Father Campos showed

⁵⁹ Maria Teresa Chin and others to Bianchi, 1st January 1955 in HKDA.

⁶⁰ Campos to Bianchi, 29th January 1955 in HKDA.

⁶¹ CAMPOS, 259.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Boletín*, V, 1st March 1950, 35.

himself inventive as well in a suggestion he made to his companion. Their house and garden, he declared, were so large that he got lost in them. It did not seem right to him when so many Chinese refugees were pouring into Macao from the troubled lands of the region, from Thailand, India, Indonesia and Burma as well as from Communist China. He thought they ought to start a school for the children of the refugees. Father Arnaiz readily agreed, so that, as Father Campos puts it, they passed from words to action.⁶⁴ And the action was very fast indeed. Within two months they had gained government approval and enrolled a few teachers. The school, not yet named, was able to open on 8th September 1955. Father Campos was unable to be present at the inauguration, as he had to preach a retreat in Hong Kong. On his return he was delighted at being greeted by the tiny scholars in perfect English, "Good afternoon, Father. How are you?" There were only 27 pupils at this stage; but their parents began to spread laudatory reports of the new school, now called Mother of Perpetual Help School. The enthusiasm of the parents was excellent publicity. Father Campos says that the fame of the new school spread like wildfire throughout Macao, so that there was no need to advertise. Such a claim seems to be a typical example of his own enthusiasm, but it needs no defense. New classes had to be arranged for the following terms. After two years a new building had become necessary to accommodate increased numbers. Provision was also made for a school chapel, where Mass was said for all whose parents allowed them to attend.

The Mother of Perpetual Help School provided a valuable service to the Chinese of Macao, Catholics and others. The classes of the primary school were conducted in both Chinese and English, so that the children could go on to secondary studies in either of the languages. Every effort was made from the beginning to provide good teachers. The salary offered was higher than was usual in other schools, so that there was never any lack of applicants for vacant posts. Careful choice was made, looking not only to competence but also to the ability to offer the children love as well as knowledge. The principal, Father Campos himself at first, had no other teaching experience than his few years in the Chengtu juvenate, but what he lacked in technical knowledge was amply compensated by his evident pleasure in the children. He firmly defended himself against the polite criticism of the staff of his placing his portly form on a see saw and encouraging his little friends to place as many as possible on the other end in a vain attempt to raise him. And he

⁶⁴ CAMPOS, 263-272 speaks of the school and its success.

loved it when they cried, "How fat the Father is".

The two Fathers, who had worked so well together in Hong Kong, continued in the same spirit. In particular, they took up again their apostolate of the pen that had already been so prolific. Father Campos speaks of what he calls "La Editorial Santísimo Redentor".⁶⁵ It is probable that he intended that name to be no more pretentious than an indication of the quite extensive literary work of the two Spanish Fathers in Hong Kong and Macao. The record of their publications is certainly imposing. Father Campos speaks of some fifty books, which had as many as 69 editions, 43 of them in Chinese languages. He himself published his translation of the Life of St. Alphonsus and in addition he undertook the translation of all the ascetical works of the saint. His translation of *The True Spouse* caused him particular problems, since the thought as well as the language was so different from Chinese ways.⁶⁶ *The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ* met with one unexpected appreciation. A young man asked permission to copy some passages, and on being asked why replied, "The saint's expressions of love are the best I can find for the sort of thing I want to say in my letters to my girl friend".⁶⁷

Fathers Campos and Arnaiz were not the only ones who published through La Editorial Santísimo Redentor. Father Manuel Cid, who joined them in Macao, had been one of those who had published religious works while still in China, and he continued after his return to the mission. The Spanish Redemptorists were in fact most assiduous in the apostolate of the pen so dear to St. Alphonsus. What is especially to be commended on account of the circumstances, at times so uncongenial, is that they produced many works in Chinese languages. They had begun even in Siping, where the privations and the constant threat from the war lords must have been an almost intolerable distraction. And they continued to the end, when even Macao had to be abandoned.⁶⁸

Father Campos is evidently gratified in being able to quote a passage from the house chronicles of Macao, "Most Reverend Father General William Gaudreau wrote of his gratification at the complete translation of the ascetical writings of St. Alphonsus, the work of Father Juan Campos, who also translated the writings of Father Schrijvers and

⁶⁵ CAMPOS, 275 speaks of the writings of Father Arnaiz and himself as well as of others of the Spanish province who joined them in Macao.

⁶⁶ CAMPOS, 278.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 276.

⁶⁸ *Boletín*, X, June 1966, 191-193 summarises the achievements of the China mission, giving emphasis to the apostolate of the pen.

others.”⁶⁹

It is clear that the Spanish Redemptorists saw both Hong Kong and Macao as stepping stones back to China. Sadly, however, Macao in time had to go the way of Hong Kong. The story is told in the Bulletin of the province.⁷⁰ The bishop, in spite of protestations of friendship, showed himself increasingly less helpful. The apostolate of the little community became too restricted to be satisfactory, the bishop showing himself unwilling to entrust a parish to the Redemptorists. In these circumstances the Superior General of 25th July 1966 suppressed the China mission. Fathers Campos and E. Lage remained until July 1967 to hand over the School to a Religious Congregation. Fathers Campos and Arnaiz eventually joined the Australian community in Singapore in order to continue their work for the Chinese people.

In 1985 Father Campos took advantage of the greater openness being shown by the Communist government in China and set off from Singapore to visit the old scenes that had remained close to his heart.⁷¹ His first call was to Sichang. There he was greeted by a community of Chinese Sisters founded by the bishop with the help of Franciscan Sisters of Mary. He had taught them Christian Doctrine; and though they were no longer the eager young women he had known, they recognised him at once and hailed him with delight. He also met some of the clergy with whom he had worked in happier times. On the eve of his departure his friends, and they proved to be many, entertained him at a banquet. He treasured the group photograph that commemorated the occasion.

Chengtu proved to be a disappointment. It had grown into such a large city that it was only with difficulty that he could find his way to the places he had known so well. The Redemptorist house, he was glad to see, appeared from the outside very much as he had last seen it. It now, however, served as government offices, and the bishop strongly warned him not to attempt to enter. The offices of the large and troubled diocese were constantly busy and he found it impossible to contact his old friends.

Beijing was different. He found the house where he had been superior for so short a time. It now contained apartments, but it looked very much the same. When he entered he found everybody he met friendly and most welcoming when he explained what the place meant to him. He was especially delighted when he was invited to go back into his old room.

⁶⁹ CAMPOS, 280.

⁷⁰ *Boletín*, X, December 1966, 248-250.

⁷¹ An account of his visit in APC, Hong Kong and China.

On the whole the return to old scenes was a happy experience. He hoped that his report of the friendly people he had met after an absence of more than thirty years would arouse interest in the China mission. Unhappily, that has been slow to eventuate.

5. - *The Australians in Hong Kong*

The decision of the Superior General in 1966 was obviously a great disappointment to the Spanish Redemptorists. They had reason to be proud of the thirty-seven years they had devoted to a work so dear to the heart of St. Alphonsus; and now they were left with nothing but memories. That was certainly the case with the two hardy veterans who found refuge with their Australian confreres in Singapore. For them it was more than nostalgia. Father Campos kept a proprietorial eye on the residence in Boundary Street, Kowloon, which remained in the ownership of the Spanish province and in at least one large heart it was to be the beginning of a renewal of the dream. The two survivors found ready listeners in their new friends. The Australian Redemptorists already had their links with Hong Kong.

The Redemptorists had established themselves in the Far East in 1906, when the Irish province sent men to Opon (now Lapulapu City) in the Philippines.⁷² The beginnings had been difficult so that by the time the second superior of the foundation arrived in 1911 hope for the future was fading. The new superior was a man who never lacked optimism. Father Patrick Maguire Lynch (P.M. to those who knew him) was a flamboyant character, born in Ireland but living in New Zealand from childhood.⁷³ Soon after arriving he preached a mission to the English-speakers of Manila, which resulted in a second foundation, the parish of Our Lady of Los Remedios in the bayside suburb of Malate.⁷⁴ The circumstances of the Malate foundation have an air of mystery about them. The best explanation is that P.M. had a charm that few could resist. He was delighted at the enormous possibilities offering to his zeal in Eastern lands. Not long after his arrival in Opon the chronicler recorded that the new rector had gone off to "missions in Borneo and other places".⁷⁵ The magnificent vagueness of the phrase describes the man exactly.

⁷² On Opon foundation see M. BAILY, *Small Net in a Big Sea*, Cebu City 1978.

⁷³ On Lynch see W. PACKER, *Necrology of the Australasian Province C.SS.R.*, MS in APC, 40-50.

⁷⁴ BAILY, 46-53.

⁷⁵ Opon chronicles in Cebu Provincial Archives.

P.M. has been traced to Sri Lanka, Singapore, Malaysia and Canton in China, and that leaves largely unknown the "other places". One of them at least has been identified as Hong Kong. He preached a mission there and a retreat to the clergy. As so often happened, the Vicar Apostolic, Bishop D. Pozzoni P.I.M.E., fell victim to that unfailing charm. Their meeting must have been in 1913, as appears from the beginning of a long and friendly correspondence. Father Lynch wrote to the bishop in March 1915 and the Vicar Apostolic in his reply spoke of the "inestimable blessings" of the mission "two years ago".⁷⁶ There is more correspondence in the warmest terms in the Hong Kong diocesan archives. The last letter of P.M. was sent to the successor of Bishop Pozzini from St. Vincent's hospital, Sydney, in 1927. It was from his death bed.⁷⁷

In that same year, 1927, the province of Australasia was established, and in 1932 it made a foundation to replace Malate. With the superior of the new house in Baclaran, Father Francis Cosgrave, contact with Hong Kong was renewed. In 1936 the Vicar General, Mgr. Riganti, requested a mission in the cathedral, adding that "the memory of dear Father Lynch is still very vivid among Hong Kong Catholics".⁷⁸ The memory of P.M. had survived more than twenty years, but the growing volume of work in the Philippines was proving so engrossing that it had become impossible to continue with his initiatives or the desires of Father Cosgrave.

In 1972 Fathers Campos and Arnaiz were living with the Australian community in Singapore. At that time the foundations in Malaysia and Singapore formed the flourishing vice-province of Ipoh with Father Paul O'Malley Jones as superior. Vocations seemed to be numerous, and there was some speculation as to how the work could be expanded. With the survivors of the Spanish mission to China among them it was inevitable that they should look to Hong Kong. The result was that in June Father O'Malley Jones with Father Campos set out to see what could be done. In a visit of two weeks they made a thorough investigation from their base with the hospitable Dominicans in Kowloon.⁷⁹

The visit had much to show that was encouraging as well as informative about the church's work in Hong Kong. Bishop Hsu

⁷⁶ Lynch to Pozzini, 2nd March 1915 and undated reply in HKDA.

⁷⁷ Lynch to Valtorta, 19th September 1927 in HKDA.

⁷⁸ Riganti to Cosgrave, 4th February 1936 in HKDA.

⁷⁹ The report of Father O'Malley Jones, dated June 1972 is in APC, Hong Kong and China.

expressed himself as satisfied with what he heard of the Redemptorists; and the various religious communities the two visitors met assured them they would be most welcome should they decide to join them in the diocese. The detailed report presented by Father O'Malley Jones had no immediate result. The vice-province apparently did not see its way clear to make a foundation in Hong Kong. And there the matter rested until 1985.

In that year a general chapter of the Redemptorists elected as Superior General Father Juan Manuel Lasso de la Vega, who warmly shared his province's interest in China. Before the capitulars dispersed he drew Father Edmund Dunne, superior of the vice-province of Ipoh, aside and asked him to consider the possibility of reopening the mission to China. His man was well chosen. Father Dunne was a canonist highly regarded in Singapore, where he had been resident for some years, and he was a man known to be careful and methodical in everything he undertook. Accompanied by Father Philip Lai, he set out for Hong Kong at the end of March 1986.

The meticulous report the visitors were able to present was completed after interviews with Bishop (later Cardinal) John Baptist Wu and others in a position to advise.⁸⁰ In Hong Kong at that time there was much talk about "China watchers", and the views of those so designated were taken seriously.⁸¹ Among the recognised "China watchers" the two visitors attached special importance to Fathers John Russell S.J., Francesco Belfiori, S.J., Henry Stultiens C.I.C.M. and John Tung, editor of the periodical *Christianity and China*. What was gathered from their discussions clarified the opinions of the visitors about the condition of religion with particular reference to the Patriotic Catholic Church Association, separated from dependence on Rome. Since they were the only Catholics officially recognised by the government, an underground church was the only field of pastoral care possible for the Redemptorists; and that led to the conclusion, "Resumption of missionary work in China by the C.S.S.R. is neither probable nor possible".

Investigation of prospects in Hong Kong proved more encouraging. When the bishop heard of Redemptorist missions in Australia and Malaysia it was something new to him and he asked for an explanation. On hearing more he exclaimed, "Wonderful! I am entirely in agreement".

⁸⁰ The report of Fathers Dunne and Lai, dated 10th April 1986 is in APC, Hong Kong and China.

⁸¹ Dimpleby speaks frequently of the "China watchers", not always in laudatory terms. He insists that Communist China is not easy to understand.

Further discussion showed that it would be helpful if a parish were accepted, and it was emphasised that knowledge of Cantonese was essential for work among the people. Father Dunne did not favour any immediate move to Hong Kong, but his detailed report was to prove most helpful for later ventures.

Even though the vice-province of Ipoh was unprepared to enter the new field, the matter remained alive. That is evident from conversations with men who passed through Australia. And renewed interest came from the Superior General, Father Lasso. Passing through Sydney in March 1987, he suggested to the provincial, Father Kevin O'Shea, that possibilities in Hong Kong be further explored. In August of the same year Father Luis Hechanova of the Philippines, consultant to Father Lasso, spoke to Father O'Shea on the occasion of the coming of the Redemptorists to Korea. Among other things he mentioned the plight of Filipinos employed in Hong Kong. They were numerous and in grave need of spiritual help. Then there was Father John Wotherspoon O.M.I., in Australia on vacation from Hong Kong. He was able to speak of openings in the pastoral work of the diocese, and in particular of the growing number of "boat people", refugees from Vietnam.

As a result largely of these conversations, the provincial made a tentative approach to Bishop Wu of Hong Kong.⁸² The bishop's reply was encouraging, even while he spelled out the special problems arising from conditions in Hong Kong.⁸³ Further encouragement came from Fathers Lasso and Hechanova, and Father O'Shea commissioned his vicar, Father Patrick Corbett and the superior of the vice-province of Ipoh, Father John Martin, to make further investigations. The two went to Hong Kong in September of 1988, and their report gave occasion to a circular letter proposing something concrete to the province.⁸⁴ The suggestion was for two men to go in the following year, one for the Filipinos and the other to work for the "boat people", and volunteers were requested for further development.

Much of 1988 had been occupied with investigating the possibilities of Hong Kong which were duly reported to the Superior General in December.⁸⁵ A decision was close, but there were misgivings as to where personnel could be found. Vocations had become scarce in Australia, and Father O'Shea suggested that the final answer could well depend on the collaboration of the vice-province of Ipoh. He was hoping

⁸² O'Shea to Wu, 19th March 1987 in APC, Hong Kong and China.

⁸³ Wu to O'Shea, 3Sth May 1987 in A PC, Hong Kong and China.

⁸⁴ Circular dated 10th October 1988 in APC, Hong Kong and China.

⁸⁵ O'Shea to Lasso, 22nd December 1988 in APC, Hong Kong and China.

that it would be decided by July of the following year, when there was to be a gathering of all the members of the province.

Father Lasso in acknowledging receipt of the letter from Australia expressed his gratification at the news that the Redemptorists might soon be back in Hong Kong and possibly even in China as well.⁸⁶ Such a foundation, he declared, would be beneficial “both for the Canberra province and for the Congregation as a whole”. The decision came quickly, as Father O’Shea was able to announce to Cardinal Wu in April.⁸⁷ Three men were proposed to go to Hong Kong for a trial period of six months. Father Peter Robb, who had been vice-provincial in Manila, was suggested for care of the many Filipinos; the deacon Joseph Mai Van Think for the “boat people” and to study Cantonese in order to assist in parish duties. A third man would be chosen out of many volunteers to study Cantonese for more general pastoral activity. The cardinal replied in May accepting the proposal and offering to sponsor the applications for visas for the men chosen.⁸⁸

In June Father Corbett, acting for Father O’Shea, reported to the cardinal the name of the third man who was to join the other two, Father Brian Jones.⁸⁹ It was a most unpropitious time, when the whole world was aghast at the appalling incident in Tiananmen Square. It did not deter the pioneers. From the start the men working for the Filipino exiles and the Vietnamese refugees proved their worth. They had much to show when there was question of reviewing their temporary status. Fathers Corbett and Robb called on the cardinal on 26th May 1990.⁹⁰ The cardinal readily approved what had been done and showed a willingness to extend the trial period for another twelve months in the expectation of a more definite offer of what they could do for the diocese.

The beginnings are a story of hard and constant work at the responsibilities undertaken. Help came in 1993. Father Francis Pidgeon, like Father Robb a one-time vice-provincial in Manila, had some years of experience with Filipino workers in Saudi Arabia and Singapore. When his visa in the latter place expired he was happy to find scope for his talents in Hong Kong. Another newcomer was Father Van Công Trân, who had been attached to the Richmond vice-province in the United States. With the approval of his vice-provincial he was able to assist

⁸⁶ Lasso to O’Shea, 27th February 1989 in APC, Hong Kong and China.

⁸⁷ O’Shea to Wu, undated, in APC, Hong Kong and China.

⁸⁸ Wu to O’Shea, 25th May 1989 in APC, Hong Kong and China.

⁸⁹ Corbett to Wu, 28th June 1989 in APC, Hong Kong and China.

⁹⁰ There is a report of the interview in APC, Hong Kong and China.

Father Mai until 1995. There was also Father Cyril Axelrod, a man with a colourful background. He had been born in South Africa into a Jewish family of Polish origin. He was deaf from birth and had been received into the Catholic Church in 1965 at the age of twenty-three. In spite of his handicap, he was ordained for the diocese of Port Elizabeth and began an apostolate among the deaf, which he continued after his profession as a Redemptorist in 1975. He preached missions to the deaf in Europe, the United States and Australia before coming to Hong Kong in 1988. From there he went to Macao to manage a foundation for the care of the deaf, and in 1994 at his request he was received into the Canberra province.⁹¹ His work in Macao has received international commendation.

In 1994 after five years the foundation in Hong Kong had a good record. Father Jones was acting as assistant priest in a parish and showed competence in Cantonese. Father Pidgeon was organising a Filipino centre, which had already been in existence, but under his guidance gave promise of a far-reaching apostolate. Fathers Mai and Vang were fully occupied among people surely most abandoned, the Vietnamese "boat people" dragging out a wretched existence in overcrowded refugee camps. Father Robb, who rarely mentioned himself in his regular reports, was now rector of the Diocesan Catholic Centre and a board member of AITECE (Association for Technological, Economic and Cultural Exchange), which helped Christians outside China to offer their services to the country in education, health, welfare and economic development.

The amount of useful activity encouraged Father Corbett and Father Robb to approach Cardinal Wu to ask for care of an independent parish. Father Jones was to be assisted by Father John Le Dinh Cac, who had already studied Cantonese in Australia. A further important consideration put to the cardinal was that such an arrangement would allow the whole group to live together. Negotiations for a parish had already begun tentatively in 1994, when Father Robb had raised the question with the cardinal.⁹² As a result of the negotiations with the cardinal the Redemptorists were installed in the Holy Spirit parish, Homantin, towards the end of 1997 with Fathers Jones and John Cac administering the parish.

⁹¹ Correspondence of Father Robb concerning Father Axelrod is in APC, Hong Kong and China.

⁹² A report on negotiations for the parish by Father Jones is in APC, Hong Kong and China.

CONCLUSION

The year was a critical one for Hong Kong. Britain returned the colony to China. That meant its falling under the Communist rule, commonly held responsible for the events of Tiananmen Square, so hard to forget. The "hand over" had been anticipated with much anxiety. In the event, however, after the fanfares and pompous speeches life seemed to have been little changed. The Fathers in Homantin were undisturbed and all appeared as stable as ever.

Unhappily, it was not long before there was evidence that the new masters were still capable of menace. Towards the end of 1998 the Superior of the province of Vietnam, recovering from a long period of persecution, offered the help of his growing manpower for the China mission. That was eagerly welcomed, promising as it did permanence for the work that was at last beginning anew; but the hopes were abruptly dashed. The authorities in Beijing refused to grant visas to Vietnamese. The China mission was once more thrown on the very limited resources of the Australians.

That is a sad note on which to end the story of the Redemptorist mission to China. It had seemed to fulfil the dream of St. Alphonsus. Under the leadership of the Spanish province there had been great achievements. The Redemptorists can justly claim some share in the success of the Disciples of the Lord among the Chinese in Asia and elsewhere. Then the painful beginnings in Siping were richly rewarded in the fine missionary life in Chengtu and Sichang, together with the tireless activities of Fathers Campos and Arnaiz from Hong Kong and Macao.

It is a record of which Redemptorists have every right to be proud. The resurgent mission being established in Hong Kong has at most a very precarious existence. It depends on the mother province of Canberra, itself experiencing a grave problem of vocations. The Vietnamese province deserves the warmest commendation for being so generous in offering the help of its own experience of a hostile government. That is the sort of generosity that once so firmly established the mission to China. Please God that spirit has not been extinguished.

RESUMEN

Los redentoristas de la Provincia de Madrid llegaron a China en 1928 para dirigir la fundación de la congregación china de los «Discípulos del Señor» y realizar el apostolado tradicional de la Congregación: predicación de misiones y ejercicios al pueblo. El autor va siguiendo la acción misionera en las diversas fundaciones que se realizaron: Siping, Canton, Chengtu, Sichang, Pekin, hasta la expulsión de los últimos misioneros en 1952. Ante el avance comunista los redentoristas establecieron una comunidad primero en Hong Kong (1949-1954) y después en Macao (1955-1967). Desde 1989 los redentoristas de la Provincia de Canberra mantienen una comunidad en Hong Kong.