

# Hong Kong Catholic Works of Mercy

(Fifth of a Series)

## "WISDOM IS AN INFINITE TREASURE TO MEN..."

*which they that use become the friends of God."*

By Richard Core

The broadening influences of travel, professional pursuits, higher education and participation in public life have generally given men in the Orient the dominant position.

It is interesting to see that preeminence being challenged in Hong Kong. A good example is St. Joan of Arc's Night School which is further proof that Catholicism gives woman opportunities to attain her rightful dignity in society.

The women directors of St. Joan's Night School are convincing proof of this. Besides, they are setting a fast pace on the manner of spreading Christ's merciful works by means of education.

Actively engaged as professional teachers they believed that

Road and unlike many night schools compelled to hold classes in dingy flats on bustling city streets, St. Joan's occupied a commodious edifice ideally located in a quiet locality conducive to concentration and study.

The teaching directors drew upon the volunteer services of

### THREE OF THE DIRECTORS



they had a uniquely sound idea on the matter of schooling. Members of the Cathedral's Catholic Action Committee, they had worked together in social welfare activities for nearly ten years.

They wished to establish a school that would be both different and answer a need. It would, they planned, aspire to surpass the pragmatic and efficient qualities and omit the bad features of the number which had mushroomed into existence in Hong Kong since the end of the War.

The school would conduct night classes for men and women from all walks of life. Race, creed, sex and age would be no barrier. Its distinctive elements would be scholastic discipline, exacting standards and the quality of the teachers employed.

Given active moral leadership and class-room facilities by His Lordship, Bishop Henry Val-torta, the new venture would comprise a board of directors drawn entirely from former members of St. Joan of Arc's Young Women's Association.

Under the guiding inspiration of Mother Angelica of the Canosian Convent and Father Nicholas Maestrini, director of the Catholic Center, the idea of the new night school was taken off the drafting board and put into operation.

St. Joan's Night School started to function in February, 1949, with the appointment of headmistress, Miss Nellie Seu. The site was the daytime Nam Wah Middle School at 10 Caine

distinguished Chinese and European professors with scholastic honours in philosophy and natural sciences from all leading Far Eastern and foreign universities.

It was inevitable and desirable that the students would be from the interior of China; they came from as far north as Manchuria and as far south as the East Indies.

Some pupils hold clerical positions in Government and business firms. Others are mechanics, office boys, business directors. Nurses, domestic servants and housewives too may be found answering the school-bell in the six class-rooms of St. Joan's which accommodate almost 130 people at the present time.

A college degree does not mean automatic eligibility to enter here. An entrance examination is a *sine qua non* for enrollment to ascertain each student's aptitude in English and general knowledge. Since English has become the semi-international language nowadays, St. Joan's insists that all lectures and class-room discussions be conducted in that prescribed language.

A number of applicants from Chinese schools at times appear amazed that their past scholastic attainments are relegated to minor consideration until an entrance examination establishes the extent of their knowledge.

Not long ago a college graduate applicant here who works as an accredited accountant, was unable to pass his entrance test in English. Education meant more to him than a

loss of "face," however; he gracefully accepted the evaluation of his knowledge and subsequent assignment to a class in fundamental English.

The enrollees soon appreciate the required insistence on "quality first" at St. Joan's.

"After being a student here for two months," one remarked, "I wouldn't attend any other school."

Siu Man-chung, 18, is a small thin youngster who despite tubercular tendencies is striving commendably to ignore his physical disability and to fulfill his scholastic dreams. With scarcely any Chinese education, he buckled down to the study of English. In a few short weeks after enrollment he was proficient enough to answer fluently the questions presented by an inspector from the Department of Education.

In Class III you will find Marcus Mak a seventeen-year-old Government passport office worker who in six months, according to his teachers, has achieved remarkable improvement. He is not afraid to talk and make mistakes in English; he holds to the thesis that one who never opens his mouth for fear of making an error never accomplishes much worthwhile in life anyway.

Quite a number from day-time schools come to St. Joan's to improve their knowledge of English. The faculty takes pains to explain errors, giving each pupil a detailed and careful analysis of his or her work.

### YOU WISH TO BE ENROLLED?



The main support of a widowed mother with five younger children, spirited Rita Chan, 17, is an ambitious young lady. Besides taking a night course in short-hand in addition to working at an office job, Rita strives hard at her studies to improve her state in life.

Another of Rita's class mates is an eager youngster who is not content with the school's classes in English. He has been so fired with enthusiasm by his teachers that he scans the daily

papers for notices of lectures being given in English.

Public debates are frequently held during class-time and a variety of professors are slated to address the students in order to attune their ears to different styles of spoken English.

Spiritual attention comes into play with a ten minute talk nightly which, although optional, is well attended by all who appreciate the emphasis on moral values in this day and age. (Continued on page 10)

### STUDENTS IN PURSUIT OF WISDOM

