



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

It is a 75-minute ride on the hydrofoil from Hong Kong, across the entrance of the Canton harbor on the South China Sea, to the Portuguese province of Macao. The tiny, isolated province on the China mainland is a mixture of Eurasians and refugee Chinese. It is separated from Red China by a "no-man's-land" guarded by pillboxes and manned on the Chinese side by soldiers with machine guns. Although many Chinese refugees are able to sneak across the border, there are almost daily reports of guards catching and shooting families who try to escape from the Communist nation.

Just the week before we arrived a Chinese woman was machine-gunned to death at the gate of the city. She was one of those with a free passport. That is, she was allowed to pass back and forth from China to Macao. She had been carrying a small baby on her back but an observant Chinese guard noticed that the baby, which was strapped tightly to the young mother's lower back, had a strange color. When he touched the baby he discovered it was dead. Not only was it dead, but the mother was using the corpse to smuggle jade into Macao. The baby's body had been cut open and was filled with the beautiful green stones which bring a high price in the free city. A quick trial was held outside the guardhouse and within 10 minutes the guard captain raised his tommy gun and executed the young woman on the spot.

Human life in Asia is cheap.

I had a specific purpose in wanting to visit the picturesque city of Macao, however. Located on the tiny peninsula which is three miles long and one mile wide, the bustling town is a mixture of European and Oriental

houses. The "water people," those refugees who have managed to swim or sneak out of China, live in miserable poverty along the harbor. Up on the hillside are the wealthy homes of retired Europeans. But overlooking the entire peninsula are the remains of the old St. Paul Cathedral.

The huge cathedral was built by the Jesuits in 1604. It stood for more than a hundred years before a giant typhoon proved stronger than the work of man's hands and the building fell in ruins, leaving standing only the massive front wall which overlooks the entrance to the harbor. High on the weatherbeaten, jutting wall, challenging the elements down through the years, stands a great bronze cross. It was that cross I had come to see.

In 1825 Sr. John Bowering sailed his ship into the harbor at Macao and caught a glimpse of that indestructible cross. For more than an hour he stood at the rail of his rocking ship, staring at the free-standing cross with tear-filled eyes. Then he retired to his cabin, picked up a quill and wrote words which are still familiar to many of us.

In the cross of Christ I glory,
Tow'ring o'er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.

John Bowering was right, I concluded, as I boarded the powerful hydrofoil to return to Hong Kong. Despite the Communist terror. Despite the wretched poverty and disease of the world. Despite all men's attempts to destroy God — the cross of Christ still stands. The trip to Macao shall remain as a high point in my life.