



CARMAN WOLFF

*each day brings  
deeper joy*

*I*T sounds romantic: four years in the inscrutable East, China at the moment of the lowering of the bamboo curtain, a trip home in which travel folders came alive, Hong Kong, Singapore, Aden, Suez, Port Said, London—and now Brazil.

Where did it start? Why am I here, a professional worker in the Church overseas? There wasn't anything startling about the decision, nor was it the result of long questioning. It was simply the sure response to a call which came at precisely the moment when I was ready to understand it. Everything had combined to make it natural: my own family in whose love there was always security; the parish in which the rhythm of Christian worship and activity laid a foundation. And finally a summer conference for young people. Things said there, lives seen, and the apartness which those ten days brought opened new vistas. The Church became more than just a place where I felt happy and whole; it became that which can make the world whole.

It was a new discovery bursting on my seventeen-year-old world, this seeing things whole, comprehending the purpose. There were people there who talked of life as growing surrender of self to God, of service as the expression of our life in God, and it made

sense. But I realize now that it made sense because the ground was laid. There was no other response possible but a joyous acceptance of this as my vocation, the call to a life of growth in God, expressed where and how He willed. At the time there was a sense that this might mean the overseas field of the Church's work. I talked long hours with a woman worker from Japan.

Each time I was home for vacation, she guided me to turn back and back to the springs of religious experience in sacrament and prayer and helped me to understand the necessity of a disciplined, religious life. She also suggested summer work during my college years: a church vacation school in East Boston, a camp for children from city mission parishes, rural work in Maine, which all proved both prelude and testing ground.

I graduated from college during World War II and taught for a year. Just before Christmas there came a telephone call telling me that a new program was to be set up at Windham House, New York, for the training of women who wanted to enter the work of the Church. At the same time, word came that the Overseas Department wanted to get people ready to go to China as soon as the war was over. There it was. I knew that there could be nothing else that was as right for me.

There followed two years of concentrated study with weekly field work, first in a settlement house and then in a parish, of close living and heated discussions, of fun and growth, which all was grounded in private and corporate devotional life.

In 1946 I went to St. Hilda's School, Wuchang, China, where the plan was that I should teach while learning the language and becoming a part of life in a new culture. Eventually I was to be on the staff of the Chinese training center for women workers.

It is almost impossible to condense the China years. Despite outward strangeness, despite long language struggles, despite extremes of heat and cold, there was never any inward strangeness, never any moment when I did not feel that I belonged there. Colleagues among the teachers, students in the school, church people, young and old, we were part of a community, bound by bonds stronger than nationality and deeper than custom.

Chinese friends taught me what no preparatory course could of the psychological and spiritual demands placed upon the overseas missionary, different from those known to the missionary working among his own people. For most of us, the learning of the language demands sacrificial concentration,

but it is only a primary step. Chinese clergy and colleagues showed me how subtle are the things which separate the foreign worker from people and make his task difficult.

When I left China it was with the deepest pain that I have ever known. It was clear that the world situation would prohibit a swift return. I reached home saying that I would not go overseas again until I could go back to China. It seemed clear that I should work among American college students, study Chinese, and wait until I could "go back to my work." Brazil was mentioned but it seemed a far-fetched idea. No, I couldn't start all over again with a new language; my work was in China.

For four months I continued with the smug assurance that I knew what I must do. Underneath there was the plaguing question, "*Just what do you mean by vocation?*" And slowly I came to the reply that I had been called not to a specific task in the Church but to a life. I was called to know and to love God, a vocation which is common to all His creatures. The accident that I happened to have started in China had nothing to do with the basic vocation. At about this point there was a weekend retreat. I began it saying, "*If I go to Brazil . . .*" and emerged saying, "*When I go to Brazil . . .*"

Even an outline account of these years reads like an adventure story. I have known life in two countries, one with the oldest continuous civilization in the world and the other young and exuberant. I have done a little bit of everything, teaching groups of different ages, races, nationalities, student work, counselling, program planning, dramatics, writing, and social work.

I might have chosen professional church work for any one or all these reasons, but I didn't. Whichever of the manifold parts of the work a given day brings, the vocation is the same: to love God in all things. I have been singularly blessed along the way both in the work and in the close comradeship of Chinese, American, and Brazilian friends. We are bound together eternally in the certainty of our oneness in Christ even when the world's confusions enforce silence and separation. The first response at seventeen was not just to a work which appealed but to a way of life which brought integration and meaning and wholeness. With each day the gladness and the joy are deeper.

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