

# With Bishop Wu

on his



## Historic Visit to China

by John Tong

translated by Peter Barry

There are good reasons why Bishop John B. Wu's recent visit to Beijing and Shanghai at the invitation of the Chinese government has been called historic. Since 1949, China-Vatican relations have been strained, and Bishop Wu represents a diocese with close ties not only to Rome but to Catholic churches throughout the world, including the Catholic Church of Taiwan. This was the first time that a Roman Catholic bishop has been invited by the government's Bureau of Religious Affairs and Bishop Wu is also the first Catholic bishop of the Hong Kong Diocese to have received such an invitation. Thus, the Bishop's trip attracted much attention not only locally but also in the world at large, and its progress was watched keenly both in Catholic and non-Catholic circles.

The trip itself was short, lasting only six days. Along with Beijing and Shanghai, the Bishop made pilgrimages to the Basilica of Our Lady at Sheshan and to the tombs of Matteo Ricci and Xu Guangqi. Wherever he went, he was greeted with

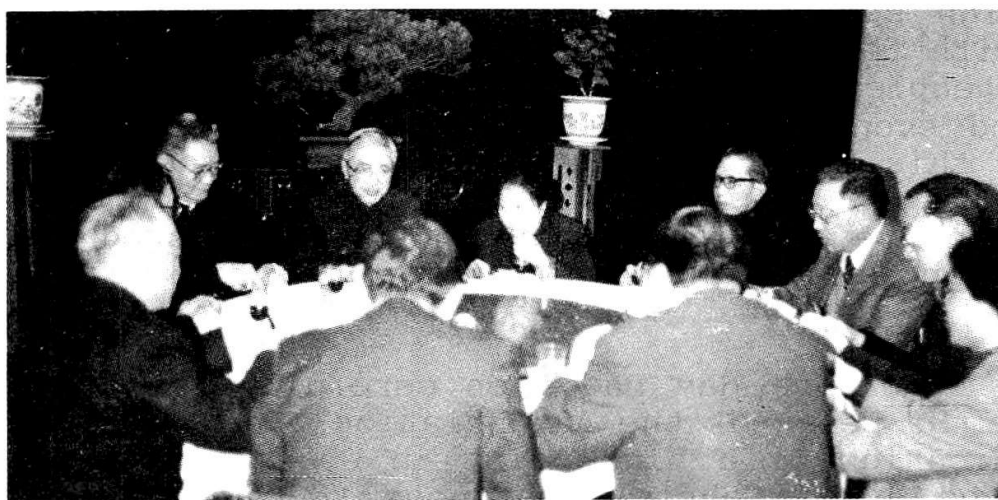
warm hospitality, and he moved within an atmosphere that encouraged frank and friendly dialogue. The general impression left by the trip was that it helped to increase mutual understanding and to lay the groundwork for more frequent contacts and cooperation in the future. It is my intention here, as one of the party with the bishop's tour, to offer some comments and impressions that might supplement the material found in this issue of Tripod and the rather extensive news coverage which can be found elsewhere.

It was on the morning of March 25th that the Bishop and the four of us who were to make up his party met in the Bishop's residence to cut the ceremonial bon voyage cake given by some Catholics. Accompanying the Bishop to China would be Dr. John Chan, Vice-chairman of the Hong Kong Catholic Board of Education and President of Lingnan College, Ms. Joyce Chang, Secretary of the Social Work Department of Caritas-Hong Kong, Father Michael Yeung, Director of the Diocesan Social Communications Office, and myself. The two Vicars General of the diocese were on hand to wish us well, and the Bishop was in high spirits. In the past few days, he had been inundated with telephone calls and letters from priests, sisters and lay people of the diocese, all offering their support, prayer and even novenas for our success, and he was visibly moved by this spontaneous expression of diocesan unity and support. Before leaving for the airport, he invited us to join him in prayer in his chapel. There we asked God for his blessings and the Bishop dedicated our trip to the Blessed Virgin.

Our departure day had been carefully selected to coincide with the Feast of the Annunciation. In religious history, the Annunciation is a high point in God's communication with man, as the Angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she is to conceive and bear the Saviour, thus becoming a bridge between the heavens and the earth. It seemed appropriate to our own mission which was one of communication and, hopefully, bridge-building that we set out for Beijing on this great feast. Later, at various times during our trip the bishop would refer back to our prayers in the chapel and say with confidence that they had been answered, for throughout the duration of the visit to China he said a feeling of great peace never left him. As we left for the airport, he said to us: "Let us face reality wisely and with courage, and express ourselves with sincerity and candor."

At the airport, Mr. Yang Sheng and Ms. Chen Mengyun, members of the editorial board of the New China News Agency (Xinhua), which is China's informal 'consulate' here in Hong Kong, came to see us off. Previously, on the 19th of March, the feast of St. Joseph, Patron of China, Mr. Li Chuwen, the Agency's Vice-director, had hosted a farewell banquet for the Bishop, and Mr. Wu Lianzi, another member of the editorial board, accompanied us on our flight to Beijing. The courtesy and concern shown to us by the Agency was very moving, and we would like to express again our heartfelt appreciation for all they did to make our trip comfortable and peaceful.

In Beijing, we were met at the airport by Ms. Cao Jingru, Deputy Director of the Religious Affairs Bureau. Her greeting was charming: "Beijing's weather has become warm, and Spring is in the air," she said, "It is a sign of a special welcome for you." She was later to accompany us on our visit to Shanghai, and she and her assistants were tireless in their efforts on our behalf.



Vice-mayor Ye Gongqi and other government officials in Shanghai host a banquet for our delegation.

While in Beijing and Shanghai we had many opportunities to meet with high government officials. The Director of the National Bureau of Religious Affairs, Mr. Ren Wuzhi, impressed us with his scholar's grasp of complicated material and lucid explanations in response to our questions. We also met with

Mr. Jiang Ping, Deputy Director of Party Central's United Front Department, and Mr. Ji Pengfei, Director of the Office of Hong Kong-Macao Affairs. Dr. Yang Zengnian, who is a medical doctor and professor of medicine as well as Director of the Shanghai Bureau of Religious Affairs, came personally to the airport to welcome us and see us off, and, because of his close friendship with Catholic leaders in that city, he was a key person in making our visits with them so mutually fruitful and satisfying. It was to Mr. Wang Hongkui, Deputy Director of Religious Affairs in Shanghai and Mr. Qiu Linpu, the Bureau's Officer in charge of external relations that we made our request to visit Bishop Gong Pinmei, still a prisoner there. They were both courteous and sympathetic and did their best to bring our request to the attention of the proper government officials on the higher levels of authority. While in Shanghai we also met with the Deputy Mayor, Mr. Ye Gongqi. Of course, both in Beijing and Shanghai we also were able to visit with bishops and members of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association.

The leaders of the Association gave us a warm welcome. We ate and prayed together, and the quality of our many exchanges was friendly and frank. It was while we were sharing pastoral experiences with the clergy in Nantang that a group of about twenty Christians after making a retreat there caught sight of the Bishop. Surrounding him, they knelt to kiss his ring and with tears in their eyes asked for his blessing. As he gave it, I saw that the bishop was also in tears. A similar incident took place in Sheshan, inside Our Lady's Chapel there. Both incidents left an unforgettable impression.



Bishop Fu Tieshan

Wherever we went we were surrounded by swarms of media people. Unaccustomed to such attention, we found them somewhat overwhelming. Their relentless pursuit of the 'story' was frightening at times, but fear gave way to admiration for their enthusiasm to get their stories out quickly and effectively. When Bishop Wu met with Ji Pengfei, all of China was able to see it on Chinese television that evening.

In our meetings with national leaders, they stressed the contents of the Sino-British Declaration on Hong Kong. They pointed out that after 1997, on the principle of the "one country, two systems" policy, the Hong Kong church will be able to continue to grow in its present pattern. China's government has no intention of interfering in Hong Kong's affairs. Any changes, should they take place, will be for the better, we were assured. The Hong Kong Catholic diocese will continue to manage its own affairs and continue to maintain relations with international and Taiwan religious groups. Under the principle of "non-subordination, non-interference and mutual respect," religious organizations inside and outside of China are encouraged to continue to maintain and develop their contacts with each other.

When officials asked Bishop Wu whether he had any further concerns regarding religion in Hong Kong after 1997, the Bishop replied:

*Freedom of religious belief and activity in Hong Kong and the Hong Kong church's existing relations with China and the outside world have already been guaranteed in the 'Joint Declaration.' However, we feel that respect and protection for religion should also be written into the basic law. I have already given my opinion regarding the Declaration, which is that we shall continue the spirit of service we have been known for in the past, and continue to do our best to promote the integral development of Hong Kong society. We did not come to Beijing for the purpose of fighting for or obtaining the guaranteed protection of the rights and privileges of the Hong Kong Catholic Church, nor merely to set the minds of Hong Kong church members at ease about the future. Rather, we want to demonstrate*



our mission as a 'servant church': we do not seek to be served by others, but to offer ourselves in service to others. As the Catholic bishop of a diocese and as a member of the world-wide college of Catholic bishops, I would like to enquire further about three matters: First, regarding the great task of the reunification of the motherland, what bridge-role can the Hong Kong Catholic Church play? How can we make more foreign friends for China and increase her international reputation? Second, faced with a changing situation in Hong Kong, besides present work what further contribution can the Hong Kong Catholic Church make to promote the integral development of society as a whole (including its material, spiritual and religious aspects)? And third, under the principle of the "three mutualities," how can we increase contacts between Catholics inside and outside of China? And within our present relationship, and in communion with the universal Catholic church, how can we best work in building a better society for the benefit of all of mankind?

Bishop Wu's words were warmly received by the government officials. Shaking his hand everyone of them said enthusiastically: "Bishop, you show a great love of country and the people. The problems you raise are quite comprehensive, and your questions are very much to the point. They are worthy of our thoughtful consideration. We will certainly give much time and careful attention to them in the coming days."

Many other topics surfaced during our visit that are worth mentioning here. Let me address one or two of the more important ones. Since our exchanges were not in the nature of formal negotiations and there was neither note taking nor taping at the time, I am relying on my memory here.

The issue of the relationship between Catholic foreign missionaries and the local Catholic church came up while talking in Beijing with Bishop Zong Huaide, chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, and other leaders of this organization, as well as with Mr. Yang Zengnian, director of the Shanghai Bureau of Religious Affairs. The

question was asked of Bishop Wu by one of our hosts about the activities and writings of some China missionaries both inside and outside of China during the 1950's. These were alleged to have caused harm to the national feelings of the Chinese people. Bishop Wu's response was that we should look at the present and to the future. He pointed out that during the past thirty years the relationships between foreign missionaries and the local church has undergone great changes.



In front of Matteo Ricci's grave in Beijing From L to R: Dr. John Chan, Ms. Joyce Chang, Bishop Wu, Fr. Michael Yeung, Fr. John Tong and Mr. Wu Lianzi, member of the staff, New China News Agency, Hong Kong

Speaking from his own experience, Bishop Wu said that from 1957 to 1975, he worked in the Xinzhu diocese of Taiwan, which is under the administration of Bishop Peter Tou. At that time, because the diocese's own personnel and other resources were insufficient to meet diocesan needs, the bishop divided the diocese into three sub-sections or deaneries. One became the responsibility of the Jesuits, another the Franciscans, and another the Maryknoll Fathers. This was one model for local-foreign missionary relationships.

In the mid-1970's, when he was selected to become the bishop of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese, Bishop Wu found he had many foreign missionaries working under him. The missionaries worked under contract with the diocese and administered some individual parishes in the diocese. The contracts

had time limits written into them, some for longer, and some for shorter periods. When contracts expired, missionary orders returned the parish to the diocese. This is second model developing, often, out of the first.

Now in the 80's missionary orders have given way to local churches in assuming its proper responsibility. They no longer wish to take direct responsibility for administering even parishes, but desire only to serve as assistants to local pastors as needed. The missionary societies prefer to place themselves at the disposal of local bishops. Whatever assignment the bishop gives them, they are willing to cooperate to the best of their ability. They are even willing to work with other religious communities within the same institution. This is the third and presently more common model.

In present day ecclesiology and missiology, mission is seen as a "two-way street". Foreign missionaries realize that they not only "give" but they also "receive". Therefore, after working in a mission territory for a number of years, they return to their order's headquarters in their native country where they share their cross-cultural experiences with their fellow countrymen and with their religious brothers and sisters. In this way, their native culture is enriched and their religious order receives inspiration.

Another sensitive issue, always in the background of any discussion, but seldom raised, was the possibility of dialogue between China and the Vatican. Chinese officials and Bishop Wu did exchange some opinions about this topic, and though not much was said, the exchange was meaningful.

Bishop Wu briefly but frankly pointed out that to engage in dialogue does not mean one side be required to abandon principles. On the contrary, it is because each side's viewpoint is different that dialogue becomes necessary. Nor does dialogue mean that the parties involved must arrive at a position pre-judged before the dialogue begins. To set certain conditions that must be fulfilled before one is even willing to dialogue, is not a method used to date in any kind of fruitful international negotiations. Such a stance, on face value, may be judged to lack sincerity, and could also result in one's views not being taken too seriously



in international circles. As for how and when a dialogue between China and the Vatican might take place, that is for the two sides to work out between themselves. Any frank and direct dialogue is bound to lead to better mutual understanding, a lessening of unnecessary misunderstanding, and will work to everyone's advantage. Leaders, hearing these words of Bishop Wu, replied that they would re-examine this question further.

During a discussion with members of the Catholic Patriotic Association, Bishop Wu mentioned that the name of the organization itself was somewhat misleading. He said that many people outside China have some difficulty accepting the term "Patriotic Association", for it seems to imply that only those who belong to the Catholic Patriotic Association can be rightfully called patriotic and that other Chinese Catholics are not. Also, it is said that if the object of the Catholic Patriotic Association is to help its members to love their country and their church, why does the name only state love of country and not also love of church? This can give rise to unnecessary misunderstandings.

Members of the Association answered that the historical background of the 'Patriotic Association, is that period during the 1950's when Chinese Catholics were not permitted to love the new socialist China. Some Catholics organized the Catholic Patriotic Association in order to show that Christians can really love their country and can participate in its socialist reconstruction, they said. Then they described for us the present day activities of the Association.

Bishop Wu responded with a question: "If the present role of the patriotic Association in China is like that, then it is similar to the Council of Laity in our Hong Kong diocese, the Association of the Lay Apostolate in Taiwan, or the former Catholic Action groups in China, and if the object of such an association is to make Catholics aware of their responsibilities to love their country and their church, to honor God and love their fellow man, which is an unshirkable responsibility given by God, why not then indicate this in a more precise name? As the saying goes, 'If one's name is not accurate, then one's words are not fitting.' This can mislead people and bring harm to your cause."

After visiting the office of the Patriotic Association in Beijing and talking with the bishops there, Bishop Wu took a tour of the national seminary, St. Joseph's, which is located on the same grounds. He made the following brief address to the seminarians:



Bishop Wu speaking to the students of St. Joseph's Seminary, Beijing

*Over thirty years ago I was in the seminary in Meixian, Guangdong Province. Its name was also St. Joseph's. We Catholics have a special love for St. Joseph. His feast is celebrated on March 19 and the seminary's patron is also China's patron saint. It was on March 19 that our friends at the Xinhua News Agency in Hong Kong treated us to a send-off dinner and that pleased me greatly. We all know that it was Jacob's son Joseph who in the Old Testament helped the king of Egypt to solve national problems, and helped his brothers to solve their problems of livelihood. In the New Testament, Joseph was the head of the Holy Family. He courageously and to the best of his ability took care of Mary and Jesus. The Holy Family is a microcosm of the church today.*

*So, let us "Go to Joseph", and following his example, love the church, and be steadfast in the midst of difficulties.*

During Bishop Wu's pilgrimage to the Basilica of Our Lady at Sheshan near Shanghai, after lunch, Bishop Jin Luxian, the rector of the seminary located on the mid-level of the same mountain, escorted him on a tour of the seminary. Bishop Wu spoke to the upper, intermediate and lower classes of seminarians. He encouraged the intermediate class to follow the example of the Apostle John pointing out that St. John was blessed with special gifts by God. He not only loved Jesus and the Blessed Mother with his whole heart, he also wrote the Fourth Gospel and the Epistles, which are rich in theological content. "You also are especially blessed by God", he said to the young men. "Your seminary is located below the Basilica of Our Blessed Lady, and so you are growing up in the bosom of the Blessed Mother. I wish you good health and success in your studies."

Afterwards, Bishop Wu was taken to visit the first year class of seminarians. Addressing them, he said that the sight of so many seminarians in their seminary gave him great comfort. Bishop Wu told them that as young people they have great potential, and, in the spirit of bearing the Cross, they should become pillars in the church of the future as well as in society. Not only must they help the motherland accomplish the four modernizations, but also to be transformed by Christ. "When the road is heavy and the road long, let us all pull together".

Lastly, Bishop Wu spoke to the upper class, which is made up of six seminarians who are more advanced in years (one is already 62). They had already received either the diaconate or the order of acolyte. Bishop Wu related to them some facts about the lives of Msgr. Charles Vath and Bishop Francis Xu of the Hong Kong diocese. Both had lived in Shanghai and had already achieved some success in their secular professions. At middle age they decided to become priests, and went to study at the Beda College in Rome where they were eventually ordained. Later, Msgr. Vath became the founder of Caritas in Hong Kong, and Bishop Xu became the first Chinese bishop of Hong Kong. "Thus, it is never too late to offer up one's life and to become involved in pastoral work", Bishop Wu concluded.

As previously noted, Bishop Wu had hoped to visit Bishop Gong Pinmei while in Shanghai. Bishop Wu first made the request a month before his trip through the New China News Agency in Hong Kong. Recognizing the sensitive nature of his request, since Bishop Gong remains a prisoner in Shanghai, he carefully outlined his reasons. It was meant as a fraternal visit to a Christian brother. It made no judgment regarding the rightness or wrongness of the sentence. Actually, this kind of a visit to those in prison, which makes no note of the sentence, is commonplace throughout the world. The Bishop himself visits the prisons in Hong Kong at least once a year to give his greetings and blessings, irregardless of the prisoners' race, religion or reasons for incarceration. If the concerned authorities felt it to be inconvenient that the whole party enter the prison, then he could go by himself in the company of someone selected for the task. His visit would be of short duration, and the gesture, he felt, would also help to enhance China's international reputation and prestige. He assured officials that his reasons were not of a personal nature, for he and Bishop Gong had no family ties other than being fellow Christians.

When Bishop Wu repeated his request to the Religious Affairs Bureau in Shanghai, Mr. Wang Hongkui and Mr. Qiu Linpu commended his frankness and said that they understood his feelings. They explained, however, that such a decision lay outside the Bureau's authority, and they hoped that should the request be denied, it would not dampen his feelings of friendship for China. On the evening of our third and last day in Shanghai, Mr. Wang informed the bishop that the proper authorities considered it "inappropriate at this time" to visit Bishop Gong. Mr. Wang added that he sincerely hoped the Bishop would be understanding of the situation.

What can be said by way of summary about this historic journey? Certainly the trip made a deep impression not only on Bishop Wu but on all the members of our party. As Chinese we were indeed pleased and gratified to observe our country's steady progress in opening itself to the outside world. We felt honoured by the sincerity and warmth of our reception, and delighted to make so many new friends, especially among the bishops, priests, and members of the Catholic Patriotic Association. It was great opportunity for us to pray with

them and exchange views about recent developments in the universal Church.

On the day after our arrival in Beijing, Bishop Wu celebrated his 60th birthday. As our party gathered in his room to note the occasion, along with our birthday card, we presented him with a gift of two pairs of socks. When making the presentation I remember saying to him in a jesting way: "Bishop, this gift is a small token whose great significance can be found in the saying of Lao Zi: 'The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.'" God, in His merciful goodness, has written a new chapter in the history of the Church in Hong Kong. Let us praise, honour and thank Him for this blessing.

### Brief Outline of Life of Bishop Gong Pinmei

Born: August 2, 1901

1935 - Parish Priest in Zhangjialou

September 9, 1949 - Appointed bishop of Suzhou

October 7, 1949 - Consecrated bishop

July 15, 1950 - Appointed Bishop of Diocese of Shanghai

December 8, 1950 - Bishop Gong rejects the Three-Self Movement

September 18, 1951 - Government bans the Legion of Mary

November 16, 1951 - Appointed also to administer dioceses of Nanjing and Suzhou

September 8, 1955 - Bishop Gong arrested along with 27 priests and 300 Catholics. According to September 9, 1955 edition of Xinwen Daily, charges against Bishop Gong were: supporting the Legion of Mary, excommunicating Catholics belonging to the Patriotic Association, and rejecting the Patriotic Association.

March 17, 1960 - Bishop Gong sentenced to life imprisonment.