

FOLLOWING THE FOOTSTEPS OF RICCI

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"Our visit has been a kind of pilgrimage, following in the footsteps of Matteo Ricci." Bishop F. Carboni was commenting on his recent tour of China in the company of twenty compatriots. Msgr. Carboni is the Bishop of Macerata, birthplace of Ricci. Among the tour members, all of whom come from the Marche region of central Italy, was the Archbishop of Fermo, C. Bellucci, the Bishop of Montalto, G. Chiaretti, and a number of teachers and other professional people. The tour passed through Guangzhou, Nanjing, and Beijing, where Ricci had worked at some time during his missionary career, and it arrived at his burial place where members paid their respects to one of their most illustrious countrymen. It was Ricci who had reintroduced Christianity into China just over four hundred years ago, and he is still honoured there today not only as a great scholar but also as a genuine friend of the Chinese people.



*Archbp. Bellucci with
the director of the
Special No.2 Middle
School in Wuhan City*

The tour also had another objective. The people of Montalto diocese had asked Bishop Chiaretti to visit the tomb of a Franciscan missionary who died in Taiyuan (Shanxi) and had been raised to the ranks of the Blessed by Pope Pius XII in 1954. Although this young Italian Sister died 80 years ago, after spending only a year in China, the visitors were surprised to find that devotion to her memory was still alive among the Catholic communities of that remote province. Her tomb has been preserved in a village outside the city, although the whole Catholic cemetery had been levelled during the Cultural Revolution.

Other cities included in the tour were Wuhan, Xian and Shanghai, and everywhere the delegation had ample opportunities to visit Catholic churches as well as Buddhist temples and Muslim mosques, where much of the discussion related to the implementation of China's present religious policy. While visiting Union Theological Seminary in Nanjing, tour-members were given many insights into the formation programmes now being implemented in the local Protestant communities. From Shanghai they went on to Sheshan Hill, where they celebrated Mass in the Basilica of Our Lady and where they were also able to visit Sheshan Catholic seminary. The group, touring as a Catholic good-will delegation comprising both clerics and lay people, was warmly received everywhere. At each point, gifts were exchanged as expressions of a common desire to extend areas of communication and mutual understanding. During their last day in China, a dinner was given at the Zikawei Cathedral in their honour.

One of the more interesting cultural exchanges for the group took place at the Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing where members met with the director of the Christianity Section of the Institute of Research on World Religions, Prof. Gao Wangzhi. While Prof. Gao explained the work and progress of his Institute, Prof. Gianni Ambrosio, a teacher of Sociology of Religion at the Milan Catholic University, outlined present trends in religious studies in the West. A valuable set of books, Fonti Ricciane, written by Matteo Ricci in Italian was then presented to the Beijing National Library. While in Shanghai, they also met with the Secretary of the New Research Section on Religion at Fudan University.