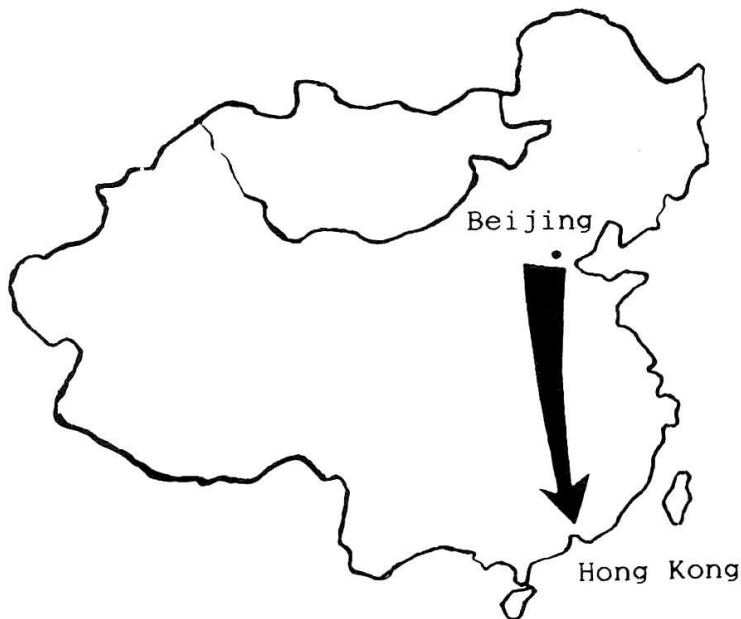


REN WUZH IN HONG KONG



by Peter Barry

Mr. Ren Wuzhi, Director of China's Bureau of Religious Affairs, accompanied by three other members of the Bureau, visited Hong Kong from April 1st to 10th at the invitation of the leaders of Hong Kong's six major religions (Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Confucianism, Protestantism and Catholicism). It was Director Ren's first visit and also the first time one of the Bureau's directors had come from China to Hong Kong to observe first-hand the religious developments that have taken place here since 1949.

Upon arrival at the airport, Director Ren said that the purpose of his trip was to renew acquaintances with the local religious leaders who had visited Beijing in recent years, and also to make new friends. Mr. Ren said that he hoped this visit would increase his knowledge and understanding of Hong Kong's religions.

Other members of the RAB delegation were a department chief, Ms. Liu Yide, and deputy chiefs Mr. Duan Qiming and Mr. Shuai Feng.

Before leaving Beijing, Mr. Ren gave an interview to a reporter from Hong Kong's Wen Hui Bao. One of the questions raised during the interview was about Bishop Wu's being refused permission to say Mass publicly during his

visit to Guangdong Province in January. Director Ren replied that he was unfamiliar with the details of the incident and, therefore, he could give no opinion on the matter. However, he did say that China is such a large country that the implementation of China's religious policy might differ from place to place. One incident cannot represent an entire religious policy, Mr. Ren added, nor should one conclude from it that the policy of religious freedom has been changed.

During their ten-day visit the RAB delegation visited places of worship, schools, hospitals and social centres run by the different religions. Each religion hosted the delegation on a different day. On April 4, the Catholics took Director Ren and his party on a tour of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, the Diocesan Centre, Caritas offices, the Caritas Medical Centre and the Home of Love run by Mother Theresa's Missionary Sisters of Charity.

In his address at a banquet welcoming the RAB dele-



Director Ren (R) Visiting Caritas Printing training Centre

gation on the evening of April 4, Bishop Wu compared China's recent opening up to the outside world to the opening up of the Catholic Church in the past 20 years after the Second Vatican Council. Bishop Wu pointed out that just as China adopted a new Constitution in 1982, so, too, the Catholic Church promulgated a new Canon Law in 1983, and this shows that both bodies realize the need to adapt to the times. In his conclusion, Bishop Wu expressed the opinion that as China's religious policy is more fully implemented and as more imprisoned clergy and lay persons are released, people overseas will more readily understand China's overall progress in this area and her reputation will thus be enhanced.

Two days earlier, Ren Wuzhi had answered questions put to him by about 20 Protestant pastors at a seminar lasting over an hour at the Kowloon Methodist Church. At that meeting, Director Ren assured the pastors that China will follow the principle of mutual non-interference in regard to religious affairs in Hong Kong after 1997. Programs now being carried out by Hong Kong religious bodies will be allowed to continue, he said, and religious matters will be spelled out more concretely in the Basic Law, which will serve as the guide for Hong Kong affairs after 1997. Director Ren added that since both the drafting and consultative committees for the Basic Law have representatives from religious bodies as members, he is certain that the Basic Law will be written in accordance with their wishes.

Other responses to questions raised at this meeting were significant for Hong Kong's future religious development when the colony reverts back to China in 1997. Regarding foreign missionaries being invited to serve in Hong Kong churches after 1997, Director Ren said that each church could decide this for itself. When asked about teaching religious doctrine to youth under the age of 18 years, Director Ren said that the Chinese Constitution does not prohibit such teaching, so Hong Kong can continue to do what it is now doing in this area. With regard to exchanges between Chinese and Hong Kong seminaries, Ren Wuzhi replied that visits and the exchange of materials could continue to take place, but, in accordance with the principle of mutual non-interference, the exchange of seminary professors could not take place at the present time. When he was asked if there will be a mutual influence in the area of religious

freedom on Hong Kong and mainland churches, since the term does not have the same meaning in both places, Director Ren replied that he thought there would be such an influence and that it could only improve relations between religions on both sides of the border. When asked if Hong Kong religious groups would be allowed to continue to maintain their relations with their Taiwan counterparts after 1997, Director Ren replied that the principle of mutual non-interference would be applied to this issue.

The contents of a two hour colloquium held on April 9, the last day before the delegation's departure, remain confidential and were not made public. The colloquium was attended by representatives of all Hong Kong's religions. Attending for the Catholics were Bishop Wu, Fr. Edward Hong, diocesan procurator, Fr. Louis Ha, editor of the Catholic newspaper Kung Kao Po and Fr. John Tong, Director of Holy Spirit Study Centre.

On the evening of April 9 at the cocktail party marking the official end of his visit, Director Ren declared that during the visit he had increased his understanding of Hong Kong's religious situation and deepened his friendship with Hong Kong's religious representatives; thus he felt he had achieved the purpose of his trip. In his final speech, Director Ren reaffirmed that after 1997 the current circumstances of Hong Kong religions would remain unchanged and that relations with mainland religious bodies could continue to develop on the basis of the principles of non-subordination, non-interference and mutual respect.

Ren Wuzhi also acknowledged the desire of Hong Kong's religious leaders to assist China in her efforts to become a strong and modern nation. He praised the educational, medical and social works of Hong Kong's religious groups, saying that they contribute much to Hong Kong's stability and prosperity. Director Ren also reiterated that Hong Kong's religious bodies could continue to administer their schools, hospitals and other social programs after 1997, and that they could continue to maintain relations with religious groups abroad.

Asked by a newspaper reporter about China's relations with the Vatican, Director Ren replied that the Hong Kong

Catholic Church could continue to maintain relations with the Vatican after 1997, but as for China herself, there were still many problems to be resolved before the matter of relations with the Vatican could be taken up. Questioned about whether the present government subvention to religious-run institutions such as schools, hospitals and social programs would continue after 1997, Mr. Ren replied that the matter would have to be discussed during meetings of the Basic Law Drafting Committee.

The Religious Affairs Bureau Delegation returned to China on April 10.

FORMAL ADDRESS OF BISHOP WU

On April 4th, Bishop John B. Wu played host to the visiting delegation from China's National Bureau of Religious Affairs, which was headed by Director Ren Wuzhi. During the reception banquet, the Bishop gave the following welcoming address.

Director Ren and Distinguished Visitors and Guests,

Your presence here tonight brings to mind my own visit to China in March of 1985. It was at your kind invitation that I and the five Catholics in our delegation went to Beijing and Shanghai for the purpose of further developing better communication and understanding among us. Your warm reception on that occasion made me feel quite honoured. And now you have come to Hong Kong on your first official visit, having graciously accepted the invitation extended to you by the representatives of Hong Kong's six major religions. Today you were able to visit some of our Catholic institutions, and the opportunity you availed us to exchange and share ideas and opinions has been for us most valuable. As host this evening, I have also invited representatives from among our Catholics to be with us that this humble meal may serve as a sign of our mutual friendship.

It was the Third Plenum of the CCP's 11th Central Committee that launched China on a new policy of openness to the world at-large. It legislated large-scale reforms, promoting the four modernizations and opening the door to