

## *John Paul II Speaks to Taiwan Bishops' Conference*

*Editor's Note: When Pope John Paul II met with the Taiwan bishops recently for their ad limina visit, he spoke to them, first of all, about their own pastoral concerns and needs at home. He urged them to seek greater unity and understanding among themselves and thus "to bear vigorous witness of faith and communion" for communion "is enriched by the diversity of peoples and cultures who through their baptism are incorporated in Christ."*

*He specified and enlarged on two priorities of their episcopal ministry: the spiritual renewal of their particular churches and the task of evangelization and missionary expansion. This spiritual renewal must be deeply rooted in Vatican II and maximize the characteristic virtues of Asian spirituality (Bandung, 1990): "meekness and humility, a deep sense of harmony, intimate communion with God, docility to the Spirit."*

*Having spoken at some length on the challenges facing the Taiwan bishops, the Holy Father, directs his message beyond Taiwan to "the entire great Chinese family."*

*The Holy Father's entire message was published in English in the 16/12/90 Italian edition of L'Osservatore Romano. We reprint here only sections 6 and 7 which relate directly to the Church in mainland China.*

Dear brother Bishops, your visit to the See of Peter makes me think with great affection also of *the beloved Catholic community on the Mainland*. In your presence, how can I not be deeply moved to thank God for the shining example offered by Bishops, priests, religious and lay men and women during these years? How can I not be filled with joy at the continuing and ever more frequent reports of loyal communion which come from the leaders and members of those communities, who are always mindful of the Pope in their prayers?

These reports speak of the spreading of the Gospel through *the hidden and unceasing apostolate of many generous Catholics*, of the re-opening of churches, seminaries and houses of formation for young people wishing to follow a life of consecration, and of a flourishing of activities at the service of the entire community. Together, let us praise the Lord for all that has been done with a loyal heart and in fidelity to Christ and his Church. It is he who

supports, encourages and increases the witness of the faithful, and who surprises us with the never-ending gifts of his grace. I am aware that in this initial blossoming of pastoral life the help of the Churches over which you preside is not lacking. Speaking as it were in the name of the recipients of such fraternal assistance, I wish to thank you for all that you are doing for those who are one with you not only in the faith but also by origin.

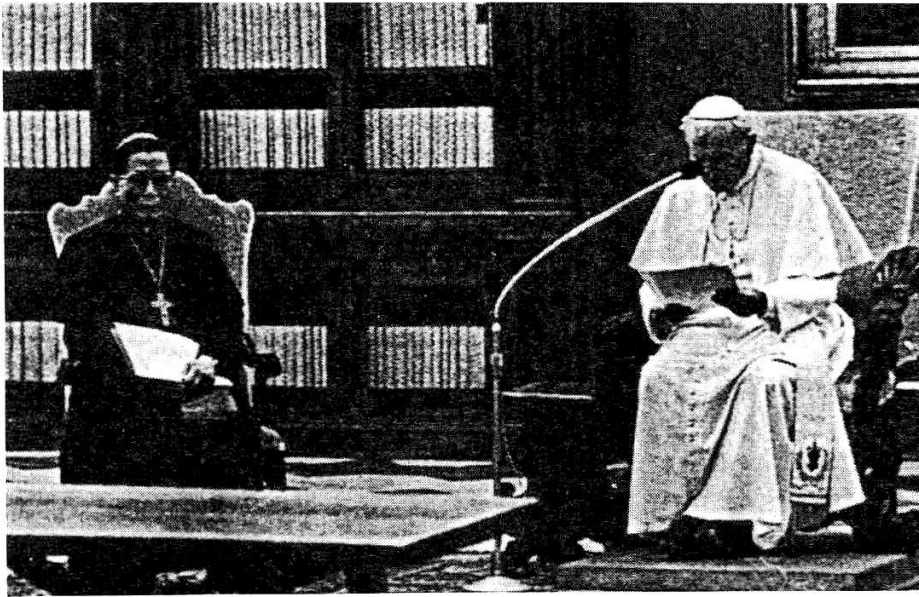
At the same time there are reports that sadden my heart as Shepherd of the universal Church. The arrests of Bishops, priests and members of the laity, and various other difficulties, lead one to think that, in spite of some positive signs, there is a long way to go before the beloved Catholic community on the Mainland can give *full and open expression to its faith and to its ecclesial communion with the Successor of Peter and the Catholic Church spread throughout the world.*

Close to the tomb of the Apostle Peter, whom the Lord chose as guarantor of the Church's faith and unity. I feel bound to make *a strong and earnest appeal for unity.* This call is directed to you who are here present, but also to all those who have generously and loyally accepted the Word who gives life. The text from the Prophet Isaiah which we read in the Eucharistic celebration of last Sunday is an invitation to us to persevere in hope (cf. Is 40:3-5). It reminds us that at Christmas the glory of the Lord will be made manifest and that "he is like a shepherd feeding his flock gathering lambs in his arms, holding them against his breast" (v. 11). The Lord expects us to cooperate in this coming by preparing a way in the wilderness (cf. v. 3). Yes, Brothers, the unity of the Church, including that of the Catholic community on the Mainland, is the fruit of the Lord's infinite mercy. But it also requires the humble, hidden and generous contribution of all concerned. As we prepare for Christmas, let our prayer to the Father be ever more fervent, that the Divine Child's gift to the Church on the Mainland may be the gift of unity.

In our prayer, how can we forget that the path which leads to true unity is the effort of every Chinese believer on behalf of ecclesial reconciliation? A reconciliation, certainly, which must be built on the foundation of the truth of the unrenounceable principles of the Catholic faith, but which must be sustained by understanding, goodwill, forgiveness and the dedication of all to the cause of spreading the kingdom of God.

I urge you to be spokesmen of this desire of the Successor of Peter; be untiring and patient builders of reconciliation among the brethren on the Mainland! Tell them that the Pope bears them in his heart and that *his prayer is constantly, daily, raised for them to the Giver of all good things and to the Blessed Virgin Mary.*

When you return to your Dioceses, take my blessing to your brothers and sisters, and remind them of the glorious heritage that is theirs as followers of Christ and as sons and daughters of the beloved Chinese family. "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may (you) be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it" (Th 5:23-24).



*Pope John Paul II and Bishop Paul Shan, President of Regional Bishops' Conference, Taiwan.*



*Taiwan Bishops with Holy Father during ad limina visit.*