

Editorial

Pastoral Concerns: Focus of Cardinal Wu's China Visit

His Eminence John Baptist Cardinal Wu, led a seven member delegation to Beijing, Wuhan and Xi'an from the 10th to the 17th of November, at the invitation of Mr. Zhang Sheng-zuo, Director of the Religious Affairs Bureau of the State Council. This was Cardinal Wu's third trip to China within the past ten years, but his first since being created a cardinal. The invitation and the trip aroused the interest of people inside and outside of the church. The mass media, placing high expectations on the visit, vied with one another to report the story.

The purposes of the trip were carefully delineated before the group left for China. They were: to obtain a deeper knowledge of the situation within China, to promote a friendly interchange, and to foster mutual understanding. Yet, Cardinal Wu specifically selected the rector of Holy Spirit Seminary, and the Dean of the Theology Division of the Holy Spirit Seminary College as two of the six people who would accompany him - one third of the delegation. In a press release given by the diocesan spokesman, prior to leaving for China, it was clearly stated that the delegation would visit seminaries and convents in all three cities. The media took this to indicate that the trip would emphasize the pastoral dimension of the church.

Since the invitation was issued by the Director of the Religious Affairs Bureau of the State Council, a visit to Beijing was a must. Meetings with national leaders also generally take place in Beijing.

Coincidentally, this year is the 700th anniversary of an event being commemorated in many places around the world: the arrival of the first missionary to China, John of Montecorvino, the first Archbishop of Beijing. Recently, in his letter to Cardinal Tomko, the head of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, the Holy Father expressed admiration for that great pioneer missionary. He took advantage of the occasion to give his greetings to and express his deep personal concern, and respect for all members of the Catholic Church in China today.

The documents left by Montecorvino, as well as those who came to China in his era, clearly reveal that Montecorvino, while making untiring efforts to have the Catholic Church take root in China by building churches, establishing Christian communities, and devoting special attention to the formation of religious successors, kept in continual contact with the center of the Universal Church. It is, therefore, not at all strange that, when Cardinal Wu spoke to the teachers and students in Beijing's seminary and convent, he encouraged and exhorted them to continue the work which Montecorvino had begun before he died. He exhorted them to help build up the faith, to promote good will, to seek truth, and to deepen their union with the Universal Church day by day and to show in this way that they are both true Catholics and true Chinese. When the Cardinal and the delegation were about to leave the convent in Beijing, the Sisters sang, "Shalom, My Friends". The Cardinal was indeed pleased with the message of this farewell song. The Cardinal and the group felt that everywhere they visited in Beijing, they were given a very warm reception.

The next stop was Wuhan, one of China's cultural, industrial, economic and transport hubs. It is also a place of heroes. It was in Wuhan, in the district of Wuchang, that Sun Zhongshan [Sun Yat-sen], the Father of China, began the revolution that succeeded in overthrowing the Qing Dynasty and in establishing a democratic form of government. It was here also that the preparatory meeting for the first Chinese Bishops' Conference was held, thus beginning a new chapter in China's Catholic Church history.

In recent years, the churches of Wuhan and Hong Kong have been in frequent contact and have established strong ties of friendship. Three years ago, when disastrous floods inundated Hubei Province, Caritas Hong Kong together with other church organizations and individual Chinese Catholics organized a special fund-raising campaign effectively demonstrating that blood is thicker than water.

The South-Central Seminary in Wuchang has made plans with Holy Spirit Seminary and with other organizations in Hong Kong to exchange teachers for mutual help in training students. In speaking to the seminarians and Sisters there, Cardinal Wu expressed his deep hope that such exchanges and friendship would increase and serve as a model for the church in other

parts of China.

The last stop was Xian, formerly called Changan, the capital city of eleven dynasties, steeped in an atmosphere of ancient culture, with a vast store of ancestral wisdom. The Nestorians came here from the far west along the Silk Road during the Tang Dynasty, and sowed the first seeds of Christianity in China. In the process of its inculturation the Nestorian Church failed to retain its distinct original religious identity and, consequently, gradually disappeared. Mindful of this Nestorian history, Cardinal Wu, in speaking with leaders in Xian both inside and outside the church, stated that the past always gives way to the future. He said he was fortunate to be able to see these historical relics which remind us that there are lessons to be learned from past mistakes. Such lessons can be effective in promoting the spirit of Vatican II and help in the inculturation of the church while carefully preserving the special marks of the Catholic Church: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic.

It is encouraging to note that vocations are flourishing in the Xian area. In the past two years, also, and to their mutual enrichment, there has been a steady exchange of visiting teachers between the seminary in Xian and the seminary in Hong Kong. Cardinal Wu expressed his hope that this kind of interchange and friendship may continually deepen and expand, energizing the churches in both places to fulfill their mission of glorifying God and serving people with love and thus making the church a blessing to society, the nation and the whole human race.

Every time Cardinal Wu visited a religious house, whether a seminary or convent, he always quoted Matthew 20:28 to encourage and exhort his listeners to imitate Jesus, who "did not come to be served but to serve", even to the point of sacrificing his life. The Cardinal gave everyone a small, delicate crucifix as a souvenir and gift. Both students and teachers were obviously deeply moved as they listened to the Cardinal speak. Some even wept quietly. Even the Cardinal, at times found it difficult to suppress his tears.

Pastoral concern is of prime importance in the church and among its ministers. This was especially evident during Cardinal Wu's visit to mainland China. Unfortunately, the mass media, always eager for the sensational, issued ill-founded reports on the question of Sino-Vatican relations, chasing shadows, writing

articles and sounding false alarms.

It should be noted that the Lord Jesus established the apostolic college with Peter as its leader and his successors to direct and shepherd his flock. The Vatican, on the other hand, originated in a donation of land by an ancient emperor. After passing through a long and complex history in the Middle Ages, the Vatican became a state with the Pope having worldly power. When Rome was occupied during the Italian Revolution of 1870, the Pope's temporal power came to an end. In 1929 the Vatican Secretary of State and the Prime Minister of Italy, respectively representing the Pope and the King of Italy, signed the Lateran Treaty which enabled the Pope to retain a piece of land so minuscule that it could hardly have been any smaller. This was given him only for the sake of exercising his spiritual power, for the spiritual benefit of humanity, and to allow him to be free from interference by the outside world.

It is interesting to note that some nations in today's world, such as the United States of America, have only recently established diplomatic relations with the Vatican. Yet relationships between the United States and the Catholic Church have for a long time been quite harmonious and the Church there has grown rapidly. From this we can see that establishing diplomatic relations is not the only way of having dealings with the Catholic Church, nor is it a necessary condition for the church to exist.

Cardinal Wu's love and concern goes out to all the Catholics of the Church in China whether they are in the open or the underground church. As circumstances permit, he hopes to be able to express openly his all-embracing pastoral concern. He is also willing to act as an instrument of reconciliation between the two groups.

Upon reflection, we can say that we sincerely believe that Cardinal Wu's trip gave great encouragement to numerous young seminarians, Sisters and to directors of religious formation. Furthermore, this was a landmark visit which enhances the possibility for deeper and on-going exchanges between the Church of Hong Kong and the Church of the Mainland. Let us continue to pray and to work for this!

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John Tong