

## INTRODUCTION

Three events of the past year stand out as particularly noteworthy for the Church in China. During Easter Week, April 5-7, 1994, an international congress was held at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, to study the contribution made to the advancement of cultural exchange between China and Europe by Martino Martini, the celebrated 17th century Jesuit missionary, explorer and scientist. In September, a number of celebrations were held in Taiwan and Hong Kong to mark the 700th anniversary of the arrival of John of Montecorvino in China in 1294. Within ten years of his arrival in China, this zealous Franciscan who became the first archbishop of Beijing and whose pastoral activity stretched out to the whole of the Far East, had built two churches in Beijing and baptized 6000 persons. Cardinal Tomko of the Vatican Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples went to Taiwan specifically for the occasion.

These men came to China to plant the seed of the Gospel among a great people. That seed is still bearing fruit today.

During the major ceremony in Taiwan, on September

25, to honor John of Montecorvino, Cardinal Tomko read a letter written to him by Pope John Paul II. The letter offered congratulations, a papal blessing and his special greetings to the Chinese Church:

*“...I am aware of the thriving growth of many fervent communities in different parts of the country and, in fulfillment of the mission received from Christ of confirming them in faith, in hope and in love (Lk. 22:32), it is my desire to foster among them fidelity, understanding and reconciliation, and to gather them all into the communion which binds us together in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Inviting all the sons and daughters of the Catholic Church in China to live this communion in truth and love (1 Jn. 1:3), my fervent prayer is that it can be manifested in an increasingly visible way. Religious faith and practice is a dynamic source of commitment in the spheres of social and civil responsibility. There can be no opposition or incompatibility between being at one and the same time, truly Catholic and authentically Chinese.”*

Another event of great importance and delight to all who are interested and concerned about the Church in China was the presence in Manila, the Philippines, of twenty young Chinese Catholics (priests, Sisters and lay people) who, with the permission of Beijing and accompanied by four officials of the Religious Affairs Bureau, attended the Tenth World Youth Day celebration from January 10-15, 1995.

On January 12, the Chinese Catholic delegates participated in a Mass in Mandarin celebrated by Archbishop Ti Kang of Taipei in which the Archbishop emphasized, “We should avoid the misunderstandings of the previous generation.” He reminded the young people, “We have the same Father in heaven; our faith comes to us from common predecessors.” According to one Catholic from Taiwan, “The most significant thing [in the Philippines for us] was that we held hands with the Mainlanders while we sang the Our Father and everyone hugged each other at the Kiss of Peace.”

Two days later, on January 14, Pope John Paul II, speaking on Radio Veritas, Asia, on its silver anniversary, exhorted Chinese Catholics to love one another and instructed by Christ, the True Light, to seek a path to unity and reconciliation.

The Pope said, “[You] make present and visible on Chinese soil the Church of Christ, One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic, a community of faith, hope and charity...I am well aware of the difficulties amid which you are called to bear witness to your faith in Christ...have love among yourselves...a love which consists of understanding, respect, forbearance, forgiveness and reconciliation within the Christian community...”

He also added, “Every day I pray for you, asking the

Lord to help you remain united as living members of the one Mystical Body of Christ. Unity is not the result of human policies or hidden and mysterious intentions. Instead, unity springs from conversion of the heart, and from sincere acceptance of the unchanging principles laid down by Christ for his Church.” Finally, he pointed out that, “Particularly important among these principles is the effective communion of all the parts of the Church with her visible foundation: Peter, the Rock.”

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“The Holy Father, The Pope” appears in big characters on a wall in a farming village in north China.

