

## *China Church and News Update*

---

### *China Church News*

#### *Sino-Vatican Relation*

Newspapers during February and March have had almost daily reports on the state of Sino-Vatican Relations.

On February 11, the *Hong Kong Standard* reported that John Paul II's next visit might be on Chinese soil. Hong Kong, was mentioned as a possible site. This announcement followed a story in *30 Giorni* and a statement by Bishop Jin Luxian of Shanghai. A careful reading of the Italian article did not seem to confirm this report.

It has been confirmed that the Holy Father is slated to come to Asia for the implementation of the Asian Synod document. Unconfirmed reports say that India, Hong Kong and Vietnam have been short listed as possible places for his visit, but no venue has yet been chosen.

On February 11, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, the Vatican's Secretary of State, reportedly said that the Vatican would switch its embassy from Taipei to Beijing if the Mainland authorities were willing. Taiwan's Foreign Minister Jason Hu visited the Vatican shortly after. Rumors that his visit was concerned with the announcement were denied by Taiwan saying that the meeting had been planned months previously and that the foreign minister would not be visiting the Pope.

On several occasions Beijing reiterated that it was ready to normalize ties with the Vatican if it abandoned its official recognition of Taiwan. As rumors became more rampant about the possible normalization of Sino-Vatican relations, Beijing flatly denied that it had reached any breakthrough. Tang Jiaxuan, China's foreign minister, said he had heard nothing about John Paul's trip to Hong Kong and heard nothing about any breakthrough in relations with the Vatican. Beijing then reiterated its stance about cutting off relations with Taiwan and added, "the Vatican must also not interfere in Mainland internal affairs including religious activities."

Fearful that the Vatican might switch its ties to Beijing, Taiwan's foreign ministry spokesman Roy Wu said, "There is no sign that the Chinese communists will loosen religious freedom." He

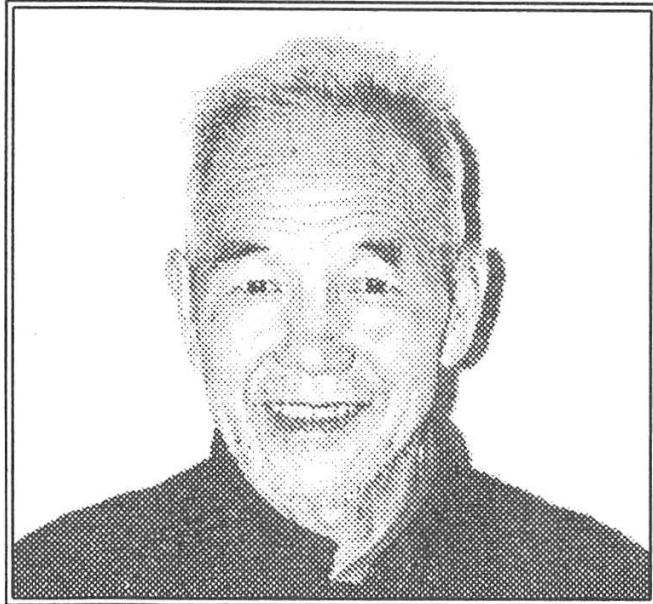
added, "We fear the Vatican's wishful expectations will not benefit religious freedom on Mainland China in any way."

(Taken from various news reports from Feb. 11 to March 24, especially from HKS.)

### ***Bishop Ma Ji dies***

Bishop Philippe Ma Ji, 81, died of heart disease on February 11, 1999.

Bishop Zhang Wenbin of Dali, Shaanxi Province, ordained Ma in 1987 as the open church bishop of Pingliang, Gansu Province. In August of 1988, Ma publicly declared that he was leaving the open church structures.



On the eve of the feast of the Assumption, August 14, 1988, Ma issued *My Statement* in which he criticized the structures of the open church, saying that the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, the Bishops' Conference, the Chinese Catholic Church Administrative Commission were all unacceptable to the faithful.

Ma maintained that high ranking clergy had abandoned some fundamental doctrines of the faith, denied the primacy of the Pope and some, who had given up their celibacy, were still functioning as priests.

On April 27, 1989, Bishop Ma attended a meeting in Beijing with more than 50 bishops, nuns and priests of the open church.

The meeting ended with a resolution calling for the government to return all former church properties, supporting the primacy and authority of the Pope and declaring that all priests who had married should leave their posts.

The government asked him to withdraw his statement. It is not clear if he did, but the bishop remained in the open church.

At his death, Bishop Ma was deputy director of the Gansu provincial Catholic Patriotic Association, and in December 1998, he

was elected director of the provincial Catholic Church Administrative Commission.

Some 500 people attended his funeral on February 14, 1999 (UCAN).

### ***China TV will cover Jubilee events***

The official Vatican television station is working with television stations all over the world, including China television, to arrange for coverage of jubilee events next year.

The event will make use of the latest technologies and viewers will be allowed to interact by via e-mail, Web sites, voice mail and cellular phones.

The China Central TV has already agreed to help in the project. "It was really extraordinary to discover how open the Chinese were towards the project," said Vatican television director, Monsignor Ugo Moretto.

### ***Tea party of religious leaders***

Religious leaders from different faiths—including Buddhists, Taoists, Muslims and Christians got together in Beijing for a tea party.

Fu Tieshan of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association said, "We will work with our countrymen and devote ourselves to society, serve the public to create a better world and help invigorate our nation."

Ye Xiaowen, director of the State Religious Affairs Bureau, said that China's followers must remain patriotic and faithful to their religion.

The United Front Work Department of the Central Committee under the Communist Party (CPC), the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission under the Chinese People's Political Consultative Congress (CPPCC) and the State Religious Affairs Bureau sponsored the tea party.

CPPCC chairman Li Ruihuan praised the contribution of religious groups to national unity, stability and development.

According to the Religious Affairs Bureau, there are more than 100 million followers of various faiths in China (CD, Feb. 12, 1999).

### ***Protestants reports rise in membership***

According to Ding Guangxun, vice-chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and the representative for Protestants in China, the number of Protestants in China has now reached 15 million. The number of Protestant churches has also increased to 12,000 and the number is expected to rise in the next ten years. The 15 million figure includes those already baptized and also other regular churchgoers who have not yet been baptized (CD, March 15, 1999).

### ***Others News***

#### ***Macau Watch***

Portuguese President Jorge Sampaio and Vice-Premier Qian Qichen met in Macau in March to discuss various aspects of the December handover.

Mr. Qian pledged that Beijing's policy on Macau would be "one country, two systems, Macau people ruling Macau, and a high autonomy of self-rule." He added he was confident that Macau could preserve its unique mix of Chinese and Portuguese culture after the handover.

Following the discussions neither side would say whether agreement was reached on other crucial issues, like setting up the Court of Final Appeal, localization of civil service, and details of the handover ceremonies to be held at midnight on 19 December, 1999 (HKS, March 20, 1999).

The Central Military Commission in China said no more than 1,000 soldiers would be stationed in the enclave after it returns to Chinese rule in December. Portugal has objected to China's decision to move soldiers into Macau, maintaining that this was not part of the handover agreement between the two countries (FEER, Feb. 4, 1999).