

## *China's Last Vatican-Appointed Bishop Dies at 92*

**B**ishop Matthias Duan Yinming, the last of the Vatican-appointed bishops in China, died on January 10, 2001, in Wanxian City, Sichuan Province. Bishop Duan would have been 93 years old on February 22, 2001. Duan Yinming was born on February 22, 1908 in Mutou town, Daxian City, Sichuan Province. In the 1930s, he went to Rome to study at the Pontifical Urban University where he obtained a master's degree. He was ordained a priest in Rome on March 27, 1937. When he returned to China the following year, he became the rector of the major seminary in Wanxian. In June of 1949, four months before the Communist takeover, Pope Pius XII appointed him the Bishop of Wanxian. His consecration took place on October 18, 1949. Trouble began brewing soon after. From 1954-1966, he was sent to work in a cotton and battery factory. In 1966, at the onset of the Cultural Revolution, he was sentenced to reform through labor at Chenjiaba. He was released seven years later in 1973, but subjected to continual political education until 1979 when he returned to his hometown. In 1980, he was permitted to resume charge of the Wanxian Diocese.

On October 18, 1997, Bishop Duan left the hospital where he was being treated for heart problems and diabetes in order to



celebrate three very special anniversaries: the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood, the 48<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his consecration as bishop and his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Although the bishop was physically weak, his mind was still very active and alert. Over 1000 Catholics attended the Mass concelebrated by bishops and numerous priests from Sichuan, the surrounding provinces, and from Hong Kong.

For the occasion, the government sponsored a special celebration at the Wanzhou Hotel where Bishop Duan was praised not only for his love of the church, but also for society at large. They noted his solicitude for the poor, especially, those in need of medical care that claimed his special attention. True to his vocation, in his talk Bishop Duan thanked all those who came to the triple celebration. Mindful that his own days were numbered, he urged young priests and Sisters to develop a deep spiritual life through prayer and meditation, and to follow Jesus in a spirit of self-sacrifice, something that he himself had faithfully done throughout his long life.

In 1998, Pope John Paul II invited Bishop Duan and co-adjutor Bishop Joseph Xu Zhixuan to the Vatican to attend the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia. The Chinese government refused to approve their application to leave the country. Bishop Duan, fluent in many languages including Italian, French, English and Latin, sent his regrets to the Holy Father, whom he occasionally contacted through fax or telephone.

In August 2000, Bishop Duan entered the hospital for the last time. His death will leave a void impossible to fill, as he was the last of the 46 Chinese bishops directly appointed by the Vatican before the 1949 Communist takeover.

Thousands viewed Bishop Duan's body the evening before his cremation and funeral on January 15, 2001. He was buried at the crematory of Sacred Heart Church at Longbao, a suburb of Wanxian. Bishop Duan did not live to see a large portion of his cathedral parish submerged in the Three Gorges Dam project. The diocese is now in the hands of the 84-year-old co-adjutor Bishop Joseph Xu Zhixuan.