

WELCOME

ONLY a few of us can hope to have an opportunity of saying words of welcome to our new Bishop. A larger number will express their welcome by their presence in the Cathedral this evening during his Episcopal Ordination. All of us, however, can and should welcome him in our hearts; for welcome is not primarily a matter of words and smiles; it is the gladness aroused in us by the arrival of one who has come to us. Without that inner gladness, greetings and smiles would be valueless.

A considerable number here can offer the Bishop the personal welcome due to a valued friend, the welcome they would have given if he had come here merely as a Father John Baptist Wu. They and all others can offer him the more important welcome due to him as Bishop of Hong Kong. He has come, not as a mere visitor, and not merely as an old friend, but as the leader of the People of God in Hong Kong, sent to us by the Holy Father in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. In this we all have cause for gladness. We are Christ's flock. Our Bishop, our Pastor, has been sent to lead us to green pastures.

The word Pastor, or Shepherd, does not reveal its full meaning to those who remember sheep and shepherds only as they are seen in countries where the shepherd drives his sheep from behind and sends a barking sheepdog to coerce wanderers. The shepherds of Palestine go ahead of the flock. The sheep trust their shepherds and follow them gladly. Our Lord's words make this clear. 'The sheep hear his voice and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.' The shepherd who comes in the name of Christ comes not to drive but to lead. We today are welcoming a leader.

We welcome our leader, and so we welcome his leadership. There should be nothing forced in this. Coercive authority, the authoritative voice that says 'Do this!', 'Don't do that!', 'Disobey at your peril!', can be galling, and is not loved unless it turns into leadership. Leadership says rather: 'Let us go forward together, uniting our powers for the accomplishment of our great purpose, united in heart because we are one in aim.' Such leadership enhances the dignity of those who are led. It does not shackle initiative, but sets it free from divided purposes and uncertain aims.

The gladness and the trust implicit in our welcome to our Bishop should not be allowed to remain on the abstract plane. Our Bishop is not a remote principle of unity: he is a man and a man placed at the centre of our common action as the People of God in Hong Kong. He looks for our cooperation, and, please God!, We shall give him our cooperation. It is scarcely possible to share a noble and voluntary task with another without developing personal friendship for our comrade in work. We should look forward to the chances that time may bring of meeting our Bishop, not as a potentate to be admired, or as a 'name to be dropped', but as a friend of whose friendship we can be certain in advance.

We need not fear that we shall be disappointed.