

## The Bishop Returns from Guangdong

**T**HE Bishop returned on Saturday, February 1, well pleased with his ten-day visit to China, not only on account of his happy reunion with his Mother and his brothers and his joy in seeing well-loved friends and places, but also on account both of the signs he saw of greater freedom for religion and of the high courtesy shown to him by his hosts.

This courtesy ranged from a friendly hour-long conversation with the Governor of Guangdong, televised to the whole province, to a careful arrangement that the food served to the guests at each stopping-place should be the typical food of the locality.

The visit, the Bishop says,

enabled him to help towards building a bridge between China and the outside world, a task entrusted to him by the Pope. He was able to observe for himself what is happening in China and he was able to inform his hosts about what is happening in the universal Church. Such exchanges of information are essential to the establishment of confidence and mutual understanding. Much progress has been made, but there is still far to go. The Bishop feels confident that his visit was enlightening not only to himself, but also to his hosts.

Religious freedom in China is far from being what it is in Hong

Kong, and the Bishop discussed this freely with his hosts. Yet he was pleased to see reopened churches and to learn that priests can now move freely and exercise their ministry. He was assured in a convincing manner that in Hong Kong freedom of religion as it is now known will remain unchanged after 1997.

The Bishop received two invitations to celebrate Mass publicly — one from a parish priest who was formerly his teacher, and one from the Vicar General of his native diocese Meixian (Kaying). Since he was present as the guest of the Guangdong Religious Affairs

Department, he discussed the invitations with the officials accompanying the Hong Kong party. They judged that acceptance of the invitations would be inconvenient and inappropriate. The Bishop was disappointed personally and he was very sorry to disappoint the many Catholics who had gathered in hope of participating in his Mass. However, he was conscious of his obligations as a guest and so accepted the officials' decision.

He returned to Hong Kong happy about the contacts that had been established and hopeful about the promotion of further contacts.