

HONG KONG (UCAN): Catholic Church-in-China experts have praised Cardinal John Baptist Wu for his "quiet" leadership in building bridges between the church in China and the universal church.

Experts on the contemporary Chinese Church lauded him for developing Hong Kong diocese as a "bridge Church." They cite documents the cardinal issued, such as the 1989 pastoral *March into the Bright Decade*, in which he emphasised the Hong Kong diocese's "historical mission of reconciliation with China and the Church in China".

Father Jerom Heyndrickx, an Immaculate Heart of Mary priest who directs the Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation of Leuven University in Belgium, says Cardinal Wu was a "quiet bishop and silent bridge builder" in Sino-Vatican relations.

A month before Cardinal Wu died, Father Heyndrickx told UCA News that his friend of 45 years "could disagree on some points with Chinese authorities, say it and maintain a friendly

## Wu was a 'quiet bridge builder': China experts

attitude of peaceful and yet genuine dialogue. That was in line with his whole character".

The missionary priest also applauded the late cardinal for establishing the diocese's Holy Spirit Study Centre (HSSC) as a major channel of dialogue and information on the situation of the Catholic Church in China.

Precious Blood Sister Beatrice Leung Kit-fun, an associate professor of political science at Lingnan University here, told UCA News Cardinal Wu was "not so much on the front stage" but worked "from the

back," and preferred "to be felt but not seen". Under his leadership, said the specialist on Sino-Vatican relations, Hong Kong's role as a "bridge church" has worked very well, much better than in Macau and Taiwan.

Father Anthony Chang Sang-loy, a Hong Kong diocesan priest who has visited China often since 1979, commended the late cardinal for supporting local clergy, nuns and lay Catholics in their various exchanges with the church in the mainland.

Father Chang, who edited a magazine on the China church from 1979 to 1998, recently said that whenever possible, Cardinal Wu welcomed visits by mainland Chinese clergy and nuns and often spoke with them of the cross and their responsibilities.

Other church sources spoke of how Cardinal Wu gave instructions that, despite Hong Kong diocese's limited vocations, the local church should not engage any priests from the mainland, not even from dioceses blessed with relatively many priests. However, the same sources also noted, he did encourage the Hong Kong diocese to help by mailing books and raising funds to build churches and seminaries in China.

On the day Cardinal Wu died, a church in China expert who uses the pseudonym "Bao Rong" said that the cardinal's greatest contribution was to allow theologians from Hong Kong to

teach in mainland Chinese seminaries. The fruits of that initiative for the mainland church, he added, are evident.

In 1989, Bishop Joseph Zen Zekium, who was coadjutor bishop and has automatically succeeded Cardinal Wu as head of the Hong Kong diocese, became the first theologian from Hong Kong to teach at Sheshan Regional Seminary in Shanghai.

Bao Rong also said the late cardinal's foresight in sending theologians to China was a greater achievement than Cardinal Wu's own three visits to China in 1985, 1986 and 1994. Cardinal Wu gladly welcomed China church seminarians and nuns but felt his own China visits were rather disappointing, Bao Rong said, because Cardinal Wu could not sit down and talk quietly with high-ranking officials of the Bureau of Religious Affairs and United Front Work Department, China's two agencies that handle religious affairs.

For Anthony Lam Sui-ki, a senior HSSC researcher, Cardinal Wu's vision for the China church was apparent when he established the research center in 1980, soon after the church in China revived after decades of persecution and repression.

The cardinal spelled out the mission of the diocese-run centre, Lam said, as understanding the China church, supporting its development and learning from it. According to Lam, some peo-

ple criticised the cardinal's decision to launch the HSSC in 1980 as "pro-leftist" and called its first director, now Auxiliary Bishop John Tong Hon of Hong Kong, a "leftist priest".

Lam further recalled that in the late 1980's, some critics also said the cardinal was ignoring the formation of Hong Kong Catholics by encouraging theologians to teach in mainland China. But local Catholics over time began to understand the church in China really needed the special help that the Hong Kong church could provide.

For Lam, it is hard to say if Pope John Paul II's elevation of the Hong Kong bishop as a cardinal in 1988 had any symbolic meaning for the China church. However, it was "very logical" in that Hong Kong had the largest Catholic population among all Chinese communities outside the mainland and he had shown great ability in diocesan management.

Bishop Pius Jin Peixian of Liaoning in northeastern China recently told UCA News he remembered Cardinal Wu, his classmate in what was the South China Regional Seminary in Hong Kong, as "a man who did not speak much." After visiting the cardinal some years ago, Bishop Pius Jin said he had heard the cardinal was sick with cancer, but the bishop was unwilling to comment at all on the cardinal's role on Sino-Vatican relations.

Father Liu Hongqing of Meizhou, Cardinal Wu's native diocese in Guangdong province, said he met Cardinal Wu on his own visits to Hong Kong. In their discussions, the priest said, the cardinal was "very concerned about the church in his native diocese. He would receive Meizhou priests and nuns who visited Hong Kong and he encouraged them and inquired about the church and the people in our diocese."



Bishop Wu in Shanghai in 1985 during his first visit to China after being made bishop of Hong Kong.

## A bishop honours a good shepherd

*'I am the good shepherd and I know mine and mine know me ...; I will lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd.'*

By Bishop John Tong

I first met Cardinal John Baptist Wu (then Fr. Wu) some 30 years ago. On that occasion I had travelled to Miaoli in Taiwan to visit Fr. Thomas Malone, an old missionary whom I had got to know in Guangzhou.

I happened to arrive during one of the regular Monday meetings of the Chinese clergy working in Miaoli. I was impressed by Father Wu's learn- edness, sense of humour and cheerfulness as well as his amiable manner. It was at times such as these that I had the opportunity to get to know him better.

In the early years after Wu took up the office of Bishop of the Diocese of Hong Kong, I was working as the Director of the Theology Faculty at the Holy Spirit Seminary. Occasionally, Bishop Wu would personally chair some of our conferences. It was at times such as these that I had the opportunity to get to know him better.

In the mid-eighties I was asked by

Bishop Wu to assist him in the reorganisation of the diocese. The theme and the activities promoted in the reorganisation were based on prayer, scripture studies, participation at Mass, unity and communion as well as service. All of these coincided with the way of perfection suggested by the Holy Father in his Message *The Advent of the New Millennium*.

Cardinal Wu visited Mainland China three times in 1985, 1986 and 1994 respectively. I had the honour to accompany him and thus witnessed his way of being neither overbearing nor servile as shown by his open and sincere talks with the Chinese Government. He strove diligently to foster unity between the underground church and the church that was sanctioned by the Chinese gov-

ernment. He also worked hard to ensure the ultimate goal of unity with the Holy See and the universal church.

Each time Cardinal Wu visited the clergy or women Religious in mainland China, he liked to quote Matthew

widespread admiration. As such, he was well received by both Catholics and non-Catholics wherever he went in mainland China.

After working closely with Cardinal Wu for 10 years, I obtained a better and deeper understanding of him. In my opinion, I think we can use Jesus Christ's self-portrait as given in John 10:14-14 to outline Cardinal Wu's lifelong ambition and efforts. 'I am the good shepherd and I know mine and mine know me ...; I will lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd.'

In recent years, Catholic and non-Catholic have started to compare Cardinal Wu with Bishop Joseph Zen, some even going so far as to contrast the former against the latter. In fact, this is an inappropriate way of thinking.

Facing the increasingly complicated

post-1997 situations in Hong Kong, we have to maintain a smooth relationship between the Diocese and the HKSAR Government on the one hand while on the other hand, we have to promote public awareness to potential changes that might undermine the principle of 'One Country Two Systems', our religious liberty as well as human rights.

When Cardinal Wu was in office, we three bishops of the diocese, played different roles. I myself acted as the bridge between the diocese and the outside while Bishop Joseph Zen played the role of the catalyst that kept the public aware of a sense of crisis and Cardinal Wu played the role of conciliator.

As such we could effectively work together to realise Cardinal Wu's aspiration of 'Adhere To Love And Practise Truth'.

On every occasion when there was some kind of a festival, all the brothers and sisters working in the Hong Kong Diocesan Curia used to express their greetings to Cardinal Wu and in turn he used to invite them to share some delicious chocolates. These acts of kindness symbolised in a special way the sweetness and bitterness of serving God and loving people.

All in all, those days when I was with Cardinal Wu were sweet experiences that I will continue to reflect on over again and again.



Bishop John Tong (right), Cardinal John Baptist Wu and Bishop Joseph Zen (left)

20:28 to encourage both their instructors and themselves to follow Jesus Christ's teaching that the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and indeed to give his life as a ransom for many. He also gave each one a beautiful, small cross as a souvenir. His devotion to the church as well as his strong national sentiments won him