

Cardinal's visit to China well received outside of Hong Kong

HONG KONG (UCAN): Mainland and Taiwan Church leaders say the visit of Cardinal John Baptist Wu Cheng-chung of Hong Kong to China is important as Hong Kong will revert to Chinese rule in less than 1,000 days.

"It might be suitable for the Hong Kong diocese to strengthen ties with the China church at this moment," China-appointed Bishop Zong Huaide, president of the Chinese government-sanctioned bishops' conference said.

Bishop Zong, also rector of the national seminary in Beijing, said, "We all belong to the same church, and it is necessary that we have mutual understanding, helping each other and praying for each other."

Bishop Zong said he would inform the cardinal's delegation of the situation of the church in China, particularly the development of seminary formation.

China-appointed Bishop Anthony Li Du'an of Xi'an, in Shaanxi province, said, "The visit will benefit both the church and Sino-Vatican relations."

As China is more open than before, Bishop Li said, it is a good

idea to see the possibilities of sending Chinese seminarians to study in Hong Kong, but he was not sure if the delegation discussed this matter.

Meanwhile, across the Strait of Taiwan, Bishop Andrew Tsien Tchew-choenn of Hualien said he believed the visit was intended to enhance China-Hong Kong church relations, normal and necessary in Hong Kong's transitional period.

"They certainly have their own mission on this trip, and we are glad to send our blessings to the Hong Kong diocese, which is seeking its own identity and space for survival after 1997," said the bishop of Hualien, in eastern Taiwan.

Cardinal Wu's visit might cause Communist authorities to be alert, since some bishops, priests and laypeople have been harassed since Aug. 15 in places such as Jiangxi province, Bishop Tsien said.

He anticipated a good effect on those cases, although arrested Catholics might not be set free immediately. "Cardinal Wu is very clever," he added.

Father Aloysius Chang Chun-

shen, Jesuit provincial in Taiwan, described the visit as "excellent," since the cardinal will visit seminaries in China. But neither Taiwan cleric expected any impact on Taiwan-Vatican relations.

Father Chang said he doubted Hong Kong was the place from which to handle the issue. Cardinal Roger Etchegaray's Beijing visit in September 1993 was expected to bring change, but nothing regarding Taiwan changed, he noted.

Jesuit Father Mark Fang Chih-jung, a theologian at Fu Jen Catholic University in Hsinchuang, Taiwan, said, "I assume Cardinal Wu's visit is on an appointment by the Holy See or at least with its permission."

Cardinal Wu was born in mainland China, but left for seminary study as a young man before the revolution. He visited Beijing and Shanghai in 1985 and Guangzhou and Meizhou, his birthplace, in 1986.

In 1989, Cardinal Wu released "March Into the Bright Decade," a pastoral exhortation to guide the church as Hong Kong prepares to revert to Chinese sovereignty in 1997.