

Marian conference draws thousands

BALTIMORE (CNS) — "Our Lady saved me from the godless prison," a Chinese prelate told a crowd of 6,000 gathered at the Baltimore Arena for the Sept. 11-15 Marian International Conference.

Archbishop Dominic Tang, the 84-year-old archbishop of Canton who is living in exile in Hong Kong, encouraged participants to continue their devotions to Mary.

He told how he was imprisoned in a Chinese jail for more than 22 years, from 1957-81, because he refused to join the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, the state-approved organization that rejects Vatican authority over Chinese church affairs.

"Everyday I said the rosary," he said Sept. 13. He was in solitary confinement for seven years. At other times he shared a cell with six or seven other political prisoners.

He said he was not beaten in jail but his captors tried to brainwash him by making him study writings of Karl Marx, and then give a report. "If I made no progress, they'd let me study some more," he said.

When he was finally released, he said, officials told him it was because of the "kindness" of the communist government.

The Chinese government has refused his repeated applications to return to Canton. He added that he thinks just as communism has disappeared from Russia, it will be gone from China eventually.

"Little by little, money and finances will change the political climate and government," he said.

Cardinal Jaime Sin of Manila told Marian conference-goers his devotion to Mary goes back to his seminary

days when he asked her to cure his asthma. More recently, he said intercessions to Mary saved his country from fighting.

The cardinal told how, in February 1986, a miracle saved the Filipino people from facing a bloody revolution.

He recounted how "millions of people" had gathered in Manila on Feb. 25, 1986, with tanks ordered by then-President Ferdinand Marcos aimed at them. Both Marcos and his opponent, Corazon Aquino, claimed victory in presidential elections. Cardinal Sin urged the Filipino people to engage in civil disobedience which resulted in Marcos leaving office. Aquino was declared the winner.

Soldiers in the tanks later asked the cardinal to identify the lady who they said appeared to them and told them to stop. They said she identified herself as "queen of this land," said the cardinal.

Cardinal Sin told the soldiers to "thank her. She kept you from becoming criminals."

"We were all praying," he said. "Only prayer could save the country. Now we were able to restore democracy ... Prayer is the strength of man, and the weakness of God."

When the cardinal was asked why

there are so many reports of Marian apparitions in our times, he said, "Mary believes Jesus is a little disappointed in what he sees. And this woman goes to the heart of things. When the heart speaks ..."

The Marian International Conference opened with a Mass celebrated by Baltimore Archbishop William H. Keeler.

During his homily, Archbishop Keeler traced the history of Marian devotion, saying it is currently worldwide, extending from such shrines as Mariasell in the Austrian Alps, to Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico, and Fatima in Portugal.

He called Mary "the first and most faithful disciple of her son."

The Baltimore Arena, usually the site of soccer and lacrosse games, was transformed into a field for the faithful as Catholics from across the United States and around the world gathered for the Marian conference — five days of addresses on Mary, daily Mass, healing services and the family rosary.

Below the arena scoreboard, the spotlight shone on a pilgrim statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The statue was blessed by Pope Paul VI for the United States 25 years ago in honor of the 50th anniversary of Mary's appearance in Fatima.



File art
The Feast of the Assumption is depicted in a painting by Bergognone, Ambrogio di Stefano.

Vatican renews diplomatic ties with Mexico

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — The Vatican announced Sept. 21 the establishment of full diplomatic relations with Mexico, marking the end of more than a century of church-state tensions in the overwhelmingly Catholic country.

Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said that with the decision to exchange ambassadors with the Vatican, "Mexico follows the international practice of modern states in their relations with the Catholic Church, with its institutions and with the Holy See" while respecting a constitutional separation of church and state.

He gave the main credit for progress in Vatican-Mexican relations to President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, who took office in 1988. Navarro-Valls called him "a man of dialogue and realistic vision."

The final step in a series of Vatican-

Mexican efforts to formalize relations was the passage early this year of norms applying 1991 revisions to the Mexican Constitution granting legal recognition to the Catholic Church.

Although many of the old constitutional provisions had not been enforced for decades, the constitution had banned the church from owning property and running schools, made it illegal for clergy to vote or to wear clerical dress in public and prohibited outdoor religious processions and public ceremonies.

The first big break with the past, Navarro-Valls said, was the "tacit support" the government gave to Pope John Paul II's 1979 visit to Mexico.

The second step in the process was the 1990 agreement of the pope and Salinas to exchange personal representatives "to facilitate a permanent dialogue on matters of common interest," Navarro-Valls said.

"Both for Mexico, as for the Holy

See, a new stage begins today under the sign of mutual respect and trust," said a Vatican statement on the diplomatic relations.

The last formal diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Mexico were broken off 125 years ago.

While the anti-church laws were written into the Mexican Constitution after the revolution of 1910-17, what the Vatican described as the "cultural marginalization" of the church began with the liberal reforms of 1855 when several bishops were expelled from the country.

According to Vatican statistics, 91.7 percent of Mexico's 86 million inhabitants are Catholic. Although the distribution is not proportionate, the country has 10,400 priests — which is one for every 8,000 Catholics. The Archdiocese of Guadalajara, for example, has one priest for every 4,100 Catholics while the Diocese of Tabasco has one for every 21,300 Catholics.

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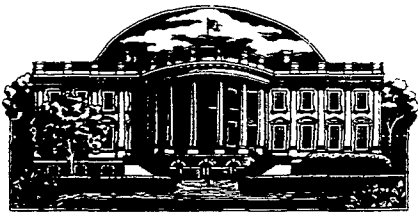
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