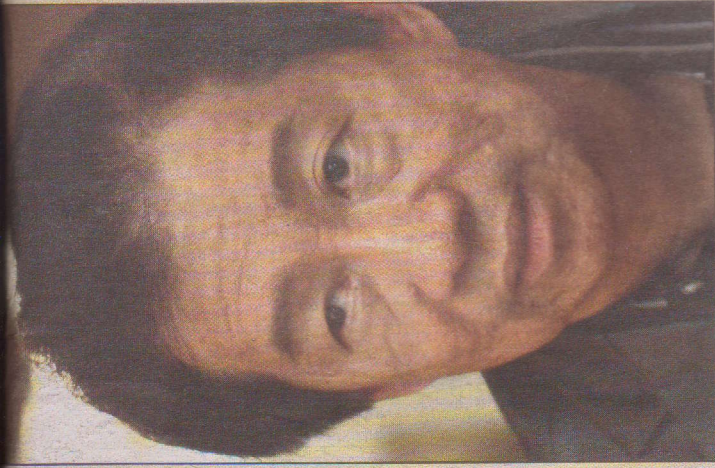


'WE HOPE HE HAS LEARNT A LESSON'

"Pastor Tan has apologised to us in person. We accept his apology, and hope he has learnt a lesson from this experience. Here on, we will stay in touch to work on promoting mutual understanding between us. We want to clear up any misunderstandings."

From the joint statement by the Singapore Buddhist Federation and the Singapore Taoist Federation after their leaders (from left) Venerable Kwang Sheng and Mr Tan Thiam Lye met Pastor Rony Tan yesterday.

MORE REPORTS: PRIME PAGE A6



Buddhist, Taoist leaders accept pastor's apology

DPM Wong is heartened religious leaders met to resolve differences

■ BY YEN FENG

THE apology was accepted the old-fashioned way - in person, over a pot of hot tea, and with a firm handshake.

After nearly a week of being watched on YouTube and other online forums, Pastor Rony Tan yesterday met the leaders of two religions he had disparaged in online videos - those that got him into trouble with

His family issued a statement late last night, saying: "We understand the gravity of the issue. We have taken steps to resolve the matter, and would like to put this behind us and focus on promoting religious harmony."

Pastor Tan's personal call made all the difference to the Buddhist and Taoist leaders yesterday.

"When I saw him, he looked very sorry and remorseful - frankly, he looked terrible," said Taoist Federation chairman Tan Thiam Lye. "I was convinced of his sincerity."

Venerable Kwang Sheng, who heads both the Singapore Buddhist Federation

Minister for Home Affairs Wong Kan Seng told The Straits Times he was heartened that the religious leaders had met to resolve their differences.

"What Pastor Rony Tan said and did at his evangelism sharing sessions was clearly offensive to Buddhists and Taoists," he said. "In fact, it has angered even Singaporeans who are not Buddhists and Taoists."

He felt that the pastor had done the right thing by meeting the Buddhist and Taoist leaders to apologise.

"I am also heartened to learn that the Buddhist and Taoist leaders, while understandably upset with the incident, have accepted Pastor Tan's apology and have

lead and set the right example in this regard," he said.

Pastor Tan came under fire from netizens, Buddhists and Taoists, after video clips surfaced on the Internet last week, showing him at a church service. It is unclear when they were recorded.

Some of his remarks about Buddhist precepts like rebirth, karma, and nirvana drew laughter from his audience.

Yesterday, Venerable Kwang Sheng and Mr Tan said they spoke for their respective communities when they accepted the pastor's apology.

Their federations represent nearly 400 Buddhist and Taoist temples here.

They met the pastor over tea at the Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery, off Sin Ming Avenue, where Venerable Kwang Sheng is also head abbot.

In the afternoon, Venerable Kwang Sheng and Mr Tan issued a joint statement, saying "We accept his apology, and hope he has learnt a lesson from this experience."

Venerable Kwang Sheng issued two more statements, as president of the Singapore Buddhist Federation and the BFO.

In the first, he said "Lord Buddha taught us to be compassionate and forgive