

## EDITORIAL

For the past several years, the U.S. Catholic China Bureau has graciously permitted us to publish the papers given at their annual China Conference. And this year is no exception. Their 20<sup>th</sup> National Catholic China Conference, with the theme *The Role of Religion in China's Emerging Civil Society*, was held at Maryknoll, New York, November 14-16, 2003.

The U.S. Catholic China Bureau has had an interesting history. It officially came into existence on September 15, 1989, when it accepted the invitation of then Archbishop Theodore McCarrick of Newark to open an office on the campus of Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey. Father Laurence Murphy, MM was the first chairperson of the Board of Directors, and Sr. Janet Carroll, MM was the first Executive Director.

However, the official opening of the Bureau was preceded by at least ten years of informal gatherings initiated by Father John Cioppa, a member of the Maryknoll Fathers' General Council in the early 1980s. The Maryknoller invited all the religious orders in the United States, who had previously served in China, to send representatives to an annual Catholic China Forum. The purpose of these informal gatherings was to share news of the newly reopened Church in China, and to seek collaborative ways of aiding that Church in its development. In spite of lacking an official structure, a small group of convenors organized at least ten of these annual forums.

The annual Catholic China Forums gradually evolved into the National Catholic China Conference. Speakers with expertise in various China-related fields were invited to deliver formal papers. Then after the arrival in the early 1990s of young priests and Sisters for study in the States, these too were called upon to share their experiences as church-persons serving in the Church of China. The National Conference became an annual gathering of American and Chinese religious personnel and scholars, an event where not only was knowledge shared, but deep friendships made. Besides the national conferences, the U.S. Catholic China Bureau has over the years organized eight study tours to China.

The 124 participants (including 30 priests, Sisters and laity studying at U.S. institutions of higher learning) at the 20<sup>th</sup> National Conference heard papers delivered by Professor Chen Cunfu, of Zhejiang University, China, Professor Carol Lee Hamrin, of Johns Hopkins University, and Professor Richard Madsen, of the University of California, San Diego. A panel of three young Chinese religious (two priests and one Sister) presented their thoughts on the contribution of the Catholic faith to modern Chinese society.

Due to limited space, we can only present an edited version of Professor Chen's paper on his survey on Christian life in the Wenzhou area of Zhejiang Province, and Sister Matthias Guo's paper on the role of religious women in today's Chinese society. We already published Father John Cioppa's paper on the Church in China in an era of transition in the last issue of *Tripod*.

In line with the theme of conferences on China, Gianni Criveller reports on a conference held in Macao, also last November, on the famous Qing Dynasty painter and Jesuit priest, Wu Li. Following this, Professor An Ximeng of the Philosophy Department of Shanxi University, deals with the history of the patriotic movement in Chinese Christian Churches. His article originally appeared in Chinese in *Tripod*, No. 126. Next, Gianni Criveller deals with one of his favorite topics: Christian Studies in China.

Towards the end of the issue we have a News Digest and Church Statistics for the year 2003, compiled by Betty Ann Maheu, and a book review by Patrick Taveirne. But between the main articles and the last items, we insert a timely report by Jeroom Heyndrickx on the ordination of Bishop Peter Feng Xingmao of the Hengshui Diocese, Hebei Province, on January 6, 2004. Apparently the ordination ceremony was held up for several hours because of a disagreement between the local clergy and government officials about the content of the ordination ceremony

This points to the difficulties surrounding the ordination of bishops in China. If this problem is not solved, then there is the danger that the Episcopal candidate will be unacceptable both to his own flock within China, and to the universal Catholic Church outside of China. (PJB)