

EDITORIAL

The lead article in this issue of *Tripod* is a paper delivered by Father Angelo Lazzarotto, PIME, one of Holy Spirit Study Centre's founders, at a conference on "Christian Faith and Chinese Culture, Yesterday and Today" held in Milan, Italy in March 2004. In his paper, entitled *Contradictions in China's Religious Policy*, Father Lazzarotto spells out recent "worrisome negative signs" in the government's policy. These include the strict and minute inspections of seminaries, the arrest of unregistered church members, the issuance in 2003 of three documents promoting the democratic running of the Church, and interference in episcopal ordination ceremonies.

Regarding the "Three Documents," Anthony Lam in his article in this issue asserts that, since they were not discussed and approved at the 7th National Catholic Representatives Assembly, held in Beijing July 7-9, 2004, they have probably been temporarily shelved. Forty bishops and several Patriotic Association leaders had originally passed them in March 2003. However, the last of Father Lazzarotto's "signs"—interference in episcopal ordination ceremonies—is potentially the most deadly, because it strikes at the very heart of unity in the Catholic Church.

At some recent episcopal ordinations, at the part of the ceremony where the Holy Father's appointment of the candidate as bishop is supposed to be read, a nomination of the National Bishops Conference is read instead. Such interference signals an attempt to create a break between the Chinese Church and the Holy Father. The government, and those in the Church who cooperate with such actions, must really think hard about what they are doing, and about the consequences of their actions. After 25 years of the open door policy, do the initiators of such actions really want to cut the Chinese Catholic Church off from its life giving connection with the universal Church? For when it comes to omitting the Holy Father's appointment of a bishop, and substituting the nomination of one's own national bishops' conference, then there is danger of rupturing the unity of the family within the Church.

Other articles in this issue include a study by Mary Roberts Daban about the reasons Chinese people living in North America convert to Christianity, either as Catholics or Protestants. It seems that they find many points of agreement with their previous Confucian beliefs and Christianity, especially in the area of family values. Father James Kroeger, MM then introduces the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC), whose 8th Plenary Assembly he attended in Daejeon, Korea in August, 2004. In addition to describing what took place at the Assembly itself – its theme was “The Asian Family: Towards a Culture of Life,” – Father Kroeger adds three appendices: an overview of the FABC, a farewell to a retiring assistant general secretary, and the final message of the Assembly.

At present, the Chinese Catholic Church is not represented in the FABC, but I am sure that the bishops from the 22 Asian countries gathered in Korea of the FABC Assembly had the same sentiments towards that Church as they expressed at the Synod of Asian Bishops, held in Rome in April-May, 1998. Their post-synodal report, *Ecclesia in Asia*, says: “On many occasions the Synod Fathers turned their thoughts to the Catholic Church in Mainland China and prayed that the day may soon come when our beloved Chinese brothers and sisters will be completely free to practice their faith in full communion with the See of Peter and the universal Church.”

Notice how the Asian bishops at their 1998 Synod called the Chinese Catholics their “brothers and sisters,” emphasizing the unity of the family in the Church. Hopefully this family unity will be preserved in the future. In light of the above, as well as of the focus on the Asian family at the FABC Assembly, as described by Father Kroeger, and the compatibility between Confucian family values and Christianity, experienced by Chinese Christians living in North America, as pointed out in Mary Daban’s article, we have chosen “Chinese Family Values” as the theme of this issue.

Peter Barry gives a short description of the 8th Verbiest Symposium, held in Louvain, Belgium, August 31-September 3, 2004, and Sister Betty Ann Maheu rounds our issue with a summary report of events in the Church in China during 2004. (PJB)