

EDITORIAL

The special theme for this issue of Tripod is the 30th anniversary of the decision taken by some old Chinese bishops, beginning in 1981, in the critical time just after China's open door policy was initiated, to consecrate their successors, or bishops for vacant sees in neighboring provinces, without first obtaining the Holy Father's approval for such a course of action. These ordinations were sometimes called "clandestine" or "secret" ordinations. What seemed to motivate the old bishops was the attempted episcopal ordination of Fu Tieshan in Beijing in December 1979. The old bishops were afraid that, although China had opened up in many areas of society, the "opening up" did not apply to the field of religion. Rather, it seemed to be a case of "business as usual" for that aspect of life. The official policy seemed, with the ordination of Fu Tieshan, to be that Chinese bishops would continue to be appointed by the state, rather than by the Holy Father.

Giancarlo Politi, Anthony Lam, and Angelo Lazzarotto have contributed articles for us on this topic. Politi and Lam recount the history of the "clandestine" ordinations, and spell out the motivation for the old bishops' actions. Father Politi writes that the old bishops felt that as bishops they had a responsibility for the future of the Church. "Keeping silent, when faced with the destruction of the Church, which is the ultimate aim of the Party, would have been a grave mistake," he writes.

Anthony Lam describes how Pope John Paul II's approval of Bishop Fan Xueyan's action of consecrating three bishops in 1981, without first obtaining the permission of the Pope, but only informing the Holy See afterwards, led to the ordination of about 80 bishops in a 12 year period (1981-1993). This was so because Rome extended this permission to all the bishops of China in 1981. These "special faculties," which permitted bishops to ordain first and inform Rome later, were curtailed in 1993, as the Holy See

sought dialogue with China. In the meantime, the faculties were also used by the “open” Church, and were helpful to its development. This came about as open Church bishops, originally appointed by Pope Pius XII in the late 40’s or early 50’s, and some ordained in the 1960’s, who later got legitimized, ordained their successors, or ordained bishops for neighboring open-church dioceses.

Father Lazzarotto’s article suggests that in order to ease tensions between Church and state in China, it would be helpful if both the Bishops Conference and the Patriotic Association amended their constitutions to bring them more in line with the doctrine of the universal Catholic Church.

Thus the initiative taken by those old bishops 30 years ago had a great influence on the whole Catholic Church of China, because it kept before the eyes of that Church the doctrine, based on the primacy of the Pope, that only the Holy Father can appoint bishops for the whole Church. As our readers well know, this question of the appointment of bishops for the Church in China has not been resolved even up to the present day.

Father Michael Sloboda, who has been on the staff of Holy Spirit Study Centre for 12 years, is now moving on to become the supervisor of two Maryknoll sponsored schools in Hong Kong. We wish Father Mike God’s blessings in his new work. Before leaving us, he wrote a final article on a favorite topic of his, China’s ever increasing population and the problems the country may face in the future because of this. We also include an article on the awakening among Chinese intellectuals brought about by Dr. Sun Yat-sen’s 1911 revolution. Father Chau’s article was held over to this issue of *Tripod* because of an overabundance of articles on this subject in the last issue, where it properly belonged.

Finally, we pray for God’s blessings on our readers at Christmas, and throughout the New Year! (PJB)