

EDITORIAL

The theme for this issue of *Tripod* is prompted by the change of leadership in both China and the Vatican. Coincidentally, both leaders, Xi Jinping in China, and Pope Francis in the Vatican, assumed office on the same day, March 12, 2013. The question naturally arises: what are the prospects for better Sino-Vatican relations from the inauguration of the two new leaders?

Several China commentators have responded to our request to offer their expectations of the new leaders. Fr. Sergio Ticozzi has written about Pope Benedict's overtures to China and to the Church in China; Fr. Chen Kaihua makes a prognosis about what we can expect in the Church during the pontificate of Pope Francis; Dr. Anthony Lam wrote about the situation of the Church in China during the ten-year term of Hu Jintao, Xi Jinping's predecessor, as President of China, and Ching Cheong has summarized some Chinese internet users' speculations about the future direction of Xi's government from an analysis of some recent speeches.

We also include a translation of the Chinese Catholic Bishops Conference issued "Regulations Concerning the Election and Consecration of Bishops." These were passed at the 2nd meeting of the 8th Standing Committee of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the Chinese Bishops Conference, held on December 12, 2012 in Beijing. The regulations were announced publicly on April 8, 2013, and appeared on the Catholic Church in China website on April 24, 2013.

According to an UCAN story, which appeared in the June 2, 2013 issue of the Hong Kong Catholic weekly, *Kung Kao Po*, the December 12th meeting was attended by about 20 legitimate and illegitimate bishops, and about 50 other standing committee members and officials of the national Religious Affairs Bureau and United Front Work Department. Thus, lay committee members and government officials outnumbered the bishops. So their opinions most likely carried more weight than those of the bishops. It will be recalled that Bishop Ma Daqin, ordained as auxiliary bishop of

Shanghai (coadjutor bishop in the government's eyes), was stripped of his episcopal office by the participants of this meeting.

The regulations themselves number 16, as compared to the previous ones, of 1993, which were only 6 in number (cf. *Tripod*, #77, Sept.-Oct. 1993, pp. 52-54). They are also more detailed than the ones of 20 years ago. Now to choose a bishop, a diocese must first ask the provincial church administrative committee to seek the approval of the provincial religious affairs departments. After receiving the provincial government's approval, the diocese reports to the Bishops Conference and seeks its approval. After receiving the Bishops Conference approval, the diocese can then hold the election.

Also added to these regulations are the stipulation that the selected candidate must support the leadership of the Communist Party and the socialist system. He must also adhere to the principles of the autonomy of the Chinese Catholic Church and the self-election and self consecration of bishops. The episcopal candidate must also follow the manual of rubrics issued by the Chinese Catholic Bishops Conference in his ordination liturgy, and have read the Bishops Conference's approval of his ordination. The Bishops Conference will also assign the main consecrator and the co-consecrators for the ordination ceremony. Also, to prevent ordinations of bishops from taking place privately, or in secret, Article #6 of these regulations stipulates that bishops can only be chosen at an officially approved election meeting.

In the whole set of regulations, there is no mention of the Holy Father, nor of the need of a mandate from him for a bishop to be ordained. With the issuance of these regulations, it seems that the official Chinese Catholic Church is moving farther and farther away from the Holy Father, and moving more and more in the direction of setting up a state-run church. They must ask themselves: do they really want to go that direction?

Let us pray that the two newly appointed leaders (of China with 1.3 billion citizens and of the universal Catholic Church with 1.2 billion believers), after having some time to solidify their positions, will address the question of relations between the two entities and arrive at a decision, satisfactory to all, concerning it.
(PJB)