

EDITORIAL

The main theme of this issue is “Sinicization.” Chinese President Xi Jinping has used this term in connection with religion several times in recent years. It is something China’s religions should strive for in their future development, the president urges.

However, several questions arise regarding sinicization. First of all, what does it mean? Is it the same as “inculturation”? Is it like the policy of Matteo Ricci and the other Jesuit missionaries of the late Ming Dynasty, namely, the policy of “accommodation,” or adaptation of the Christian message to Chinese culture? An example of the latter would be equating the ancient Chinese tradition of honoring the ancestors with the Judaeo-Christian Fourth Commandment: “Honor thy father and thy mother.”

This issue’s contributors, Fr. Sergio Ticozzi, Fr. Jing Baolu, and Paul Rule, from different aspects, try to find answers to these questions.

Since President Xi started the ball rolling on the sinicization of religion, it is perhaps best to start with him. President Xi’s thoughts on the subject are spelled out in an article published by the Xinhua News Agency on April 23, 2016. The article reports on President Xi’s speech at a meeting (April 22-23, 2016) of religious work cadres in Beijing (we do not have the actual words of the speech).

President Xi begins by saying that the Party must maintain and develop the Marxist theory of religion within China’s socialist system. More concretely, he says that we must work hard to bring about a merger between religious doctrines and Chinese culture, so that both together can make a contribution to the great renaissance of the Chinese people and to the achievement of the Chinese Dream. The president continued that, for the policy to be effective, the Party must always maintain the power of initiative in religious work. The Party is to positively guide religions to adapt to socialist society.

The president then pointed out an important responsibility that his addressees should undertake: support the nation’s religions in

their trend toward sinicization. They are to encourage each religion, while they keep their basic faith, core doctrines and liturgy, to extract those doctrines and moral practices which are beneficial to social harmony and compatible with China's modern development, and explain them in terms of China's outstanding cultural traditions.

Fr. Ticozzi cites an article by Zuo Xinping of the Academy of Social Sciences, in which the latter points out that President Xi's view of sinicization is mainly political. At the same time, Zuo points out, there is also a cultural dimension. In Zuo's view, sinicization has two dimensions, political and cultural. Which type of sinicization the Church will consider more compatible with its doctrines and beliefs, and therefore which trend it will follow—we hope that the Church has the freedom to choose. Otherwise the president's view of the sinicization of religion could be taken as only one more means to exercise control over religion.

Speaking of control over religion, Hong Kong's religious believers experienced a scare about it during the first week of March. Carrie Lam, one of the candidates in the election for Chief Executive, in her campaign manifesto, proposed to set up a "religious affairs unit" to handle questions concerning religion. Apparently, the proposal had to do with questions she had received regarding the use of land for religious purposes. However, religious believers in some quarters feared that she proposed setting up a religious affairs "bureau," like the one that exists on the Mainland to control and supervise religion. Both Catholic and Protestant Christian leaders, in written statements, objected vociferously to the establishment of such a body, saying that it was not needed, because of the good relations that already exist between religious communities and the Hong Kong government. In the end, Carrie Lam removed that proposal from her election manifesto.

This issue also contains Cardinal Tong's recent commentary on the Sino-Vatican dialogue on the appointment of bishops, Father Ticozzi's annual update on the religious news from China, and an article by Anthony Lam on the Vatican conference on Organ Transplants, to which China sent a delegation. However, we do not include our usual 2-year index in this issue, due to a lack of space. It will appear in our next issue. (PJB)