

## EDITORIAL

A contemporary of Karl Marx (b. 1818) and Friedrich Engels (b. 1820), Fyodor Dostoyevsky (b. 1821) wrote with prescience about new ideas that would sweep over Europe and the world. In his novel, *Crime and Punishment* (published in 1866), Raskolnikov [the verb *raskalyvat'* means "to chop," "to split"], a student doubly oppressed by poverty and alienation, plots the murder of an old woman, a pawnbroker. He justifies the murder in this way: her greed, merciless accumulation of capital, and cruelty make her a louse; it is a chance to seize private property, and use it for the good of many.

In his fever, the ideas of social equality would fuse with notions of the "superman":

Then I saw that if one waits for everyone to get wiser it will take too long... Afterwards I understood that that would never come to pass, that men won't change and that nobody can alter it and that it's not worth wasting effort over it. Yes, that's so. That's the law of their nature ... And I know now that whoever is strong in mind and spirit will have power over them. Anyone who is greatly daring is right in their eyes. He who despises most things will be a lawgiver among them and he who dares most of all will be most in the right! So it has been till now and so it will always be. (*Crime and Punishment*, Part V, chapter 4)

Almost 70 years after the founding of New China, Chairman-and-President Xi asserts that the country is right to stick with the rubric of communism.

Forty years ago, China launched the "Reform and Opening Up" to rescue an economy bled dry by ideological extremism, collectivisation, and an autocracy that rules in the name of the dictatorship of the proletariat. It was as though Raskolnikov took the money he had buried, invested it, mixed it with foreign capital, took advantage of cheap labour (more recently expelled as "low-end"), and became the capitalist he once loathed.

Ideals, values and society have been torn in China. Into this crisis (of faith), the Church is called to “put out into the deep.” In September, 2018 the Holy See announced the signing of a provisional agreement with China over the appointment of bishops.

As Catholics, we cannot interpret the signs of the diplomatic agreement without also imbibing Pope Francis’ “Message to Catholics in China and the Universal Church.” The Message is reprinted in full in this issue, as it is addressed to *all of us!*

Pope Francis expresses his admiration and paternal care for the Catholic Church in China who has indeed suffered. He notes the spiritual and pastoral aims of the agreement “to support and advance the preaching of the Gospel, and to reestablish and preserve the full and visible unity of the Catholic community in China.”

The Message also poses two important questions to this reader. The Catholic Church in China is a “small flock.” What does the vast number of people in China really need? (Are they satisfied only with material things? Are they unchangeable and irredeemable, as Raskolnikov concluded above?)

The second question: Who are we as Christians?

At every Eucharist, we drink and remember the blood of Christ, poured out willingly for the forgiveness of sins. “The Word became flesh” (John 1:14), so that “all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” (Luke 3:6) Pope Francis asks for “passionate missionaries.”

In this *Tripod* issue, Fr. Franco Mella traces the contours of Marxism-Maoism in China, and the dialogue between Christianity and Marxism. Ma Kwok Ming ponders Marxism in China’s global capitalist venture. Fr. Sergio Ticozzi examines the role of ideology in China’s Communist party-state. Anthony Lam reviews Marx’s and Engels’ writings on Christianity as a way to interpret Marxism.

Marx was born 200 years ago. His writings opened a rift and shed light on social injustice. This Christmas, who will be born, who has been anointed—

to bring the good news to the afflicted  
to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind  
to let the oppressed go free  
to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord? (Luke 4:18-19)  
(CP)