



INTRODUCTION

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When the Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation of Louvain University was invited to be the guest editor of this issue of Tripod, we chose as our theme the Historiography of the Chinese Catholic Church. In our opening article, Ardolf Camps of Nijmegen University gives the reason for our choice. Local church histories have now become important areas for research study not only for church historians but also among secular scholars as well. This new interest is based on the growing conviction that the histories of local churches had and continue to have a significant influence on the evolution of national histories. In his article, Professor Camps draws our attention to the changes in methodology now taking place in this field and the new dimensions it is adding to modern historical research.

An example of new ways of writing mission history can be found in Dr. Jean-Paul Wiest's The Contemporary Relevance of Mission History, where the author of the recently published Maryknoll in China 1918-1955 reviews traditional forms and offers a fresh approach that promises to be more comprehensive and relevant than that used in the past.

The Idea of Inculturation is Dr. Jean Charbonnier's particular point of focus in this issue. It also happens to be a central theme of any comprehensive historical study of local churches. Charbonnier discusses the recent works of Ralph Covell and Jean-Paul Wiest, one a Protestant and the other a Catholic mission historian, illustrating how this concept is now being used in retelling the history of Christianity in China.

Our final article for this issue is an historical study of the efforts by the Holy See to establish an ecclesiastical hierarchy in China along with stable diplomatic relations with that country. Patrick Taveirne takes us back to the 14th century and carries us along to the year 1946, when Rome finally succeeded in reaching its first objective only to see the second shattered by a Communist victory in the civil war three years later.

Obviously it is not possible to discuss the entire range of Chinese Church history in such a limited amount of space. Our intention here is

merely to draw the readers' attention to the need for on-going research and to new methodologies being introduced by the renewal of historical study in this field. It is important and critical that such work be carried on by both Chinese and Western historians, working in close cooperation with each other. For this reason, our Foundation is organizing an International Conference to take place in Louvain in September of 1990 on the Historiography of Catholic Missions in China.

The Conference will bring together church-related historians as well as secular scholars from both East and West to share the results of their research, to discuss new methods and approaches, and to bring their critical acumen to bear on evaluating the past with an eye to possible directions that might be taken in the future. It comes at a critical time in the history of the Church in China, which is now in the process of reorganizing itself. It is our hope that the Conference by working to understand the past, might be of some service in supporting the Church in China's efforts to create that future.

THE STUDY OF THE HISTORY OF LOCAL CHURCHES: ITS IMPORTANCE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH

by Arnulf Camps



During the past few decades, the study of Church history has been undergoing a process of change. New dimensions have been added and new methodologies have revitalized its traditional approaches. No longer is Church history the private reserve of a few historians in search of the past. It now attracts an ever-increasing number of scholars concerned with mankind's future. These scholars, who represent a variety of disciplines, have become keenly aware of the impact the Church has had, and continues to have, on the development of cultures. They are now studying Church history within the larger framework of the history of mankind. In this paper, we wish to present our readers with a general overview of this new renaissance in the field of Church history, indicating significant changes in methodology and underlining certain new