

From the Editor

As Church structures go, the bishops' conference is a relatively new phenomenon in the Catholic Church, having a history of only about one hundred years. However, there can be no doubt about its becoming a major factor in church life on a global scale in that very short span of time. Vatican II has contributed much to its rapid development to the extent that the bishops' conference is taken for granted as an essential ingredient in the organizational structure of local and regional churches. Two of its most noteworthy achievements have been in its ability to actualize indigenization of the Church on the regional level, and in its effectiveness in maintaining and fostering the communion of local churches within the universal Church.

TRIPOD had a specific purpose in mind when its editors chose the bishops' conference as its topic for this issue. We were anxious to help our own local Catholics to better understand the history of this structure, how it is organized, its theological import and juridical status within the universal Church. But we also had one eye on China as we went about the task of assembling the material. We feel that the episcopal conference might well become the key structure in efforts by the Church in China to effect a lasting unity and full communion with the universal Church.

We are indeed privileged to be able to offer our readers articles by two leading specialists in the field of Canon Law. First we have James H. Provost, Chairman of the Canon Law Department at the Catholic University of America. His article on Bishops' Conferences serves as a very clear and concise introduction to their history, structure, and theological as well as juridical status. He is followed by J.E. Lynch, a colleague of Professor Provost at Catholic University where he teaches both the history of Canon Law and the history of the Middle Ages. In From Council to Conference, Professor Lynch concentrates on the historical development of bishops' conferences, opening up for us a more accurate understanding of their present role in the modern church and its future possibilities.

And what of China? Our second pair of articles has to do with the bishops' conferences of Taiwan and mainland China. The history and development of these two structures are certainly of more than passing interest to those who see in the future a restoration of Church unity and communion among Catholics in a divided nation. Bishop Joseph Wang Yu-jung is the Secretary General of the Regional Episcopal Conference of China based in Taiwan. We are deeply indebted to him for his

Brief Introduction to the history and structure of that conference and how it functions in contemporary Taiwan society. We are in full agreement with Bishop Wang when he states that the rich experience of the conference will be of invaluable assistance to the future Chinese Bishops' Conference when unity has finally been achieved. This hope is also shared by Anthony Lam, our Executive Secretary, whose Chinese Bishops' Conference in Beijing is an overview of an organization that suddenly burst on the scene in 1980. Still without its own constitution and not yet recognized by Rome, the Conference in Beijing gives indication of its desire to follow the pattern and development of sister conferences throughout the universal Church. When we add the fact that not all mainland bishops are members, we can readily see that the road ahead will not be without its internal struggles and complications. But the process has begun and augurs well for the future of the church there.

A fundamental issue in all bishops' conferences is the question of authority. In his Authority in the Church, David Stagamen, Dean of the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, California deals in depth with this and other related issues. We recommend this article highly to those who are looking for a thorough and substantial treatment of the meaning and nature of authority in the Church. Far from being a theoretical issue, it is a key concept in how the Church sees its role and functions practically in modern society.

New Publications of Holy Spirit Study Centre

Family News—Catholic Church in China

This book is a compilation of interesting articles from Zhu Ai Zhonghua and other noteworthy material. It contains a total of 136 pages and gives valuable information to those who have concern for the Catholic Church in China.

Spring Rain

The good rain comes in season;
Spring calls -- clouds gather,
It slips in softly like night-breath,
falling gently on all the world. (Du Fu)

This book is a biography of the late Father Li Chang of Meixian Diocese, Guangdong. His life was like the spring rain, quietly nurturing the soil of China.

The Chinese edition of these two books has already been published. The English editions will be ready in May or June.

For further information and ordering please contact the Holy Spirit Study Centre, 6 Welfare Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong. Tel:553-0141