

Editorial

For the second time recently Party chief Jiang Zemin asked Li Ruihuan, chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), to speak to the country's religious leaders in his stead. The latest meeting was January 29 and the venue was Zhongnanhai in Beijing, the compound of the Chinese Communist Party. The audience included Zong Huaide representing the government approved Catholic Church; Ding Guangxun, the head of China's official Protestant Church; An Shiwei for the Muslim Association; Zhao Puchu of the Buddhist Association and Xie Zhongxin, head of the Daoist Association. Li's message was crystal clear: religions and their works must conform to the "changing face of the nation's socialist market economy" (*China Daily* 31 Jan. 1994). The dye was cast. All religions without exception were to get on the modernization band wagon and, "jump into the sea." Religious organizations were being requested to rethink their mission of bearing witness in word and deed to a realm beyond the material and concentrate instead on Deng's maxim, "To get rich is glorious."

The craze for money that has taken hold of China is distorting values, encouraging crime and corruption and infecting even organized religions.

While China's economy grows at a fantastic 13% yearly rate, China is nonetheless strapped for cash. It is discovering that collecting taxes is not easy, that the money losing state owned businesses must be liquidated, that pursuing high speed development is risky, that switching from a command to a market economy is a complex task fraught with dangers. China is also aware that the Party's future as well as the country's stability depend on the success of the present enterprise. No wonder the government is jittery and seeking every possible avenue for revenue.

Suddenly, the government has hit on a perfect marriage: religion and business. Given this perfect couple the government can even compromise its principle of independence.

Until now the government has been providing its state-approved churches and religious associations with subsidies. The cookie jar is nearly empty. It is the turn of the churches to

fill it. With their foreign contacts, the churches can not only take care of their own needs; they can also keep the government's cookie jar filled to the brim. The fact that once the organized religions enter the business world they may be so busy making money that they will have little time or energy left to minister to the spiritual needs of the people, does not seem to be a major government concern. In fact, the many churches, constrained to maintain good relationships with the government have already jumped onto the market enterprise wagon: a number of Buddhist monasteries are running lucrative vegetarian restaurants; other groups are running three-star hotels, some own high rise buildings, one in Beijing is even named "the Muslim Building"; church land is being rented, sold or developed for money making purposes. These are some of the issues that Father Jean Charbonnier discusses at length in his article, *The Use of Religion for Economic Purposes*.

Father Beda Liu, S.J., in his *China Today: Contemporary Issues*, explores how China's renewed drive for reform, its opening to the outside world and its unabated rush for modernization present unprecedented challenges to the Church. Using an historical perspective, he analyzes how the developments which led to the 1989 Tianamen Square events as well as those afterwards are all rooted in the nation's social, political and economic life. Quoting the late pioneer China observer, Laszlo Ladanly, he writes, "What China needs is a new creative political and legal thinking.... new general convictions, a new mental outlook concerning the human person, society and political life." Fr. Liu's question is "What kind of service can and should the Church render in China's tortuous path towards modernization?"

The history section researched by Michael Sloboda, M.M., features the Church in China's Northwestern Provinces.

The personality section briefly recounts the life story of a young woman martyr, Lin Zhao, little known outside of China but deeply honored and venerated among the Miao and the Catholics of Guizhou Province.

The book review continues our series on missionary history with an examination of Robert Carbonneau's doctoral dissertation, *Life, Death and Memory: Three Passionists in Hunan, and the Shaping of an American Mission Perspective in the 1920's*.

As usual, the *News in Brief* feature those events which are relevant to the life of the Church in China.