

Editorial

Christianity with Confucian Characteristics

Much has been written in the secular press recently about the resurgence of interest in Confucianism in East Asian countries. In these writings Confucianism is treated in many different contexts, and as addressing a variety of issues. For instance, Confucianism has been depicted as filling the void left by China's abandonment of socialist values in the economic sphere in favor of more market oriented ones. Confucianism has also been called upon to popularize authoritarian regimes in the sense of encouraging citizens to be loyal and obedient subjects of the state. A Confucian ethos is cited to show that human rights are viewed differently in the East than they are in the West. Here, it is said, individual rights are subordinate to the rights of the community as a whole.

So important is Confucianism now considered in official circles in China that a three-day conference was organized on the subject during the first week of October last year in Beijing. Over 300 scholars from 18 countries attended the conference which was timed to coincide with the sage's 2,545th birthday. Speakers included Gu Mu, a former Chinese vice-premier, and Lee Kuan Yew, former prime minister of Singapore. Speaker after speaker emphasized the influence of Confucianism on all aspects of Chinese life, as well as on the lives of citizens in many other East Asian countries. While we have not seen any of the papers delivered - having only viewed newspaper articles about the conference - one wonders if it was recalled that during the Cultural Revolution Confucianism was criticized as being feudal and elitist.

However, newspaper accounts of the Confucian phenomenon for the most part only seem to deal with one aspect of Confucian thought, namely, the relationship between those in authority and their subjects, be they rulers and citizens, teachers and pupils or parents and children, what can be referred to as *li* (rites) in the Confucian corpus. Not much is presented about Confucianism's emphasis on nourishing the inner person, that is

by fostering a spirit of *ren* (human-heartedness). The connection of the latter to Christian charity springs immediately to a Christian's mind. Indeed, both Chinese and foreign Christians, from the Jesuits of Matteo Ricci's time up to Archbishop Luo Guang of today's Fujen University in Taiwan have sought a relationship between Confucian and Christian asceticism.

And so it is apropos at this time to have an issue of *Tripod* devoted to the theme of *Confucianism and Christianity*. In the lead article, *A Christian Reflection: Confucianism and Economics in East Asia*, Noboru Yoshiyama points to the influence of the ancestors in the lives of East Asian peoples. Economic prosperity, for instance, is viewed as blessings received from the ancestors, whereas organ transplants, to address a modern problem, are considered harmful to the vitality which a person receives from his ancestors. Judith Xu in her *Confucian View of Human Nature: Its relevance to the Contemporary Chinese* says that the two features of the Confucian understanding of human nature which impress her most are the affirmation of the intrinsic goodness of human nature and the concept of a mystical bond uniting human nature and heaven. Ms. Xu, who became a Christian in 1993, tells how her Confucian culture has enhanced her Christian faith in the sense that both traditions share a fundamental truth, namely that God, or heaven, is love. Of course, this brief summary does not do justice to the two articles just mentioned; the reader is promised a rich harvest of insights from a meditative study of each.

The third main article is a contribution from Aloysius B. Chang, S.J. entitled *Can Mainland China's 'Official' Church Still be Called 'Catholic?'* in which, without arriving at any conclusion, the author presents contrasting statements from ordinary Catholic teaching (like from Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium*) and from documents of the "official" church of mainland China. This is followed by no less than four items of DOCUMENTATION: a pastoral letter from the "unofficial" bishops conference of the Catholic Church in China, excerpts from two addresses by Josef Cardinal Tomko, Secretary of the Vatican Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, at a celebration in Taiwan of the 700th anniversary of the arrival of the Franciscan missionary John of Montecorvino in China and a speech by Liu Bainian, vice-chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, at an ecumenical conference in London.

We also have the usual China Church and News Update.

If one wishes to link the discussion of Confucianism in the first part of this issue with that of the differences between "official" and "unofficial" churches alluded to in the second part, one could do no better than to hope that Catholics on both sides of the question will practice Confucian human-heartedness (*ren*) and Christian charity in their dealings with one another. There is a *sensus fidelium* among Catholics on both sides which tells them what they must believe as Catholics. For the rest we have the hope that God who is love will ultimately solve the problem of division in the church sometime in the future. [PB]

