

From the Editor

Obstacles to Sino-Vatican relations usually focus on the need for the Vatican to bring its diplomatic ties with Taiwan to an end, and in line with those of other European nations. A second obstacle revolves around the right of the Church of Rome to appoint China's bishops independently of the Chinese government. Occasionally, mentioned, but most often only by way of parentheses, are the possible difficulties likely to be encountered on both sides by the role of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association within the hierarchy and government of the Church in China.

In the lead article of this issue of *Tripod*, Professor Michael Mi does cite the difficulty that exists with the appointment of bishops, but he lists it only as the fifth obstacle to Sino-Vatican relations. He makes no mention of Taiwan whatsoever. He does discuss at some length four obstacles seldom if ever mentioned in regular newspaper articles on the subject: atheism, Marxism, the underestimation of the Vatican's international status and fear of Vatican control.

Professor Mi sees the problem of the bishops' appointments as crucial since it touches on the Western concept of the distinction between religious and political authority. This is a distinction well understood and accepted in the West but seen as an aberration in a country such as China where religious matters are inseparable from State affairs. In China other religions submit the names of their leadership to the government for approval. Any deviation from this practice is interpreted as imperialistic interference in China's internal affairs.

Basically, Mi sees the issue as a "clash of civilizations", a problem of conflict of cultures not likely to be resolved easily nor quickly. He postulates the need for a deeper understanding of church history and respect for cultural diversities as a possible key and path to harmony and unity.

In a completely different vein, the article, "The Gospel with Chinese Characteristics" by a "China Pilgrim", we are given a glimpse, in fact, a refreshing insight, into the minds, hearts and characteristics of the ordinary Chinese. It is the work of a poet who gently reminds us that by constantly concentrating on China's political

and complicated religious situation, we lose sight of the beauty, the simplicity and the human qualities that characterize the ordinary Chinese, a people whose knowledge, inventions and culture have enriched the world for centuries.

For the section on *Culture*, we have selected Part I of “White Affairs” by Susan E. Goodman, a study of Chinese death and funeral rites and beliefs. This is particularly timely given the Chinese population’s growing interest in these types of religious matters and China’s on-going efforts to curb all traces of “feudal superstitions”. Part II will be printed in the next issue of *Tripod*.

The documentation section is the translation of an important article by Ye Xiaowen, the new national director of the RAB. It is entitled “Talk Policy, Talk Supervision and Talk Adaptation: The Three Phrases Must Be Thoroughly Implemented in Order to Do Religious Work Well”. Ye elaborates on these three phrases and discusses the main questions related to them. His stress is on the political nature of religious work and the need for all concerned to implement the policies comprehensively and correctly. This implementation, according to Ye, will only be accomplished through careful and constant supervision over all religious affairs according to law. The goal is to guide all religions to adapt themselves to socialism.

Anthony Lam, in reflecting on Ye’s article, points out some difficulties Catholics would have with some of the article’s contents.

The Book, reviewed by Michael Sloboda, is Beverly Joan Butcher’s doctoral dissertation, *Remembrance, Emulation, Imagination: The Chinese and Chinese American Catholic Ancestor Memorial Service*. We published an abstract from this book in No. 92, the March-April, 1996 issue of *Tripod* dealing with “Ancestor Worship in the Church”..

The News Update is, as usual, a collection of the more significant happenings in the China Church since our last publication. Of particular interest may be the most recent listing of those still being detained for their religious activities. □