

Editorial

Several events of major consequence affecting religion in China have occurred since the last publication of *Tripod*: the Holy Father has named a Chinese bishop a Cardinal; the Sixth Chinese Catholic Representatives Congress has met and elected its church leaders for the next five years; and Guangdong has issued a new set of guidelines to regulate the exercise of religion in the province. In addition, one of China's most devoted friends died suddenly in Hong Kong after returning from a trip to the mainland.

Let us look briefly at each of these events to assess their possible impact on religion in China.

When Pope John Paul II on January 18 announced the creation of 22 new cardinals, the name of Bishop Paul Shan Kuo-hsi came as something of a surprise to many. After all, Rome, in spite of repeated requests from Taiwan, has not elevated any bishop in Taiwan to the cardinalate since the death of Cardinal Paul Yu-pin in 1978.

People all over the world were quick to speculate on the Holy Father's motive for the selection. A prominent member of the church in Taiwan maintained that the appointment meant to express the Holy Father's concern for the church in Taiwan and his love for China. This same opinion was expressed by Bishop Shan himself in an interview with the press. In a typical Chinese response Bishop Shan said humbly, "I am not worthy of the cardinalate because I am just an ordinary man without much contribution to the church. However, looking from another perspective, the appointment means the Pope's concern and love for the church in China, including Taiwan." The same feelings were expressed by some leaders of the Mainland church.

Taiwan's foreign affairs ministry described it as an event having "significant meaning," adding quickly that the relations between the Holy See are firm. Actually, the Holy See is the only State left in Europe that still maintains full diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Others were quick to add that the "significant meaning" could be the peace offering of the Holy See, before it downgrades its diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

The Mainland government has made no comment on the appointment. Leaders in the Taiwanese church affirm that this is not a political decision but a religious one and all Chinese everywhere should receive the news with pride and joy.

Although the Sixth National Congress of Catholic Representatives had a hard time getting off the ground, and had to delay its opening for almost a month, the results came as no surprise to anyone. The difficulty lay in getting the 250 participants to agree to elect the government's choice of Fu Tieshan as Chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA). Bishop Fu is one of the 200 members of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress.

No such matters dog the new president of the Bishops Conference, Bishop Liu Yuanren. He is known as a man of deep faith who, it is reported, spent at least twenty years in a "reform through labour camp". He is a man in a delicate position who will need something of the wisdom of Solomon to fulfil his task.

Then there is the publication in Guangdong of the "new" guidelines entitled *Proclamation on the Publishing and Implementing the "Administrative Regulations of the Guangzhou Religious Affairs Bureau."* These present nothing new. They are modeled on the Shanghai regulations that came out last year. However, the Shanghai regulations have often been criticised as being too restrictive. This has caused considerable confusion. The result is that their implementation is unevenly carried out.

The stress in the newly published Guidelines that go into effect on March 1, 1998 is on the need for all religious organizations to register with the government, to follow the governments' regulations concerning places for the religious activities and the use, publication and importation of religious materials. The document is a reiteration of the obligation of all citizens not only to love their church but to love their church AND their country.

Finally, the Holy Spirit Study Centre mourns the passing of a dear friend in Father Edward Malatesta, a man of great scholarship who had a passionate love for China. May he rest in peace. (BAM)