

EDITORIAL

In this issue of Tripod we continue our study of the changes in China in the 30 years since the 3rd Plenum of the 11th Central Committee of December 1978, when Deng Xiaoping came back into power and initiated the policy of openness and reform. No longer was the Party Line to be “class struggle.” Rather, it would now be the promotion of the “Four Modernizations.” China was set on the road to becoming the economic powerhouse that it is today.

Many journals have been commemorating the 30th anniversary of that historic event. However, their accounts have mostly concentrated on the economic transformation of the country. They cite such statistics as the 8-9% average annual growth in the GDP, and the 2 trillion U.S. dollars of foreign reserves China has amassed in that 30-year period. With all the coverage given to the economy, we would like, in this issue, to consider developments in the field of religion, especially in Christianity.

We have articles by two Hong Kong Christian scholars, Leung Ka-lun, President of the Alliance Bible Seminary, and Ying Fuk Tsang, Associate Professor in the Divinity School of Chung Chi College, Chinese University of Hong Kong on the situation of the Protestant Christian Churches in China, and an article by Dr. Anthony Lam of our staff on conditions in the Catholic Church, over the last 30 years.

Seminary President Leung writes that the government’s religious policy has not basically changed since the issuance of Document #19 and Document #6 in 1982 and 1991 respectively.

Professor Ying referred to the “Three Sentences” the then Chinese President Jiang Zemin issued regarding religious work at an United Front Works Department conference in 1993: thoroughly implement the religious policy, strengthen supervision over religious affairs in accordance with the law, and guide religion to adapt to socialist society. Professor Ying also cites the clarification

President Jiang gave of Sentence #3: “This kind of adaptation certainly does not ask believers to discard theism and their religious faith. Rather, it demands that in the political realm they love the motherland, support the socialist system, and support the leadership of the Communist Party. At the same time, they should reform those religious systems and doctrines, which are not adapted to socialism, and utilize religious doctrines, rules and ethics which positively serve socialism.”

In his article, Anthony Lam cites Party elder Chen Yun’s 1990 letter to Deng Xiaoping warning him to beware of counter-revolutionaries using the cloak of religion to infiltrate China. Dr. Lam also refers to the two conditions China requires for establishing diplomatic relations with the Vatican: cut the present ties with Taiwan, and do not interfere in China’s internal affairs, including in its religious affairs.

All these statements cause a problem for the Catholic Church. It arises in the sensitive question of the appointment of bishops. Is the clarification about “reforming religious systems and doctrines,” and warnings about “infiltration” and “interference” aimed at the Catholic Church? However, it is part of faith of the Catholic Church that Jesus said to Peter: “Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church,” that down through time the Popes are the successors of Peter, and that these Popes have the authority to appoint bishops in all the countries of the world. How can the Catholic Church change this doctrine in order “to adapt to socialism?” Why would socialism require this of the Catholic Church? How can it be considered “infiltration” and “interference” if the Holy Father attempts to carry out this universally recognized duty of his?

Through concordats or agreements, many countries have worked this problem out. However, a solution to the question of the appointment of bishops has yet to be arrived at with China. To avoid much pain among the Catholics of China, let us pray that this problem can be solved in the not too distant future.

Lastly, we wish our readers a Blessed Christmas! (PJB)