

EDITORIAL

The special topic of this issue of *Tripod* is the 70th anniversary of the resolution of the “Chinese Rites Controversy.” This took place on December 8, 1939, with the issuance of the Vatican decree *Plane Compertum Est*. This decree lifted the nearly 200-year-old ban on Catholic participation in the “Chinese Rites” honoring Confucius and the ancestors.

In their articles, our four authors deal with the history of the controversy, the effects of the reversal of the ban, the inculturation of Chinese cultural practices into the Catholic liturgy, and attempts at forming a Chinese Christian theology as a distinctively Chinese response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our authors’ investigations come at a particularly apropos time because their publication takes place against the background of several significant anniversaries for the Catholic Church in Asia. In November 2009, the Catholic Church of Vietnam celebrated the 350th anniversary of the first introduction of the Gospel to their country. In the same month, the Catholic Church of Taiwan celebrated 150 years of evangelization on their island republic. And next year, in 2010, the Catholic Church in China celebrates the 400th anniversary of the death of Jesuit Father Matteo Ricci, who was one of the initiators of the policy of viewing the “Chinese Rites” as being no obstacle to the acceptance of the Christian faith.

Bishop Tod Brown, bishop of the Orange Diocese in California as well as chairperson of the Committee for Migrants of the U.S. Catholic Bishops Conference, plus five Vietnamese-American priests from his diocese, passing through Hong Kong on their return from Vietnam, described the “full-house” main celebration in Hanoi as “tremendous.” Father Michael Sloboda of our staff, who participated, along with 300 priests (including several Cardinals and bishops) and over 30,000 Catholics at the closing Mass in Taiwan’s Taoyuan Stadium on

November 21, 2009, described the atmosphere of that event in this way: "The excitement was palpable. You could feel the presence of the Holy Spirit. It gave great hope for the future of the Taiwanese Church."

What have been the effects of the lifting of the ban on the Chinese Rites? Has a new typically Chinese theology come into existence yet? Our author Matteo Nicolini-Zani quotes Father Aloysius Chang of the Fujen Theologate in Taiwan as saying: "Looked at as a whole, we Chinese theologians find ourselves with basically empty hands; we are still at the beginning." Father Mark Fang, also at Fujen, stated: "The long wait for the appearance of an authentically Chinese catechism, liturgy and Bible partially explains the reason for the delay in the take off of a truly local theology." However, Father Luis Gutheinz, of the same theologate, appears more optimistic, when quoted as saying: "From the workshop of Chinese theology new theological winds will be brought into the worldwide theological discussion in the not too distant future."

Most likely, it will be left to younger theological workers, like Father Zhao Jianmin, Director of Beijing's Institute for the Study of Christianity and Culture and of Sapientia Press, and other young Christian scholars to develop, what Nicolini-Zani calls, "a unique and distinctive Chinese way of thinking theologically." We all look forward to that day.

We must once again point out to our readers an "errata" in our previous issue. In the review of the book *Splendid Cause: The Missionary Society of St. Columban 1916-1954*, by Neil Collins, SSC, the reviewer mistakenly wrote that St. Columba (521-597), who preached the Gospel in Scotland, is the patron after whom the Columban Fathers and Sisters are named. However, the saint who holds that position is St. Columban (559-615), who evangelized on the European continent and founded monasteries in northern Italy. I can see that we must do a better job of proof-reading here at *Tripod*.

Finally, we wish all our readers a holy and a happy Christmas! (PJB)