

FR. HENRY ATWELL

## Toward Tomorrow



What "might-have-been" can be fascinating to think about.

With world attention focused on President Nixon's historic trip to China, one most improbable "might-have-been" is that Mao Tse Tung might have been Cardinal Archbishop of Peking if the Vatican hadn't goofed in the year 1517.

If the Vatican then had said "yes" rather than "no," China today might be a Catholic nation.

The Vatican mistake four centuries ago was certainly not due to malice but to a massive gap in communications — understandable in those days.

And the man who recommended that the Vatican say "yes" so long ago lies buried near the very spot where President and Mrs. Nixon will meet the Communist leaders in China.

That man was Jesuit missionary Father Matteo Ricci, who spent more than 25 years as the first Catholic missionary to China, where he died in Peking in 1610.

The controversy which later pitted Jesuits against Dominicans and Franciscans — and which the Jesuits lost — seems too trivial today to have stirred so much rancor.

Father Ricci studied the customs of the Chinese people, how best to appeal to them, how not to offend. He discovered their respect for their ancestors. Each home had a memorial shrine with flat little sticks inscribed with the Chinese letters for scores of deceased ancestors. Every family took time each day to pray at their shrine and recall the noble lives of relatives long since gone.

Father Ricci and his Jesuit companions found no fault in this practice but other missionaries, Dominicans and Franciscans, reported back to Rome that the Jesuits allowed the Chinese to worship their ancestors. After a century of charge and counter-charge, the Vatican ruled against the custom and demanded that converts to the Catholic faith must burn their memorial sticks and shrines.

About the only parallel I could think of in our present day way of life is if the Vatican were to order you to burn all the pictures you have in your home of relatives and friends, as a pre-condition for having your baby baptized, or for you to go to Communion.

The amazing thing is that many, even millions of Chinese people actually did so, thereby setting themselves apart from their neighbors, who looked upon these Catholics as people willing to reject their family heritage for the sake of a foreign religion.

Several other perfectly acceptable customs were also banned by the Vatican decree of 1517, requiring that the Catholic faith be accepted in its European package of Latin liturgy, Gothic architecture and even styles of clothes.

The mistake of 1517 was not the last one. Following Mao Tse Tung's takeover in 1949, some few prelates in China ran away to save their necks, but most of the others preferred to stay and suffer with their people.

In 1951 the Vatican forbade any bishops to be consecrated in China unless approved by Rome — an impossibility because Communist China had cut off all contact with the rest of the world. Today there are still 65 Catholic bishops in China, but 45 of them got their miters contrary to the Vatican decree of 1951.

Pope John and Pope Paul quietly buried both the 1517 and 1951 edicts and nudged open the gates with hopes of reversing these many centuries of misunderstanding. Mao Tse Tung indicated he's interested too by setting free the imprisoned American Maryknoll Bishop James E. Walsh.

Pope Paul said the bishop's release was "a sign of better days, of days for which we have so long been waiting and hoping." Father Ricci must have responded with a fervent "Amen" to that statement. Yes, indeed, may it be so.

FR. PAUL J. CUDDY

## On The Right Side



Father Interrogator: "What developments do you consider significant through Vatican II?"

Father Education Specialist: "Two. 1) The Church opened up areas for further speculation which pre-Vatican II had not considered. 2) The Council no longer looked upon the Church as the Mystical Body or as an institution, but as an organic body. The Pilgrim Church, opening up continual doctrinal study."

COMMENT: Re 1: The development of Catholic doctrine began about 2000 years ago, and will continue to the end of the world. Cf. Epistles of St. Paul, Councils of Nicaea, Guastalla, Lateran, Trent, Vatican I; cf. also Cardinal Newman's Development of Christian Doctrine. cf. Papal Encyclicals. So, what else is new?

Re 2: "The Council no longer considered the Church as an institution or The Mystical Body." Stuff and nonsense! The Council says the opposite: "... The Church has more often been called the edifice of God. On this foundation the Church is built by the apostles and from it the Church receives durability and solidity. By communicating His spirit to His Brothers, called together from all peoples, Christ made them mystically into His own body. Christ established and ceaselessly sustains here on earth His holy Church, the Community of faith, hope and charity, as a visible structure. Through her He communicates truth and grace to all. But the society furnished with hierarchical agencies and the Mystical Body of Christ are not to be considered as two realities. This is the unique Church of Christ, which in the Creed we avow as the one, holy, catholic and apostolic."

It continues: "... By the power of the risen Lord she is given strength to overcome patiently and lovingly the afflictions and hardships which assail her from within and without."

I am sorry to have to believe that Father Education Specialist is one of the afflictions which assails the Church from within. The dreadful thing is that so many such men are in the upper echelon, directing religious education through those beneath them. More next week.

In early February I was half sick, so I confined myself to quarters all morning. I live in a house across from our hospital, in celibate solitude, but take my meals at the hospital. At 11:15 just before going over for lunch, I flicked on the TV and got a NYC station. Two priests, identifiable by their clericals, were in the middle of a discussion on Catholic religious education in the States. The names I missed; but the interrogator was a New Yorker who posed questions well, both in manner and substance; the respondent was a mid-thirties priest greatly involved in religious education. He held an executive position in the upper echelons of influence and direction. So I sat in my new chair, pencil and pad in hand, and said to myself: "This should be interesting." Well, it was: like an earthquake or a flu epidemic. Here is a sampling.

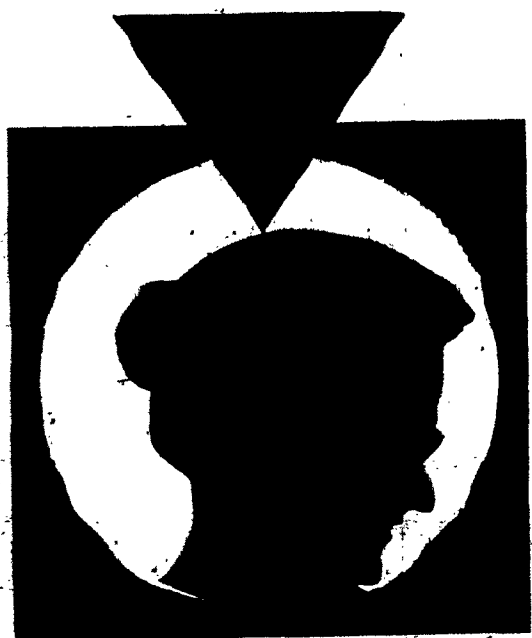
Father Interrogator: What would you say are important changes in the Church today?"

Father Education Specialist: "There is a confusion regarding roles. Before Vatican II the religious specialists were priests, nuns, brothers. Now with post-Vatican II we have the great role of parents."

COMMENT: This declaration hardly accords with fact. Recently Msgr. John Duffy was a guest at our parsonage. He was recalling his own preparation for Confirmation. "We used de Harbe's Catechism, much more difficult than the Baltimore Catechism. It had over 300 questions and answers. My father and mother would listen to my answers and they expected me to understand them, even as they explained them."

The Nonsense Peddlers keep drumming that pre-Vatican Adamites were mentally slow. As one expressed it to a group: "In the Old Days people memorized the Catechism, but they didn't know what the answers meant." To this rubbish I would reply: "Do you honestly think little John Duffy did not know more than any comparable youngster of comparable age today? Who's kidding whom? Experiment: Ask a dozen teen-agers for a clear-cut answer to a doctrinal or moral question today — and see what you get."

## Spotlighting the Canandaigua area PAT BOLAND



Pat Boland, a free-lance writer, is joining the Courier-Journal staff to cover the Canandaigua area.

Pat has had work published in several national magazines and newspapers and what makes this even more noteworthy is that she is the mother of six children.

And that's not all. She does part-time work at the Ontario County Historical Museum; and has taught school in several diocesan schools. A native of Rochester, she attends St. Mary's in Canandaigua. She and her husband Gerald have lived in Canandaigua for 11 years.

If you have news of the Canandaigua area, give her a call.

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