

COLUMNISTS

China-Vatican tensions have long history

The controversy provoked by the ordinations last month of five Chinese bishops in Beijing, without Vatican approval, was multi-faceted in nature.

A key bone of contention between the Chinese government and Rome has been Rome's insistence on the right to name bishops. A spokesman for the Chinese Ministry for Foreign Affairs said: "We want to improve our relations with the Holy See. But we do not want the Holy See to interfere in our internal affairs."

Anyone with a knowledge of Chinese history can see why the Chinese have long been suspicious of foreign interference. And anyone with a grasp of church history knows missionary efforts were often exploited, and thereby subverted, for political and economic gain at the expense of those being evangelized.

Therefore, the history of relations between Rome and China needs to be weighed if one is to place this present controversy into a meaningful context.

After a few unsuccessful missionary ventures in the seventh, 13th and 14th centuries, Jesuit missionaries, from the late 16th to the late 18th centuries, established Christianity on a surer footing. No one typified this effort more nobly than Father Matteo Ricci (1552-1610).

Ricci entered China in 1583 and soon



By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

essays in theology

attracted converts among the intellectual elite. He was a favorite at the imperial court and an important scientific and literary figure, publishing a catechism in Chinese and a number of other books and translations.

But due to Jesuit-Dominican rivalries, Ricci's accomplishments were dissipated after his death. Pope Innocent X decreed in 1645 that Chinese rites should no longer be used in the liturgy.

Innocent X's successor, Alexander VII, reversed that decision 11 years later, but in 1704 Pope Clement XI, in turn, reversed Alexander VII, decreeing that the Jesuit missionaries could no longer use Chinese rites. In reaction, the emperor expelled all missionaries and a persecution of Chinese Christians ensued.

In 1939 this disastrous papal decision

was reversed once again, this time by Pope Pius XII, but the incalculable damage had already been done.

One need not hold a brief for the policies of the current Chinese government to see that there is at least some justification for its historic suspicion of foreign interference in the internal affairs of China, including its religious institutions.

While Catholics today may regard the appointment of bishops as a purely religious matter, it has not always been the case. Bishops have been the pawns of temporal rulers and powerful families for centuries, and were often bestowed in return for money (simony), to reward relatives (nepotism), or to advance political interests of the Papal States.

The process of selection was originally in the hands of the clergy and laity of each diocese. All bishops, including even the bishop of Rome, were elected by the people they would serve, in accordance with the ancient principle of Pope Leo the Great (440-61): "He who is in charge of all should be chosen by all."

Later the Byzantine and the Holy Roman emperors became directly involved in the election of popes by requiring their approval before anyone elected to the office could be consecrated. Less exalted temporal rulers exercised similar

influence over the appointment of bishops within their own realms.

A central goal of church reformers at the beginning of the Second Christian Millennium was to bring an end to lay interference in the appointment and investiture of bishops. That task shifted again to other bodies, including cathedral chapters, or groups of priests (canons) attached to the local cathedral.

However, the pope appointed relatively few bishops, apart from those within the Papal States. He generally ratified decisions made by others, whether democratically or otherwise. It was not until the end of the Napoleonic wars in the early 19th century that popes began to reserve to themselves the right to appoint all bishops. At the time, less than 5 percent of Latin-rite bishops had been appointed directly by the pope.

Whatever other reasons the Chinese government may have for opposing the Vatican's right to name bishops in China, its argument has ample support in the history of the church itself.

Apart from the case's politics, Leo the Great's dictum still holds: "He who is in charge of all should be chosen by all."

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Christ is God's 'Yes'

Seventh Sunday of the Year (Feb. 20): (R3) Mark 2:1-12. (R1) Isaiah 43:18-19, 21-22, 24-25. (R2) 2 Corinthians 1:18-22.

When we think about the sacrifice Christ made in our behalf, when we think of the summons we have heard since childhood to follow in Christ's steps — then when we think of our own inadequate efforts to repay what has been given us — our shoulders slump, a look of distress comes on our face and a sense of failure invades our heart. Isn't it ironic that those of us who have striven all our lives to love Christ and serve him should be the ones who need to hear the words of St. Paul? To the Corinthians he wrote: "For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was proclaimed to you by us ... was not 'yes' and 'no,' but 'yes.' For however many are the promises of God, their Yes is in him."

In her memoirs, an anonymous woman writes of her experiences as a field nurse in the Civil War. She worked for the Confederate forces, patching up dozens of wounded, sick soldiers every day. One day at the war's end, news came that President Lincoln would be visiting this Confederate field hospital. Many of the rebel soldiers were terrified of meet-



By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

a word for sunday

ing him. Surely Lincoln was a monster, and he would treat the Confederate soldiers cruelly!

But when Lincoln entered the hospital tent, he began to cry. He bent over the injured soldiers' cots and spoke softly to them. He patted their hands and stroked their hair, just as a father might do. When he left, the men couldn't stop talking about what a good man he was. They had expected a tyrant, and found instead a kind, gentle and forgiving leader. One day you and I will discover that the God we serve is kinder, gentler and more forgiving than we can imagine. And we will wonder why we were so reluctant to trust God with our lives. Christ is God's "Yes."

A dear Christian woman was asked by her pastor, shortly before her death, "If

you had your whole life to live over, what would you do differently?" Without reflecting for even a few seconds she answered, "I would believe God more."

Just think what you and I might be emboldened to do if we believed God more. What is holding you back from being all that you can be? Still, there is a third thing we need to see, namely, the best is yet to come.

God who gave us Christ "has also put his seal upon us and given the Spirit in our hearts as a first installment." Imagine that! To get a car all you need do is put a deposit down on it. The Holy Spirit is God's first installment on us. We are His! Even though we may not see it now, there will come a time when the glory of our life in Christ will show itself in glorious fulfillment in eternity.

A young Irish immigrant, Joseph Scriven (1820-86) was deeply in love with a girl and their marriage plans had been made. Not long before their wedding day, however, she drowned. For months Scriven was bitter, in utter despair. At last he turned to Christ, and through Christ's grace, he found peace and comfort. Out of this tragic experience he wrote the familiar hymn that has brought consolation to millions of

aching hearts: "What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!"

Joseph Scriven came to see that through the Holy Spirit God made an installment on his heart. One day he, too, would share in the grandeur of God's promises and be with the girl he loved.

God loves us more than we can imagine. Christ has made us a special people. God has placed his Spirit within us as an installment on our lives. With joy let us say "Yes!"

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, February 21

James 3:13-18; Mark 9:14-29

Tuesday, February 22

1 Peter 5:1-4; Matthew 16:13-19

Wednesday, February 23

James 4:13-17; Mark 9:38-40

Thursday, February 24

James 5:1-6; Mark 9:41-50

Friday, February 25

James 5:9-12; Mark 10:1-12

Saturday, February 26

James 5:13-20; Mark 10:13-16



In our community, the Image Centre of the World, we greatly appreciate the value of memories. Pictures capture special moments, family events, and once-in-a-lifetime happenings. Our life, as with a picture, becomes a memory to family and friends. When you consider how you would like to be remembered and memorialized, think of us, we are the CRAWFORD FUNERAL HOME, where helping families share memories has been our focus since 1957.



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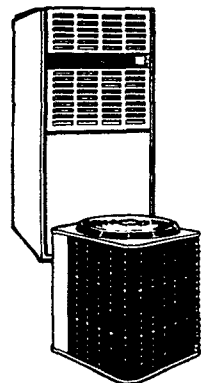


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