

EDITORIAL

This issue of *Tripod* is a tribute to our late Holy Father John Paul II. The world's media have given enormous coverage to the late Holy Father and to his successor. We want to look at their efforts to contact the Church in China.

Because of his over 100 trips abroad to more than 120 countries, John Paul's successor, Pope Benedict XVI, has aptly called him a great "missionary" Pope. Although never making it to China, Pope John Paul had a great love for China, for the Chinese people, and for the Chinese Catholic Church (CCC). The articles by Gianni Criveller, Anthony Lam and Jeroom Heyndrickx in this issue describe Pope John Paul's efforts to reach out to China and to build bridges to that great country.

Realizing the sensitivity of all matters concerning the Catholic Church and China, in his words and actions, the late Holy Father was always careful not to make matters worse. For instance, despite his many travels, and although invited many times to do so, he never once visited Taiwan. And although frustrated in not being able to come to Hong Kong in 1998 to deliver the report on the Asian Synod, not a word of complaint passed his lips. The late Holy Father did not engage in stone-throwing; rather he stressed the positive side of things. While admitting the mistakes of some Christians in the past, he emphasized the positive contributions of the missionaries to China. He tried to assure the Chinese government that a Chinese Catholic could be at one and the same time authentically Chinese and authentically Christian.

Addressing the CCC, he did not draw lines of distinction between official Catholics and underground Catholics. He considered them all to be members of the one CCC. His pastoral concern for the Chinese Catholics came through. At the same time, Pope John Paul II held to the principles of the Universal Catholic

Church. For instance, he did not give up the right to appoint bishops in China (as the Holy Father does throughout the whole world), for the sake of establishing diplomatic relations.

Speaking of diplomatic relations, there has been some speculation about this recently in the media. People wonder whether, with the election of Benedict XVI, diplomatic relations between China and the Vatican are imminent. This writer deals with this question in his article on the new Pope. The problem is that if only a political agreement is arrived at, this will not be satisfactory to the Catholics of China. What the Chinese Catholics desire is real religious freedom. They want freedom for the Holy Father to appoint bishops in China. They want freedom to communicate with the Holy Father, whether by mail or in person. They want freedom to decide their own church matters without government interference. They will feel that a merely political settlement, i.e., the external establishment of relations, without firm guarantees of the religious freedoms mentioned, will be useless.

Our final article is by Father John Baptist Zhang Shijiang, editor of Faith Press in Hebei Province. The essay is basically a talk given by Father Zhang in Sydney in April 2004. He stresses the need for the establishment of diplomatic relations because, in his view, it would solve many problems, like the appointment of bishops and the demarcation of diocesan boundary lines. Towards the end of his article, Father Zhang cites the complaint of some religious work cadres, who have told him: "We have spent millions beautifying the Catholic Church in Wangfujing in Beijing, and we have allotted 450 million RMB for religious work in 2004. Why do some people outside of China still criticize us for having no religious freedom?" But can the two things be put on the same plane? Does the spending of millions of yuan equate with granting religious freedom? In other words, outside observers could answer: "Yes, the government spent millions on religious work, but the granting of real religious freedom wouldn't cost a dime!"

Just as with the Apostles, may the Spirit of Pentecost come down upon all our readers! (PJB)