

Twenty-five Years of Tripod

Peter Barry, MM

In January 1981, the first issue of *Tripod* was born. As editor of the English section of *Tripod*, I would like in this article to review the 25 years of English writings that have appeared in our journal. It is a great pleasure to look back from this vantage point to see what we have accomplished, or at least tried to accomplish. I am in great admiration of my predecessors as editor because then *Tripod* was a bi-monthly, and they had six issues a year to put out. Although *Tripod* became a quarterly in 2001, and so I theoretically have less work, I still feel the pressure of meeting deadlines!

Tripod was envisioned not only as a means of relaying information about the Church in China to the outside world, but also of relaying information about the Church outside of China to the Church inside of China. Therefore, it was decided that the journal would be published in two languages, Chinese and English. The Church in China had been cut off from the outside world for over 30 years, so for instance, its clergy and faithful knew nothing about the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). A great effort at updating was called for. At the same time, *Tripod* was seen as a vehicle for dialogue with Marxist theoreticians, especially on the question of the role of religion in social life.

Feeling our way as we went along, in that first year of publication, *Tripod* had articles introducing the work of the Centre, as well as the work of other similar centers, both Protestant and Catholic in Hong Kong. Setting the tone early for the stance to be taken by *Tripod* on the crucial question of papal primacy, Director and then Chief Editor, Father John Tong, published an article in issue No. 3 (1981), entitled "The Primacy of the Pope and the Collegiality of the Bishops." And in line with one stated purpose of the magazine, namely dialogue with Marxism, in that same issue

No. 3, we published an article by Leo Goodstadt, entitled "Atheism and the Chinese Communist Party after Mao Zedong."

The history of the Catholic Church in China was another great concern of ours. So, in that first year, Angelo Lazzarotto wrote two articles on this topic for us, one in issue No. 2, entitled "The Fourth Centenary of Matteo Ricci's Arrival in China," and another in issue No. 5, "Martino Martini: A Sinologist to be Remembered." Other articles concerned with Church history were Leo Van Den Berg's "The Mongolian Territory and The Christian Encounter" in issues Nos. 4 and 5, and Beatrice Leong and this writer's "The 1200th Anniversary of the Erection of the Nestorian Tablet" in issue No. 4. Keeping up with contemporary matters, Father John Tong also wrote an article explaining the Vatican's appointment of Bishop Dominic Deng Yiming as Archbishop of Guangzhou on June 6, 1981 for issue No. 4, and the whole of issue No. 6 was devoted to commentaries on the ecumenical meeting, entitled "A New Beginning," attended by Catholics and Protestants from both China and the outside world, and held in Montreal on October 2-9, 1981. All the statements of Pope John Paul II concerning China and accounts of visits to Catholic communities in China (including pictures) also appeared in our first issues.

Throughout the 1980's *Tripod* continued to publish articles under the following three or four main categories: the Bible and theology, politics and economics, Chinese Church history, and accounts of visiting delegations. In the fields of Bible and theology our authors were: Mark Fang, Gabriel Ly, Aloysius Chang, Edward Malatesta, Richard Wang, Eugene LaVerdiere, John Linnan, Richard McBrien, Robert Schreiter, Geoffrey King, Philip Wickeri, Thomas Law, Betty Ann Maheu, Therese Howard, Thaddeus Hang, Paul Knitter, James Kroeger, Michael Amaladoss, George Evers, Raymond Collins, Herman Hendrickx, Cardinal Josef Tomko, Bishop Howard Hubbard, John Tong, and Goretta Lau.

In the areas of politics and economics, authors who wrote for us included: Leo Goodstadt, Arthur McGovern, Georges Cottier, Jean Charbonnier, Michel Masson, Arnold Sprenger, Liu Peng, Michael Sloboda, Beda Liu, Anthony B.L. Cheung, Edward K.Y. Chen, and Lo Wing Hung. In the field of Chinese Church history, our writers included: Angelo Lazzarotto, Gianni Criveller, Patrick

Taveirne, Jean-Paul Wiest, Bernard Luk, Jeroom Heyndrickx, John Young, Pierre Jeanne, Roman Malek, Jessie Lutz, Ruth Hayhoe, Arnolf Camps, Ray O'Toole, Laurence Murphy, and Anthony Lam.

The content of our articles thus came to be set in those three categories of theology, politics, and Church history. This continued throughout the 1990's. Articles on Church history, like Gianni Criveller's enlightening series (in 14 installments) entitled "Dialogues on Jesus in China," appeared. However, what we did notice in the last decade of the 20th century was that both the central and local governments were issuing more and more official documents on religion. We decided to translate and publish these for our readers' reference.

The first of these was Document #3 of the Spring of 1989 entitled "Strengthening Catholic Church Work in the New Situation," which appeared in *Tripod* No. 52, August 1989. This was followed by Document #6, with the rather lengthy title "A Circular from Party Central and the State Council Concerning Certain Problems in Further Improving Religious Work," which appeared in our issue No. 66, November-December 1991. Then our issue No. 79 of January-February 1994 carried the decrees Nos. 144 and 145 of the State Council, entitled "Regulations on the Supervision of the Religious Activities of Foreigners in China," and "Regulations Regarding the Management of Places of Religious Activity," both signed by then Premier Li Peng on January 1, 1994. Finally, we re-produced the "Regulations on Religious Affairs," listed as Decree No. 426, signed by Premier Wen Jiabao on November 30, 2004 to take effect on March 1, 2005, in *Tripod* No. 136, Spring 2005. Throughout the late 1990's, we also printed many of the speeches and articles of Mr. Ye Xiaowen, Director of the Religious Affairs Bureau at the national level.

In a parallel manner, we also recorded documents issued from the official Church structures. These included "Regulations of the Chinese Catholic Bishops' Conference Regarding the Election and Consecration of Bishops," dated May 17, 1993, published in *Tripod* No. 77, September-October 1993, and more recently the three management system documents for the Catholic Church, passed at a Church conference in March 2003, re-produced in our issue No. 130, Autumn 2003. We even published documentation from the

unofficial bishops' conference, under the title of "The Chinese Bishops' Conference: A Proposal," in *Tripod*, No. 79. And of course, we faithfully re-produced all the messages Pope John Paul II addressed to the Catholic Church of China.

The picture one gets from all this documentation is that the Chinese government desires to maintain strict control over the Chinese Catholic Church. This is exemplified in the government's steadfast refusal to permit the Holy Father to appoint bishops in China. However, the Catholics of China want their bishops to be appointed by the Holy Father. They generally refuse to attend the ceremonies conducted by bishops who do not have such an appointment. Moreover, people are going to jail for this principle. Examples are Bishops Su Zhiming and An Shuxin of Baoding, arrested in 1996-97, and held *incommunicado* ever since. Their only apparent "crime" is that they do not want anyone, including any government, to change their religion, which would be the case if the Holy Father cannot appoint bishops in China.

Thus for the last 25 years *Tripod* has followed the vicissitudes of the Catholic Church in China and has documented the government's efforts to control it. From this vantage point one cannot help but have the feeling that the government's religious policy is too restrictive and has a long way to go in the direction of granting more religious freedom to its Catholic citizens. It is mystifying to me how China can be so far advanced economically that it is able to bid to buy foreign oil companies, and yet at the same time have such an anachronistic religious policy!