

EDITORIAL

We continue on the occasion of the 35th anniversary of the founding of the Holy Spirit Study Centre to review the situation of the Church in China during the last 35 years. Father Paul Han has shared a paper with us, which he first delivered at a Church-in-China conference last September in Poland. We have shortened the paper here, but have not left out Father Han's thoughtful analysis of the vocation crisis in the Church in China, as well as his sympathetic presentation of the difficulties of the over-worked clergy and religious as they reach middle-age.

Because this year marks the 50th anniversary of the close of the Second Vatican Council, we asked Father James Kroeger, eminent professor of theology at the Loyola School of Theology in Manila, to sum up the contribution of Vatican II to the life of the Church in our time. He has selected ten themes from this historic event, which have had an influence on the Church up to the present day. He then applies these themes to the Church in China.

Next, the *Tripod* staff analyzes the meager information that has emerged from the meeting between representatives of the Holy See and the Chinese government, which took place last October in Beijing.

Then Grace Zhang, a young Catholic scholar of China, in her article reviewing the development of theology, briefly describes the work of four Chinese-staffed institutes of theology, which are making incipient attempts to develop an inculturated Catholic theology. Finally, Father Peng Jiandao describes the evangelization methods of the Handan Diocese in Hebei Province.

As part of the recent situation of the Church in China, we must make mention of the shocking news of the death of Father Yu Heping in early November. The story was first carried by Catholic social media on the mainland, then picked up by *UCANews*, and published in the November 29, 2015 edition of Hong Kong's Catholic paper *Sunday Examiner*. According to the news report,

two Sisters were apparently the last persons to see Fr. Yu alive. On November 6th, they accompanied him to take transportation to Liaoning to attend a catechetical conference there on November 7th. He never arrived at his destination. Instead his body was found on November 8th floating in the Fen River, a tributary of the Yellow River near Taiyuan.

Father Yu Heping, a member of the unofficial church community, was born in 1974 in Shanxi Province. He studied at the Baoding Seminary, and was ordained for the Ningxia Diocese in 2004. He also studied at the Pontifical University in Salamanca, Spain, earning Master's degrees in both the Social Teachings of the Church and Canon Law. At the time of his death, Father Yu was pastor of the Yinchuan parish in the Ningxia Diocese. However, he also helped with Church catechetical programs in other parts of the country.

The death of Father Yu is quite mysterious. Conflicting reports have emerged. According to a reliable source, on November 12th, some Catholics from Father Yu's parish met the police in the area where Father Yu's body was found. The police informed them that they had ruled out homicide and robbery in Father Yu's case. They said that Father Yu had either accidentally fallen into the water and drowned, or he had committed suicide.

However, friends, both inside and outside of China, have objected to suicide as the cause of Father Yu's death, because he did not seem to be suicidal. He seemed, on the contrary, to be a positive person, actively involved in many charitable activities. Then, on December 19th, *Catholic Church Online* reported that no autopsy report has been issued up to now. "But the police want to state clearly that from the very beginning they have never determined that Father Yu's death was a suicide." Thus it seems that the police have not definitely ruled out homicide in Father Yu's case, and that a further investigation along the lines of a possible homicide will take place.

Whatever the cause or motive for Father Yu's death, we pray for the repose of his soul, and give thanks for his many multi-faceted efforts at preaching of the Gospel in China. May he rest in peace. (PJB)