

EDITORIAL

I shall get up and go through the city; in the streets and in the squares, I shall seek my sweetheart, I sought but could not find him!

The words of the beloved in the Bible's *Song of Songs* (3: 2) could be the voice of the youth in China today.

The State has taken heed. In April, 2017, the central government issued the first development plan tailored for China's youth, *The Middle- and Long-term Youth Development Plan (2016-2025)*. Citing the needs of the single-child and internet generation, the authorities proposed to fix what is deficient, and initiate policy changes in areas such as education, health, employment, ideology, social integration, even dating and marriage. Young people matter, for they are the means of achieving the "China dream of national rejuvenation," and "socialism with Chinese characteristics." To do so, the youth must "obey and follow the Party."

As "Sinicisation" (at first a slogan) takes shape, and becomes policies that rule over institutions and communities across the country, the religious sector is not exempt. In June the state-sanctioned Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China (BCCCC) and the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) issued a *Five-Year Plan on Carrying Forward the Chinese Catholic Church's Adherence to the Direction of Sinicisation (2018-22)*. The document spells out:

For adhering to Sinicisation of Catholicism, it is necessary to have political self-consciousness and self-awareness. To love the motherland and obey the state regime is a responsibility and obligation for each Christian. Core political requirements are acceptance of the leadership of the Communist Party of China, supporting the socialist system and safeguarding constitutional and legal authorities.

The emphasis is on local implementation. Although neither the Five-Year Plan nor the 2017 Religious Affairs Regulations carry provisions that target young people specifically, children and youth under 18 are forbidden to enter the church, or receive religious

instruction. This has taken place in different dioceses, in cities, towns, and even at the village-level. Strong-armed paternalism speaks not of love, but of fear.

As the Church gets ready to convene the Bishops' Synod on "Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment" in Rome, we dedicate this *Tripod* issue to reflections on contemporary youth ministry in China. In addition to the voices of young Catholics, and youth ministers, lay and ordained, from mainland dioceses, we publish an excerpt from Chiaretto Yan's new book on youth and mission in China, *Season for Relationships*. Annie Lam sums up the responses of Chinese youngsters to the Synod. And Fr. Bruno Lepeu reports on recent developments in youth ministry in China.

Loved first by the Lord, the Church has been asked as an evangelising community to "go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast." (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 24) But the Church has fallen—*again!* Recent revelations about the sexual abuse of minors by members of the clergy, *and* the abuse of power that covers up, and allows such crimes to fester, cast doubt on what the Church is about. Like the beloved who sought the Lord, but was brutalised in *Song of Songs*, some of the children and youth have been violated by those they trust.

The watchmen met me...they beat me, they wounded me, they took my cloak away from me: those guardians of the ramparts! (5:7)

It would be naïve to think that such scandals happen only in the West. What is being done to protect minors, to prevent abuse in the Church in China? How to bring about mechanisms of accountability and leadership—in dioceses that lack even episcopal oversight, or are torn by mistrust between "official" and "unofficial" communities of faith? The solution does not lie in state-enforced "independence, autonomy, and self-management," the so-called "democratic management" of the Church, where new idols, money and influence are peddled.

As we pray for the Synod, and for openness to the future of the Church, may we discern and take up our ecclesial responsibility. We—the laity, the clergy, women, men, the young and the elderly—are the "universal sacrament of salvation." What do we need to do to bring life to today's youth and the world? (CP)