



# FROM THE EDITOR



There can be little doubt that the most delicate and sensitive issue confronting the universal Catholic Church and the Catholic Church in China is Church unity. The problems involved here are the result of a set of historical circumstances that are as unique as they are intricate, and the difficulties are as complicated as they are vexing. In this issue of Tripod, we offer our readers some interesting observations by leading churchmen on the topic of Church unity and ecclesial communion.



Our first article is a reprint from the International Fides News Service: "Catholic Church in China Merits Trust for its Fidelity and Service." This is the commentary that was sent to churches throughout the world along with the December prayer intention of the Apostleship of Prayer: "that all Chinese Catholics may enjoy full communion with the universal Church". Such commentaries emanate from the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and generally reflect papal pastoral concerns of a special nature. Certainly the relationship of the Pope to Chinese Catholics has been one of the overriding concerns of recent Popes. The commentary, we think, serves as a good lead-in to the second of our three major articles.

It is indeed rare, and to our knowledge perhaps the very first time that a leading Catholic churchman from China

has addressed himself publicly and at some length outside his own country on China-Vatican relations. "The Church in China: Past and Present" is an English translation of an address given by Aloysius Jin, Auxiliary Bishop of Shanghai, to an audience of Catholic clergy and laity on his visit to West Germany in April of this year. Along with a brief historical summary of the more painful episodes of the Church in China in its long relationship with Rome, which is uncomfortably familiar to regular readers of Tripod, the Bishop also goes into some discussion of theological aspects of the relation of local churches with the universal Church. The Bishop's comments were received with more than just passing interest in certain secular and church circles at the time.

In an attempt to give our readers a fuller picture of the nature of the problems involved in Church unity, we are most grateful to Father Aloysius Chang, S.J., one of Taiwan's leading theologians, for allowing us to print his article on the "Ministry of the Pope and the Communion of the Catholic Church". Father Chang's main concern is a careful analysis of the nature of ecclesial communion, but he does respond to some of the issues raised by Bishop Jin. As Father Chang himself mentions, his interest is in initiating a dialogue. And few would dispute that a respectful and productive dialogue would hopefully lead to the gradual clarification of issues and the elimination of those barriers that stand in the way of full communion, and also a realization of Christ's prayer for his disciples: "May they all be one, Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me." (John 17:21)

It is a sobering thought for all of us who are concerned with the unity of Christians everywhere that Christ prayed this prayer as he was about to undergo his passion and death.

And while such thoughts of the passion might at first seem to clash with the joy and good cheer of the present Christmas season, on further consideration, we can also see that the two are related: for is it not in the poverty of the child in the crib and the humble self-sacrifice of the man on the cross that we find our only hope and guarantee for a truly lasting unity?