

From the Editor

We are greatly indebted to the China-Zentrum (the German - China Centre) for serving as special guest editors of this edition of Tripod. They have put together six articles quite diverse in content but unified by a central theme: the mutuality of concern that has marked the relationship of German Christians with the people of China down through the years. When considering the contributions made by German people in the past, the name Adam Schall (1591-1666) comes immediately to mind. This pioneer Jesuit missionary to China integrated a religious zeal with a genius for science and placed both at the service of the people he went to evangelize. After predicting the exact time of the lunar eclipse on three separate occasions, Schall was placed in charge of the Beijing Observatory by the emperor himself. He served as a high court official for the Qing emperors until his death in 1666. Many of the astronomical instruments he developed and designed can still be seen at various sites throughout the city. Adam Schall became a role model for many missionaries who were to follow him.

But our guest editors are not merely concerned with the past, they also outline current bridges that have been built during the 1980's with the re-opening of China to more frequent foreign exchanges. These have been on many levels, including economic, social, cultural, theological and spiritual. Such efforts have already produced much fruit, and augur well for the continual growth of genuine friendship.

Another characteristic that these articles have in common is their objectivity and realistic optimism. The mistakes made by both sides in the past, the misunderstandings and misgivings of two peoples coming together from diverse cultures and histories are not glossed over, but the focus always returns to the underlying strengths that can be found in the present relationship. The articles reflect a search for common ground and mutual understanding. An example of this is when the German theologians offer the experience of their own turbulent Church and State history as an encouragement to the Church in China in resolving their present internal problems. And the overriding emphasis is on the universality of human experience, where the family of man is realized in the communion of Christians sharing in the one body of Christ.

Fr. Ed Malatesta, who is the Director of the Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History at the University of San Francisco, was the first Western teacher invited to lecture at Shanghai's Sheshan Seminary. He reflects on his experiences and offers us some provocative and moving insights into the present situation there.

Finally, we wish to thank Fr. Osvaldo Pisani, former Chancellor of the Hong Kong Diocese for his letter of response to an article which appeared in our issue on Small Faith Communities (Tripod #55). We hope his comments will inspire more of our readers to share their written reactions to what appears in our Tripod. We all have a great need to learn from each other.