

Editorial

In *Lumen Gentium* Vatican II describes the nature of the Church as sacrament, "a sign and instrument... of communion with God and of unity among all human beings" ((LG #1). Unfortunately, the Church in China does not always project such an image. With its divided allegiances, its sometimes confrontational approach, its manifold forms of disagreements, it seems that Pope John Paul II's frequent appeals for reconciliation are still far from realization.

In this issue of *Tripod* we have enlisted the help of theologians, historians and canon lawyers, men united in a common love for the Chinese people, to reflect on the situation of the Chinese Catholic Church. They explore the ramifications of canon law and point out the complexities of the factors which have led people of good will to entirely different conclusions. They emphasize the need for all concerned and interested to avoid categorical and unqualified judgments. They situate reconciliation within the biblical and Christian context, one founded on hope and capable of sustaining Christians who suffer from their disunity. They come to the conclusion that if harmony and unity are ever to be achieved, there is need for all involved to foster a deeper spirit of understanding and appreciation of each other's point of view and motivations. Bitter memories of former mistakes must be set aside in favor of openness and forgiveness.

All who love the Church and who are solicitous for its unity and welfare in China, as well as for the happiness of our Catholic brothers and sisters, must help find a way out of the impasse. This challenge can only be met through a prayerful spirit, and an open heart where love, hope and trust can find a way.

As Pope John Paul has urged all of us in his message to the Taiwan Bishops' Conference, "...be untiring and patient builders of reconciliation among the brethren on the Mainland. Tell them that the Pope bears them in his heart and that he *daily prays for them to the Giver of all good things and to the Blessed Virgin Mary...* 'He who calls you is faithful and will do it'" (1 Th. 5:23-24).