

From the Editor

"It is a source of great joy to all of us to know that all the ecclesial communities in the world join us in prayer: even those which cannot be represented here today by their bishops. In the first place we remember fondly our brothers in China..." These words were spoken by our Holy Father at the Eucharistic celebration opening the VIII Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 1990 on *The Formation of Priests in Circumstances of the Present Day*. These words highlight the Holy Father's concern for the formation of priests in China and his love for the Chinese Church.

In his closing message the Holy Father said, "On-going formation, brothers, is a high priority for us.... priests are the most important collaborators in the apostolate and the first and most important agent in the ongoing formation of the priest is the priest himself." The Holy Father sees the priesthood as so vital that there can be no substitute for it.

For him priests are to be "witnesses to the great mystery of God," who as ministers of the word of God must daily grow in faith and truly become men of the Gospel.

Besides witnesses, the priests must be "builders of community, of *communio*," ever growing in their "personal and communal integration in the service of the Church...."

Priests must also be "agents of mission" who must "struggle constantly to respond to the signs of the times," to understand and judge the changing and challenging cultural, political, social and economic circumstances with Gospel criteria.

And finally, the Holy Father called on young men to be open to the priesthood. He urged seminarians to respond from the heart to Christ's basic question: "Do you love me?" "For the future priest" the Pope insists, "the answer can only mean total self-giving."

Responding to the Holy Father's challenge the rectors, spiritual directors of Asia's major seminaries with the chairmen of the National Bishops' Commission for seminaries from thirteen Asian countries gathered to reflect on the formation of priests in the circumstances of present day Asia. The participants singled out the following areas as basic to any holistic on-going forma-

tion for the priesthood: 1) the spirituality of the diocesan priest; 2) discipline and human formation for discipleship; 3) spiritual formation and direction of future priests; 4) formation in the spirit of poverty and the need for detachment; 5) formation for celibate life; 6) formation in the missionary spirit and interreligious dialogue; 7) formation in the social doctrine of the Church; 8) the impact of social communication (mass media, etc.) and its implications for priestly formation; 9) the role of the rector and his relation with the spiritual director.

Our lead article, *Priestly Formation in the Asian Context* is the final statement of this meeting. It includes the convictions, recommendations and conclusions which emerged from the discussions. We hope these deliberations will prove fruitful for the Church in China which has also set the formation of priests as its top priority.

In *The Challenge Facing the Chinese Catholic Church* a young priest from northern China states the need, as he sees it, for in depth changes in the present formation of seminarians in his country. Out of touch for over thirty years, the Church in China must gradually not only catch up with Vatican II but also devise a formation that will add zest and life to spiritual formation.

Father Yao Jingxing, rector of Sheshan Seminary in Shanghai, explains that seminary's present formation program in *Row Out into the Deep*. He describe it as one which follows the Church's ancient traditions, and which stresses a spirituality centered in the Holy Spirit.

We have selected *A Meditation: The Stages of Apostolic Formation in the Life of Mary* by Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, S.J., as a model for understanding the various stages in formation for ongoing maturity in faith. With Mary as model the stress is on a detachment from personal wishes which enables a person to enter ever more fully into the divine plan: salvation through Jesus.

Our short historical feature, *Tianjin's Catholic Church: Yesterday and Today* by Fr. Norman Walling, is a continuation of our series on the Catholic Church in China's municipalities and provinces.

It seemed only fitting while featuring the Catholic Church in Tianjin to include a profile of its most famous missionary son, Lei Ming-yuan better known in the West as Vincent Lebbe.

Father Lebbe did much to advance the cause of the local church in China and to insured an adequate formation for its seminar-ians and priests.

The book reviewed in this issue, *For All the Peoples of Asia* assembles the most important texts of the conferences, consultations and assemblies of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. It comprises articles on the development of mission, theology, Church, dialogue and evangelization in the Asian context. It is also a valuable source for discovering the meaning of being Church in Asia in the 1990s.

In our *China Update* we have given not only a year-end review of the most important happenings in the Church in China in 1993 but have also included significant secular events. We daily become more and more aware that we are living in an exciting and unparalleled period in China's history. (BAM)

*May the Joys of the Christmas Season
follow you throughout the New Year.*

With every best wish always!

The Tripod Staff.
