

Editorial*The Founding of Holy Spirit Study Centre
15th Anniversary*

With this issue of *Tripod* the Holy Spirit Study Centre celebrates its 15th anniversary. In the first issue, our editor, Father John Tong, explained why we chose the Chinese character *Ding*, or *Tripod*, as the title of our magazine. The tripod is a traditional vessel used by the sages to offer sacrifice to the heavens in order to achieve harmony through wisdom and understanding.

After 15 years, we at Holy Spirit Study Centre have tried to achieve harmony, wisdom and understanding in our exchanges with the Catholics in China. Since our founding in the fall of 1980, we have tried to offer them both spiritual and material support in their efforts at reconstruction. We have held many conversations and made many friends. Hopefully such contacts have helped to strengthen the bonds of friendship between the Catholics in China and the universal Church.

It is in this spirit of friendship that we throw into the crucible of the *Ding*, the following impressions gleaned over fifteen years. We do so in the hope that all of us working for Catholics in China may be gifted with deeper wisdom, that harmony with compassion may help us to understand better China's complicated reality.

These past fifteen years have produced a series of lights and shadows. Rays of light can be seen in the fact that foreign professors have been welcomed to teach in China's major seminaries and seminarians and young priests as well as young Sisters have been granted permission to study and visit abroad. Vocations to the priesthood and Sisterhood are flourishing everywhere.

Churches, seminaries and convents have reopened all over China. The number of Catholics is steadily increasing both in the open and in the underground churches. There have even been signs in the past year that, in some places, the two sides are eager to speak with each other and that together, without outside interference, they will eventually be able to bring about reconciliation. Tremendous strides have taken place in trying to adjust to the changes called for by Vatican II. This is especially evident in the liturgy. Masses are seldom, if ever, now said

in Latin. Printing presses are publishing thousands of Bibles and other religious books and materials, all of which disappear almost as quickly as they arrive in the bookstores. The Holy Father, for his part, has taken every opportunity to promote reconciliation urging Chinese everywhere to be a "bridge" between the Catholics in China and the Universal church. Recently, he has even referred to the church in Taiwan as a Sister church of the church in China. His voice has not been lost on all parties concerned.

Many shadows, however, still remain. In terms of religious policy, very little has changed. The Religious Affairs Bureau and the Catholic Patriotic Association still control the exercise of religious activities. Unfortunately, throughout these years, arrests among the underground Catholic clergy and laity, as well as among Protestants have continued unabated. The underground church finds itself isolated and, as such, at a decided disadvantage since its members do not find a place among the delegations of bishops, priests and church personnel who are invited to go abroad. In the past years a number of delegations of bishops, and priests from the Chinese church have traveled to Europe, to Canada and to the United States. Other delegations have come to Hong Kong for special seminars. Members of the underground church are never part of these delegations. It would seem that representation by the entire Catholic Church in these events would, in the end, be to everyone's advantage. It could also hasten the deeply hoped for dialogue between the two and the normalization of relations between China and the Vatican.

In November, during his visit to China, Chancellor Kohl of Germany, spoke to the authorities calling for more freedom for the Catholic Church in China. The Bishops of Vietnam, who find themselves in a situation similar to that of China, recently also spoke up and asked their officials to restore more freedom of religion to the church. Hopefully, these voices will be heard.

As we look at the roster of possible human rights, it seems that none is more precious than religious freedom. Our hope and prayer is that in China, that Pope John Paul II himself has called "this great and beloved country", this right, in its fullness, may soon be enjoyed by all believers. Generally, Chinese Catholics are very good citizens. More freedom of religious activities will not only help build up the country, but it will enhance China's reputation at home and abroad. (PB/BAM)