

## Editorial

In 1981 to initiate in Hong Kong the publication of a periodical primarily concerned with Christianity in China might have seemed at the time to be a rash, if indeed somewhat innovative, idea. But the founders of the Holy Spirit Study Centre saw in it an opportunity to come to grips with the rapidly changing political and religious situation unfolding in China, as it ended years of isolation and began to open itself once again to the outside world.

In *Tripod's* very first issue, its editor, Father John Tong, in explaining the meaning of the Chinese character, *Ding*, said that it "reflected an attitude of persistent concern that we Christians should have towards the religious and ethical problems of China today." He added that our fervent hope was to establish "an empathetic dialogue that would allow us to experience the things that were happening in China, and after reflecting upon them, report them to a wider audience." In this way, he said, "We hope to reach a better understanding of the situation (in China) in order to be able to make a more informed response."

One hundred issues over 16 years is not a long time in the life of any publication. But this brief span of history has wrought momentous social and economic changes in China, of such magnitude unprecedented in her previous history. In its struggle to implement its "Four Modernizations" policy, China has come to realize that even such a strange bed fellow as religion can become an ally in its efforts to establish "a socialism with Chinese characteristics." Also, the sudden resurgence of religion on the mainland caught the government by surprise and offered clear evidence to the authorities that religion is not something that can be put to rest by government decree.

This new openness to the outside world has had positive and negative effects on China's attitude towards religion both in theory and in practise. And it has been one of *Tripod's* re-occurring themes throughout the years. John Tong's "The Bottom Line" (1990), Richard C. Bush's "Chinese Constitutions and Religious Freedom" (1987) and Jean Charbonnier's "Church and State in China (1986) are just three examples that come to mind.

Another favourite theme from the very beginning has been the history of the Church in China, with special emphasis on those people who made lasting contributions to its growth and development. Our coverage of the life and times of Matteo Ricci coincided with the 400th anniversary of his entrance into China and merited a special issue (#12, 1982) all to itself. In this our 100th issue we once again highlight some of those personages from the past who continue to influence our present, and to a certain degree will continue to effect our future.

Our respect for the history of the Church in China has only served to intensify our admiration and concern for it today. Many of our articles have dealt with its joys and sorrows, its triumphs and failures, its persecution, decline and renewal, and how, after living in isolation from the universal Church for so long a time, it is now undergoing dramatic growth and development. *Tripod* has explored the political as well as the spiritual aspects of the relationships between the government, the local church and the universal Church. We have made reconciliation a major theme, not only a reconciliation within the Church in China, but also the re-establishment of Sino-Vatican relations. "Five Obstacles to Sino-Vatican Reconciliation" by Michael Mi (1996), "Reconciliation in Biblical Revelation" by Mark Fang (1986) and Robert Schreiter's "Reconciliation in the Catholic Church in China" (1992), all reflect this concern. *Tripod* has also invited articles by such leading theologians as A.B. Chang ("The Church in China: Ecclesiological Impasse" 1992) to contribute to an instructive dialogue that might serve to clarify the problems involved. Also, we have printed Pope John Paul II's many appeals to the people of China for reconciliation. Highlights from several of these addresses are reproduced here for our 100th issue.

Another subject that we have found of special import and interest to ourselves and, we hope, to our readers because of its direct bearing on the Chinese Church's immediate future, has been the reopening of seminaries and convents on the mainland for the training and formation of future priests and religious. One of those who continues to play a leading role in this renewal is *Tripod's* former Executive Editor, Sr. Maria Goretti Lau, who is the Dean of Theology at the Holy Spirit Seminary College in Hong Kong and a frequent guest lecturer in seminaries on the mainland.

For the major articles in this issue, we prevailed on each of our four "founders" to write an article. Bishop John Tong, in "The Power of

Witness” uses the seven miracles in St. John’s Gospel to tell seven moving stories of Catholic faith on the mainland today.

Father Angelo Lazzarotto’s “The Chinese Church at the Second Vatican Council”, is a piece of valuable research. Permitted to use the Vatican archives, Father Lazzarotto bring us the amazing account of the part played by the “China” bishops at the Second Vatican Council.

Father Peter Barry gives us a picture of the lights and shadows within the Church in China today in his article, “The Church in China: New Life” and Father Elmer Wurth pursues his favorite area of research in his new article, “Sino-Vatican Relations 1980-1997”.

As we were preparing this 100th issue of *Tripod*, we could not help but marvel at how much has been accomplished in China and in its church in so short a time. It has been our constant delight and privilege to report on this extraordinary phenomenon. If we have in some small way contributed to the fostering of "harmony through wisdom and understanding" as the Chinese title of our publication *Ding* implies, and if we have helped to serve the cause of reconciliation in some small way, we are, indeed, most pleased and grateful. As the Church begins to prepare for the celebration of the Christian millennium in the Year 2000, we give thanks to God for what we have been able, through his grace, to accomplish in the past, and we look forward with hope to the future.[BAM]

