

From the Editor

With this, our final issue of the year, we are also aware of the approaching end of the lunar year of the ox as well. The ox, and in particular this year of the 'fire' ox, with its uncommon display of strength and vigor, has been an appropriate symbol for a year that has seen unprecedented changes in the relationship of China and Hong Kong.

Tripod began the year with an analysis of the Holy Father's message to the Church in China given on 3 December, 1996, the feast of St. Francis Xavier. The Papal message itself was more of a meditation expressing his affection and solicitude for Chinese Catholics in China and throughout the world. It's intention was to foster unity and reconciliation. It was given mixed reviews: positive from Catholics both in and outside of China, and negative, mainly from the Chinese government, who used the occasion to reiterate their conditions for normalizing Sino-Vatican relations.

This was followed by two issues in which we focused on the main historical event of the year, the return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty. We attempted to summarize the past and to analyze the complexity of feelings, that mixture of hope and fear, which are part and parcel of every impending change. Our articles revealed the height and depth of those feelings, which ran the gamut of dark and dire foreboding to a guarded but positive optimism. Changes had already been noted several months before the actual handover: the bauhinia flower became more and more prominent on coins and flags as Hong Kong's emblem, and the royal crowns began to disappear from post boxes and public buildings. The arrival of the first contingent of the People's Liberation Army passed without incident, although evoking in some sectors uneasy memories of Tiananmen.

The handover itself was accomplished with appropriate dignity and decorum, and brought with it expressions of joy and sorrow, laughter and tears. It did, in fact, help to reassure people that all would be well, and that Deng Xiaoping's 'one country, two systems' could and would be workable. Deng, himself, had longed to witness

this unprecedented ceremony, but, unfortunately, he had died in February. However, his legacy would live on.

The summer ushered in a milestone event for *Tripod*: the celebration of our 100th Issue. It gave us an opportunity to look into the past to see where we had been, the present, to see where we are, and a peek at what the future might hold for us all. But the one overwhelming impression we got from all this scrutinizing was the realization that the advances made by China since *Tripod's* inception in 1981 could only be measured in light years.

As for the immediate present, we realize that religion is taking on an ever growing importance in the minds of China's government officials. The year saw the publication of a White Paper on Religious Freedom, and many statements on the positive role religion would play in the evolution of the socialistic state.

We reprint the entire white paper on Religious Freedom in this issue, along with two reflective responses. Some critics saw nothing new in the paper itself and felt it was meant as an *apologia*, especially to the American public on the eve of President Jiang Zemin's visit to the United States. Others were saddened by the treatment given to the history of the missionary enterprise, which was negative and highly critical, without any references to the many positive contributions missionaries have also made. And there were still others who saw in the paper reasons for hoping that progress could be made through open and fruitful dialogue.

It is the Christmas season. And we offer by way of a seasonal gift the first part of an article written by our newest research assistant, Gianni Criveller, PIME. Father Criveller's "Christ in the Late Ming China" is a well-researched analysis of the Christology of the early Jesuit missionaries and the controversy caused by their unique methodology. A young Chinese philosophy professor contributes a very sympathetic essay on the good work done by missionaries in the past, especially in the areas of education, social reform, law, medicine and science. We also include in this Christmas issue our usual features, "Facts About China" and musings from "Our China Pilgrim", closing with 'China Church and News Update, 1997, a review of the year's happenings.

Of all the world's religious holidays, Christmas is perhaps the best known and most popular. It brings to a weary world the message of peace and reconciliation. We come to the manger, to the Babe of Bethlehem, who came to bring peace to the world and to reconcile us all to our Father. Here we lay our hopes and here we pray for the strength to continue to work for peace and reconciliation among nations, communities, families and within our own hearts. (BAM)

MERRY CHRISTMAS
AND
HAPPY NEW YEAR.

