

Editorial

A number of young priests in China's underground church today are eager for their voice to be heard by their brothers and sisters outside. From the narrow confines of their isolated situation, they seek an objective platform and a listening ear for their suggestions, complaints, their concerns, and their aspirations. They are willing to take the risks associated with their speaking out, and to accept the possible negative outcomes of their actions. In doing so, however, some prefer to use pen names. One of these authors simply calls himself John. Others openly use their own name. In any case, *Tripod* follows their wishes regarding their identity.

In this issue of *Tripod*, we are giving two of these young priests the opportunity to say what is in their minds and hearts.

In "An Appeal from the Underground Church," the author, John, is eager for Christians outside of China to be clear about the differences between the official and the underground church. He maintains that while the members of the underground church are reluctant to accept the government's religious policy, they are willing to work with the bishops who have been recognized by Rome. However, he seems to set some conditions for this cooperation. He cannot understand why these bishops will not sever all ties with the Patriotic Association. John sees the Association as the chief obstacle to communion and unity. He challenges the "legitimized" bishops to take courage and openly declare their status, and opposition to the Patriotic Association. John made his challenge in June 1999. He was later detained by public security officials but released in December.

Shih Lei in his article, "Unity in the Chinese Church Revisited," examines the causes for disunity within the Church and places the responsibility squarely on the political situation and climate created by the government, and its various agencies set up to control religious freedom.

He also faults certain overseas China observers for what he considers their simplistic view of a very complicated situation, those who misunderstand the real reasons behind the underground church's refusal to share communion, and church services with their open church brothers and sisters. He especially derides those who accuse the underground of failing to read the signs of the times. He feels that

those who have never met or spoken directly with members of the underground church are likely to arrive at faulty conclusions since their information is gotten through government officials and members of the open church.

While some of our readers will be in complete sympathy with these two young priests, others will certainly not agree wholeheartedly. Some will, no doubt, even disagree vehemently. *Tripod* feels that, in any case, such articles provide a deeper understanding of how our brothers and sisters in the underground church think and feel about the present situation of the Church in China. They also have a word of caution for those outside who seek to help them. This alone gives them the right to express themselves, and to be heard.

A layman from a church in Beijing, Yu Min, in his contribution, "The Church in China: On-going Concerns and Challenges," discusses very frankly some of the problems facing the Church in China today. He explores areas of possible corruption, waste, lack of organization, self-discipline, the love of money, and the inadequate formation of young men for the priesthood. It is clear, however, that the author also finds many reasons for hope in the Church's future. He is eager for the Church to project a positive social image, recognize its weaknesses, and by so doing, to become a truly effective force in society.

In a completely different vein, totally non-polemic, meditative and literary, we include an article by Peter K.H. Lee, entitled, "Reading the Bible with a Touch of Zen." Professor Lee explains his strategy, "This short paper chooses several Chinese poems which reveal a sense of Zen, and at the same time bring to mind certain passages from the Bible which leave room for the interplay of consciousness."

We also publish the third in a series of articles by Gianni Criveller, "Dialogues on Jesus in China." This one deals with the question asked by the Chinese literati throughout the centuries, "Why Was Jesus Not Born in China?"

In response to a request from one of our readers, Michael Sloboda has written the article, "China is not Eastern Europe." This is a brief analysis of the similarities and dissimilarities between the situation of the Church in Eastern Europe before the collapse of Communism there, and the present situation of the Church in China.