

EDITORIAL

On these days between Easter and Pentecost when the first reading at daily Mass is from the Acts of the Apostles, it is appropriate that we take as our theme for *Tripod* the First Asian Mission Congress. For just as Acts traces the missionary activity of the first century Church around the Mediterranean basin, so too the Asian Mission Congress, under the theme “The Story of Jesus in Asia,” celebrated the spread of the Gospel on the Asian continent. The Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences’ Office of Evangelization sponsored this congress in Chiang Mai, Thailand on October 18-22, 2006. The Catholic Bishops Conference of Thailand acted as host.

The more than 1,000 delegates from all the countries of Asia shared their experiences of meeting Jesus, what attracted them to Him, what they found meaningful in His message, how they believed in His Word, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, how they were eventually baptized and entered His Church. According to reports, an atmosphere of joy pervaded the congress, as the delegates shared stories of their personal encounters with Jesus, and encouraged one another to continue the work of spreading the Good News. It was hoped that the spirit of the congress would spill over into the delegates’ local churches, when they returned to their home countries.

Besides Christianity, Asia is home to many of the world’s other great religions, like Buddhism, Daoism, Islam and Hinduism, as well as being the cradle of one of the world’s most influential philosophies, Confucianism. What is to be the position of Christian evangelization vis-à-vis these other great religions in Asia? It was posited that God’s Spirit is active in the other religions, and that therefore they are deserving of our respect. However, God’s Word was more concretely announced in the revelation to Abraham and to the other patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament, and more

fully announced in the revelation of Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, in New Testament times.

It was noted that there are many points in common between Christianity and the Asian religions, e.g., filial piety, respect for the ancestors, concern for neighbors and persons in need, and a yearning for contact with the Divine through prayer and contemplation. Asians are also more influenced by action and good example, than by logical arguments, it was pointed out. Fathers Savio Hon, SDB and James Kroeger, MM, whose congress papers we include in this issue, cover many of these points.

Delegates from the Church in China were not officially present at the Congress. However, evangelization seems to be alive and well there, judging from a comparison of the statistics of believers between 1949 and the present. It is estimated that there are about 10 million Catholics in China today, compared to 3 million in 1949. The figures for Protestant Christianity are even more phenomenal. Their converts number over 20 million today, whereas there were only 700,000 in 1949. We hope that news of the Asian Mission Congress will reach China, to encourage Christians there to continue to carry out the work of evangelization among their fellow countrymen.

We likewise reproduce the final message of the congress, as well as its pledged future commitments, which are in the form of orientations and priorities.

We also include Hong Kong Cardinal Joseph Zen's thoughts (first published in the *Sunday Examiner*, April 8, 2006) on preparing to receive the Holy Father's letter to the Catholics of China.

At this time of Pentecost, and in the spirit of the First Asian Mission Congress, let us pray that we will receive the power of the Holy Spirit, which Jesus promised us, so that we can be His witnesses, even "to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

Finally we note the recent death of two bishops from the "open" church community in China: Michael Fu Tieshan of Beijing on April 20 and Bernardine Dong Guangqing of Wuhan on May 12. We will keep them in our prayers. *Requiescant in pace.* (PJB)