

Retrospect of Christian Ecumenism in Hong Kong 1960-2010

by Fr. Harold Naylor S.J.



I thank *Theology Annual* for giving me the opportunity to share some reflections on my experience in the field of ecumenism in our local Church. Concretely, I would like to share my memories of meetings and contacts with other Christian leaders and congregations for the past fifty years in Hong Kong.

A Mission Sunday Celebration

At our Mission Sunday celebration 17 October 2010¹, I looked around wondering if any of our ecumenical contacts over the past

¹ With the permission of the author, all footnotes have been added to the original article by the *Theology Annual*. Mission Sunday is observed

decades were present. I did not notice any. If there were present, I wonder if they could really share “Our Mission”!

Our celebration was “catholic” in that it was really what we Catholics as a whole really do and represent. The annual celebration is also an occasion to see old friends and even acquaintances that we do not often meet. We are people of the same ‘faith and mission’, who are brought close together by our liturgy and devotions – our ‘catholic sub-culture’.

I recalled the General and Mission Intentions for the month of October 2010²: “That World Mission Day may afford us an occasion for understanding that the TASK of PROCLAIMING Christ is an absolute necessary service to which the Church is called for the benefit of humanity.” Why could not other Christians join us on that day in the ‘task of proclaiming Christ’! The answer I have is that they do not have our experience of Christ in the Church.



every year by the Catholic Church all over the world on the 3rd Sunday of October to promote concern for the missions and front-line evangelizers. The Mission Sunday celebration is the annual gathering of Hong Kong Catholics. It draws even up to 20,000 participants. Given the size of such an assembly, it is often held in the Hong Kong Stadium in So Kon Po, Hong Kong Island. The 2010 Mission Sunday Celebration was held as the inauguration of the diocesan Year of the Laity and as the conclusion of the Universal Church’s Year of the Priest, proclaimed by Pope Benedict XVI for 2009-2010, in commemoration of the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of the Apostle of the Gentiles, St. Paul of Tarsus. See *Sunday Examiner* (October 24 2010), pp. 1-2.

- 2 These two monthly Intentions are chosen each year by the Holy Father (the Roman Pontiff, the Pope) and given to the members of the Apostleship of Prayer. The Apostleship of Prayer is a Catholic association founded in France in 1844 by Francis X. Gautrelet. Its statutes were approved in 1879 by Pope Pius IX. In 1896 these were revised and approved by Pope Leo XIII. Millions of members of the Apostleship of Prayer throughout the

In the past few years I had also been to this government football stadium on the occasion of City Renewal Celebrations on Pentecost Sunday, led by Linda Ma³. It was different and I did not feel I belonged there. There seemed to be no students from schools, less elderly people, less colourful decorations, and of course no priests. The hymns were unfamiliar and the whole atmosphere was not that of what I know as a Church! The emphasis was on going out to all nations to bring the Good News that Jesus saves. It has been said that Hong Kong Christians have more than two hundred missionaries in North America, South East Asia, and even South America and Africa! They are witnessing to the Risen Lord, in a different way and with different backgrounds. And in that stadium there was the strong thrust to be outgoing to all people, in every other country – some of whose representatives were present. They were celebrating the mission all Christians are called to. If we were more united, would not that be more fitting? Our mission could thus also be expressed in bringing reconciliation with the Father and one another – to be a sign to all nations and people of the unity in Christ for all humanity.

world make a daily offering of themselves to God for the good of others, in union with Our Lord Jesus Christ who offers himself in the Eucharist for the salvation of humankind. To get an idea of the spirituality of this prayer movement see, for example, the following two texts: Pius PP. XII, *Epistula apostolica “Cum proxime”* on June 16 1944, from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/apost_letters/documents/... and Pius PP. XII, *Allocutio iis qui interfuerunt conventui internationali moderatorum Sodalitatis ab Apostolatu Orationis* on September 27 1956, from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/speeches/1956/documents/...

- 3 Linda Ma is a Hong Kong evangelical leader of the “City Renewal in the Spirit” movement.

How is it that other Christians have a different background to us Catholics? It is because we are Catholics in a Church which claims to be in continuity with the teaching of the Apostles. We are a multinational and multicultural world community, in communion with each other through Bishops united with St. Peter's successors! And we pray to be healthy of body and spirit.

Devotional and Translational Difficulties

a) Mary

But there are more concrete issues which make us Catholics different from other Christians. One of these is the place that Mary has in our Church. Look how our Mission Sunday celebration started – with the recitation of five decades of the Rosary⁴. The Legion of Mary hymn - *Totus Tuus Ego Sum*, which is so familiar even to non Legionaries, was sung⁵. We



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- 4 For a contemporary understanding of the Rosary, see the Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II to the Bishops, Clergy and Faithful on the Most Holy Rosary, from http://www.vatican.va/hf_jp-ii_apl_20021016_rosarium-virginis-mariae_en.html
- 5 For the Legion of Mary, see *Concilium Legionis Mariae, The Official Handbook of the Legion of Mary* (Louisville, Kentucky: Publishers Printing, 1953). The Legion of Mary hymn ("*Totus tuus ego sum, Regina mea, mea Mater, et omnia mea tua sunt*", which means, "I am all yours, my Queen, my Mother, and all my things are yours") is derived from the "Consecration to Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Wisdom, through the Blessed Virgin Mary", written by St. Louis Grignion de Montfort (1673-1716). This prayer of "Consecration", that sums up the content of his masterpiece, can be found in St. Louis Grignion De Montfort, *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, translated from the Original French by Frederick William Faber (Bay Shore, New York: The Montfort Fathers, 1946), pp. 227-229.

sang *Panis Angelicus*!⁶ I recall the words I saw as a boy so often around a church: "To Jesus Through Mary."⁷ Most other Christians would say: "Christ is our only mediator with the Father." Mary then is a stumbling block for many other Christians to our spreading of the Gospel. But for us Catholics, Mary is not only the model for knowing, following, and loving Jesus, but often an attraction to those outside the Church to becoming Catholic!

b) The Chinese Bible

An even more important obstacle to our evangelization is our Scriptures in Chinese. In the English-speaking world, there are many versions of the Bible. So the differences that there are between the Catholic Bible and other English versions are not an obstacle to our Christian prayer and life. However, the Chinese translation of King James Version is still considered normative by most Chinese Christians⁸. There is no resentment among our separated brothers

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- 6 The *Panis angelicus* is the last-but-one stanza of the Eucharistic hymn *Sacris solemniis* composed by St. Thomas Aquinas (1224/5-1274). The full text is: "*Panis angelicus fit panis hominum; dat panis caelicus figuris terminum. O res mirabilis: manducat Dominum pauper servus et humilis*", which means, "The bread of angels becomes the bread of humans. The bread from heaven ends the realm of mere figures. O wonderful thing! The poor, the slave, and the humble eat their Lord". For the attribution to St. Thomas Aquinas, see Joseph Connelly, *Hymns of the Roman Liturgy* (London – New York – Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co, 1957), pp. 116-131 and the article "Hymnography" in Michael O'Carroll, *Corpus Christi. An Encyclopedia of the Eucharist* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazer, 1988), p. 94.
- 7 In Latin: *Ad Jesum per Mariam*, also an expression of Montfort spirituality, though, perhaps, not coined by St. Louis de Montfort himself. See e.g. <http://montfortspirituality.org/>
- 8 The so-called *Heheben* (Union Version).

and sisters in Christ, when English Catholic versions are referred to. But the differences between the Chinese Christian Bible and the Catholic Chinese Bible⁹ seem considerable.

In the Chinese world, the Union translation is held in high esteem. Here there are many places where the Chinese version appears to be different. Here one finds almost every proper name has a different rendering, as the Chinese transliteration is from the original text or from English, while the Catholic transliterations are from the Latin text! Imagine that even names like John and Paul, Bethlehem and Nazareth are different. An example of more serious difficulties: “faith” in St. Paul’s Letters, has another rendering, and there are many other instances of important words with a different translation! And it goes as far as having a different word for God!¹⁰



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- 9 The so-called *Sigao Shengjing* or *Bethlehem Bible* by the Hong Kong Studium Biblicum OFM. The founder of the Studium and chief translator, Fr. Gabriele M. Allegra OFM (1907-1976), was a great ecumenist. Together with Hong Kong’s Anglican Church, he organized the first ecumenical Biblical Exposition in Hong Kong (April 19-22 1965). This experience was repeated in the year 2000 by the Hong Kong Bible Society and the Studium Biblicum OFM, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the Bible Society and the 55th anniversary of the foundation of the Studium Biblicum (November 2-6 2000).
- 10 Catholics use the term “*Tianzhu*”, the non-Catholics “*Shangdi*”. Both terms were used indifferently by Matteo Ricci, who was the first to use them to translate the biblical “*Deus*”, but now they represent the specific Catholic and non-Catholic religious linguistic usage. For a discussion of this linguistic problem, see the Chinese article by Li Wenxin, “‘*Tianzhu*’ yu ‘*Shangdi*’ zhi Zheng”, in the commemorative issue *Sigao Wushi. Studium Biblicum OFM 50 Anniversary. Sigao Shengjing Xuehui Wushi Zhounian Jinian Tekang* (Hong Kong: Sigao Shengjing Xue Hui, 1995), pp. 52-55.

For many other Christians, our mission to spread the Good News is of prime importance. In fact it means giving each one a Bible to guide their lives. We Catholics are centered more on the sacraments and traditions in the Church. With Chinese Bibles that look different to the Catholic Chinese Bible, and often some different texts, how can Christian unity be nurtured in a Chinese context!

Recently in Hong Kong September 2010, the Revised Union Chinese Bible was published on the occasion of the 60th Anniversary of the HK Bible Society. This revision of the Chinese translation took 27 years and the combined effort of many scholars. Unfortunately, there were no Catholics working with them¹¹. The obstacles to the publication of a common Christian Bible are of great importance for Christian unity, but efforts so far give little hope of achieving it. We need to pray about this.

I like a hymn from the breviary which helps me: “In the Scriptures, by the Spirit, May we see the Saviour’s face; Hear His Word and Heed His Calling, Know His Will and Grow in Grace”.¹²

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- 11 The Studium Biblicum OFM in Hong Kong, contacted by us, confirmed this, as far as they themselves are concerned. Yet, ecumenical cooperation has been going on to produce the *Heyi Yiben*, a “Common Chinese Version” of the Bible that could be used by both Catholic and non-Catholic Christians. See the Preface by Friar Lionel Goh ofm and Rev. Lee Chee Kong to the commemorative issue *Bible 2000 Exhibition* (Hong Kong: Studium Biblicum Hong Kong & Hong Kong Bible Society, 2000), p. 9.
- 12 This is the second stanza of the hymn for The Office of Readings of Week 1: Tuesday. See (with some slight variation of transcription) *The Divine Office. The Liturgy of the Hours according to the Roman Rite, I-II-III* (London – Glasgow: Collins; Sydney: E.J. Dwyer; Dublin: Talbot, 1974), pp. [63], [53], [57].

Before 1965

About 1911, there was a missionary congress in Edinburgh, Scotland. All missionary groups were invited. The Catholics did not join in any way¹³. Then in 1948, The World Council of Churches (WCC) was set up with offices in Geneva. It was to enable churches to consult and cooperate with each other. Again the Catholic Church stood aloof, though it did send observers¹⁴.

The Vatican representing the Pope had the position that Christian unity could only come with accepting the universal jurisdiction of the Pope. Looking back twenty centuries, the schisms and divisions in the Church had occurred and communion with the *See of Peter* had been broken. Only restoration of communion with the Pope could bring Christian unity. The Catholic Church could not then participate in any ecumenical activities. And of course, Catholics could not join other Christians in prayer and worship!

It could be said that before 1965, Catholics were very cautious not to join other Christians in prayer and worship. This was sometimes very embarrassing when Catholics had good contacts with Christian



neighbours. Funerals and weddings were embarrassing moments, when Catholics felt they could not join their neighbours, friends and even relatives in a Christian service. This was to change.

When Pope John XXIII (Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli) called the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), one of the three aims was to restore Christian unity. Previous to that the official Catholic position was that we are the only True Church. Christian unity will be restored by other Christians acknowledging the authority of the Pope. With the Council a different mood was nurtured. It began with formal invitations being made to all the main Churches to send observers to the Council. The spirit was one of charity and mutual respect. Pastoral efforts were made to address the historical and theological issues which had brought about divisions. The hope was that deeper understanding of biblical texts could be achieved, and the issues behind condemnations and splits could be healed. Other Christians were our separated brothers and sisters.

In Hong Kong in the 1940s and 1950s, the churches had vast relief programmes to meet the physical needs of tens of thousands of refugees. There were contacts between Catholics and other Christians as they both worked in providing food, clothing, shelter, education and other material help, just as we see today in places where we hear of earthquakes, flooding, persecution and conflicts. There were social and working contacts only between churches and their workers.

After the setting up of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1948, in Europe the experience of imprisonment of Christians and Catholics under Nazi oppression brought Christians and

13 Actually, they were not invited. See Ans J. Van der Bent, "Ecumenical Conferences," in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, edited by Nicholas Lossky *et al.* (Geneva: WCC Publications; Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 325-336.

14 See the articles on the World Council of Churches in Nicholas Lossky *et al.*, eds., *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: WCC Publications; Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1991): Tom Stransky, "World Council of Churches," pp. 1083-1090; Ans J. Van der Bent, "WCC Assemblies," pp. 1096-1096; T.K. Thomas, "WCC, Basis of," pp. 1096-1098; Marlin Vanelderren, "WCC, Membership of," pp. 1098-1100.

Catholics to better understanding. The WCC was not a church, but an organization to help followers of Christ to help each other, and to work for social justice, mutual faith understanding, and cooperation in bringing the Good News to Asia, Africa and other parts of the world.

The Holy See sent observers to the WCC, but could not join it¹⁵. Many Christian leaders regretted this. However, after the Second Vatican Council in 1965, many in the mainline Churches were delighted with the changes they saw among Catholics and became friendly. Catholics would now join them in prayer, and show support for deeper faith understanding and cooperation in the mission of Christ.

By 1954, the Hong Kong Christian Council (HKCC)¹⁶ was formed, as a place where Christians could contact each other, and take counsel on their objectives and programmes. After 1965, the HKCC started to have Catholic contacts and encourage all activities for greater Christian unity. But Catholics were never members of committees. The reality was that the HKCC was linked with the WCC, and represented the main-line Churches which amounted to less than half of Christians. Smaller and indigenous churches held aloof, in an evangelical and independent frame of mind.



From 1965 to 1980

The years from 1945 to 1965 saw great numbers of refugees from China arrive. The Catholic and Christian relief services worked hard, even as we see today, with help being given to those in great need after natural disasters of earthquake and flooding, and to people fleeing from political oppression and persecution. This brought some cooperation and contacts between Catholics and non-Catholics. Here in Hong Kong, Bishop Hall¹⁷ was also eager to help workers and families. Lutheran World Service¹⁸ and many Christians showed their concern in practical ways. There was also the perception that the Communists were the common enemy, given the atheistic stance of the People's Republic of China. Christians saw the Catholics suffering as much as they did.

But this was followed by the wonderful developments in Hong Kong as it became a world-class city. Many churches were involved in education and social work. As just mentioned, the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) started with the intent to promote greater Christian unity. As its decrees were implemented, many dioceses had their own Ecumenical Commission. After our Diocesan Convention closed in 1971, there was a strong Ecumenical Commission composed of members of the Studium Biblicum OFM¹⁹, professors of Theology,

15 For the reasons of this inability to join, see Marlin Vanelderren, "WCC, Membership of," in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, edited by Nicholas Lossky *et al.* (Geneva: WCC Publications; Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1991), p. 1099.

16 See <http://www.hkcc.org.hk/acms/?site=hkcc> and <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/regions/asia/hong-kong/hkcc.html>

17 Ronald Owen Hall (1895-1975) was Anglican Bishop of Hong Kong from 1932 to 1966.

18 The Lutheran World Service is the relief and development arm of the Lutheran World Federation (Department for World Service, DWS). See http://www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/DWS/DWS-Welcome.html

19 Order of Friars Minor (Franciscans).

Caritas²⁰ leaders and responsible lay people.

This committee was composed of important and busy people who found it hard to come to meetings. However, there were achievements. The Catholic-Anglican Joint Port Chaplaincy was set up in 1969, based in the Mariners' Club²¹, followed by an Ecumenical Chapel at Kai Tak Airport about 1973. Then there was achieved in 1969 a mutual recognition of Baptism of the Anglican Diocese (Sheng Kung Hui) and the Catholic Diocese in HK²².

Every year the "Week of Prayer for Christian Unity" was observed between 18-25 January. The HKCC organized a Communion Breakfast from 8.30-10.30 which had over 300 ministers and church workers present, and a Chinese Christian Unity Evening Prayer was held every year at different central locations. There was also a "Common Pastoral Statement" of the Catholic Bishop, the Anglican Bishop, and the Chairman of the HKCC until 1976, when it was issued by Catholic Diocesan Ecumenical Commission, the



20 Caritas is the Catholic Church's social services agency both at universal level and at local level, so also in Hong Kong.

21 Presented in <http://www.marinersclub.org.hk> as follows: "The Mission to Seafarers operates two clubs in Hong Kong for the use of visiting and locally registered seafarers. One is in the heart of Tsim Sha Tsui and the other near the Container Port at Kwai Chung. [...] Both clubs have Chapels and at St. Peter's in Tsim Sha Tsui, regular Anglican and Roman Catholic services are held. The clubs are backed up with the ministry of the Chaplains and the welfare service provided by a fully trained Social Worker."

22 The agreement of mutual recognition on baptism was signed on 15 March 1974 by Bishop Peter Lei for the Catholic Diocese and by Bishop Gilbert Baker for the Anglican Diocese. A photo commemorating the event is posted on humanum.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/~lha/diocese

Hong Kong Christian Council, and the Ecumenical Patriarchate Orthodox Metropolitanate of Hong Kong and South East Asia²³. The Diocesan Ecumenical Commission and the HKCC organized every year an English-speaking Christian Unity Prayer evening, which rotated between different churches.

From 1980 to 2009

It could be said that there was less interests in ecumenism during this period. There were deep concerns about the future of the Churches after 1997 reversion of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty. In the event, all Church leadership became localized and efforts were made to strengthen overseas contacts. Local Christian unity seemed to many as less important than bonds with Christian groups abroad.

The Diocesan Ecumenical Commission met regularly every month, supporting the Week of Prayer, and visiting other Church leaders when possible, and encouraging any attempts at Catholics and Christians doing things together.

23 For example, in 2007 a "Joint Statement The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2007 (January 18-25)" was issued by the Diocesan Ecumenical Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Church, The Ecumenical Patriarchate Orthodox Metropolitanate of Hong Kong and South East Asia, and the Church Unity and Relations Committee of the Hong Kong Christian Council.

See sundayex.catholic.org.hk/hk/2007/hk070114.html The Joint Statement for 2010 can be found on the website of the Diocesan Ecumenical Commission, from <http://www.hkecumenical.org> or <http://www.ecumenical.catholic.org.hk>

With the encouragement of Fr. Edward F. Malone, MM²⁴ (1925-2009), Assistant Secretary General of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), efforts were made for bilateral agreements between the Catholic Diocese and other Churches. The Sheng Kung Hui (Anglican Episcopal Church) is close to us in liturgy and teaching, and there were constant cordial contacts. There was an effort at a Lutheran Catholic bilateral Agreement on Justification, but this did not come to fruition, because of lack of local interest and the little support for the statements made in Germany after apparent agreement on justification²⁵.

The Diocesan Ecumenical Commission was virtually made up of foreign priests. Fr. Theobald Diederick, OFM (1911-2008), of the Hong Kong Studium Biblicum OFM, was a member for over ten years. Fr. J. Shields, SJ²⁶ died in 2005 after being active on the Commission for twenty years. He was also a lecturer in Greek and Hebrew and the New Testament at Chung Chi Theology Department. He lectured for six years also at the Lutheran Theology College. Fr. John Casey, MM was active with the Commission for over a decade. Fr. Roman Carter, OP²⁷ served for over ten years, with wide contacts especially with the Pentecostal groups. Members



of the Focolare Movement (*Focolarini*)²⁸ have been active on the Commission since 1978, and brought their spirit of unity among small groups. This resulted over the years in concern to get church choirs to sing together, and to encourage Christian groups through Gospel sharing. They also have been influential in helping married life when one party is Catholic and the other Christian.

2010

Recently, one of the Vicar Generals of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese, Rev. Pierre Lam Minh, MEP²⁹ came to the monthly Diocesan Ecumenical Commission meeting to draw up new members of the Commission. This has resulted in a bigger and more important group of people on the Commission³⁰.

There are now two parish priests serving: Fr. Stephen Tam Kwan, who has been active since 1980 and is highly respected by other local Christian leaders, and Fr. Peter Leung Tat Choy, who has much experience in ecumenical activities. There is also a young priest, Fr. Dominic Lui Chi Man, which brings in the parish context. Then, for the past two years, there have been two Religious Sisters,

24 Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America, popularly known as "Maryknoll".

25 See the "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church", from http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/...

26 Society of Jesus (Jesuits).

27 Order of Preachers (Dominicans).

28 "*Focolare*" is Italian for "hearth", a symbol of "family". The Focolare Movement is a Catholic ecumenical movement started by the laywoman Chiara Lubich (1920-2008) in Trento (Italy) on December 7 1943. See the Focolare Movement Official Website, from <http://www.focolare.us>

29 *Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris*.

30 The Hong Kong Catholic Diocesan Ecumenical Commission can be contacted on two websites at the following addresses: <http://www.hkecumenical.org/> and <http://ecumenical.catholic.org.hk/>

who represent much from their Canossian³¹ and St. Paul Sisters³² Congregations. Added to them are a representative of HKU Katso (Catholic Society), and a layman of three decades of experience with evangelical Christians. These people are coordinated by the dynamic personality of Theresa Kung of the Focolarini.

The Commission hopes to encourage the Week of Prayer for Christian unity, and be in contact with all ecumenical activities. The present thrust is to encourage ecumenical groups in parishes, and to enable church choirs to occasionally come together to praise the Lord.

There are to be four lectures on Ecumenism in late autumn this year, by Fr. Peter Choy and Fr. Jacob Kwok. This is very encouraging as it marks a Christian ecumenical dimension to the Holy Spirit Seminary College³³.

It is desirable to develop a dimension of actual experience of God, of personal encounter with Jesus Christ, and of the presence within us of the Holy Spirit. Promoting Christian Unity can be seen to be a fourfold endeavour for all: 1) To discern the will of God in our daily lives, 2) To cooperate in promoting the common good in community and social projects, 3) To hold sharing in our spiritual lives, 4) To engage in theological reflections on our life and mission.

Finally, the text proposed for the January 18-25 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2011, will be Acts 2:42 “They met constantly to hear the apostles teach, and to share the common life, to break bread and to pray”. Meditating and praying this text together could promote Christian unity.



31 Daughters of Charity of the Canossian Institute (FDCC).

32 Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres (SPC).

33 See its website in <http://www.hsscol.org.hk/>