

Editorial

The Meanings and Strategies of Evangelization

Evangelization is the mission of every Christian and the whole church. Travelling from afar to a strange place, missionaries from different parts of the world are called to abandon their comfort zone in order to go to the peripheries to share the Good News with other people. For the Catholic Church, to evangelize is to bring the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transform humanity from within and make it new (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 18). What matters is to evangelize culture and cultures of human persons in a vital way, deep and right to their very roots, in a wide and rich sense, always taking the persons as one's starting point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God. In fact, the Kingdom of God which the Gospel proclaims is lived by human persons who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building up of the Kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human culture or cultures. (EN, 20)

The question of “how to evangelize” is permanently relevant to the missionaries and to the Church, because the methods of evangelizing vary according to the different circumstances of time, place and culture, and because they thereby present a certain challenge to our capacity for adaptation. In the long history of the Catholic Church, countless missionaries, religious and lay, have employed different ways to evangelize and share the Gospel of

joy with people, through witness of life, preaching, catechesis instruction, personal contact, and so on. Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) of the Society of Jesus was one of them. Surely he was not the first one, but his influence is profound and impressive. Ricci claimed that his job was not to sow seeds, not to mention the harvest, but to cultivate barren land. His task was important and the difficulties he faced were enormous. This was related to the socio-cultural context of his time in China.

So much has been written about Ricci and discussions on him in the Chinese Christian communities are never ending. This is because people try to find out from him what is still meaningful and inspiring to them in their own contexts, especially in contemporary China and Hong Kong. Specifically, what are the strategies of evangelization and attitudes of Ricci and his companions, and how are they relevant to Chinese Christians today?

Last year, in 2019, the Holy Spirit Study Centre and other institutes, organized a series of seminars on Matteo Ricci after the well-received Matteo Ricci musical in Hong Kong was performed. Many Christians as well as non-Christians applauded the creative and artistic performance. People also appreciated the enthusiasm of the spirit of evangelization of Ricci as well as of the initiator of the musical – Fr. Giovanni Giampietro, PIME (also known as Fr. Yan Po Tak), an Italian missionary. Many were interested to attend the seminars in order to know more about Ricci and his relevance to contemporary China and their own lives as Christians.

After the series of seminars, speakers were invited to revise and expand their lectures into articles. Fr. Robert Ng, SJ, Fr. Jing Baolu and Dr. Edmund Kwok accepted the invitation with pleasure. In addition, Dr. Anthony Lam also contributed an article on Ricci and the intellectuals of his time. This issue of *Tripod* brings together these four articles with the theme: *The Strategy of Evangelization of Matteo Ricci and the Church in China*. There are two other non-thematic articles which are also relevant to evangelization and the Church in China, as well as two book reviews and the 2019 news update.

In the section of thematic articles on Matteo Ricci, the first one is Fr. Robert Ng's "Matteo Ricci's Evangelization Strategy and the Inculturation of the Church." Fr. Ng points out that Ricci and his companions introduced Christianity to Chinese people through writings and words, an important means to keep spreading the Christian faith when missionaries were hindered from entering China later. Ricci's acceptance of Confucianism helped the inculturation of Christianity into Chinese culture. His promotion of local vocations also helped Christianity to take root in China. It is true that Ricci played a prominent role in the process of the inculturation of Christianity in China, but he was not the only one. Ng highlights that the strategy of Ricci was indeed a strategy employed by the Society of Jesus in general. He points out that Michele Ruggieri, among other missionaries, was one of the forerunners and left a number of Chinese works as the foundation for Ricci to continue the mission.

The second article is “The Evangelizing Strategy and Spirit of Matteo Ricci and the Mission of the Church in China Today,” written by Fr. Jing Baolu. In delineating Ricci’s cultural evangelization strategy and spirit, the author argues that the issues debated among missionaries concern mission tactics and methods rather than questions of doctrine or principles of faith. Reflecting on Ricci’s strategies, Jing emphasizes that the inculturation of faith and theology must be able to respond to the physical, mental, and spiritual needs of people in their contexts, and every Christian must affirm his/her mission and passion for this mission. Writing at a time of conflict in terms of international relations and East-West ideological differences, Jing points out that Ricci’s experiences can inspire us to reflect on the current situation of the Church in China, that is, how to encourage Chinese people and the Chinese government to have trust in Christianity?

From the historical and literature perspective, in his article “The Interactions between the Tang Xianzu Circle and Matteo Ricci,” Dr. Anthony Lam discusses how the encounter between Ricci and the intellectuals of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) headed by the famous playwright Tang Xianzu (1550-1616) reflects Ricci’s strategy of evangelization and his role in the late Ming political environment in which many intellectuals were eager for reform. Through depicting the literary works of Tang and his friends, Lam demonstrates the legacy of Christianity and the sincere friendship and dialogue between Ricci and China’s intellectuals.

Employing the methodology of autoethnography and macrohistory, in his article “The Legacy of Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue: From Ricci, Second Vatican Council, Pope Francis to Father Yan Po Tak,” Dr. Edmund Kwok traces the legacy of intercultural and interreligious dialogue over the past 400 years through a few important figures or events in Church history. Though Ricci’s contribution to intercultural dialogue for cultural evangelization has been well recognized, Kwok contends that Ricci’s contribution goes far beyond this. Ricci, indeed, created the environment in which his interreligious efforts could succeed, and this revealed a deeper level of relationship between intercultural and interreligious spheres. Kwok argues that Ricci contributed to this by first creating a bridge of understanding between Chinese and Christian cultural and wisdom traditions. It was through this bridging of understanding with experiential exchanges that religious elements could be transferred and translated. From the documents of Vatican II and Pope Francis’ *Evangeliu Gaudium*, Kwok investigates the notion of intercultural and interreligious dialogue as the new vision of evangelization. After discussing the ecclesiology of Pope Francis in which openness, inclusivity and dialogue are the key elements, Kwok also offers his own reflections which are relevant to the future of the Church in China.

The second section contains two articles related to important issues of the universal Church and the Church in China. In her article “Pope Francis and The Church Reform,” Sr. Maria Goretti Lau, SPB, examines the reforms of the Church introduced by Pope Francis. She traces the factors affecting Pope Francis’s

reform plan, including the spirit of Vatican II, the Pope's own background and experiences when he was a prelate in Argentina of Latin America, his ecclesiology, spirituality and personality. In discussing the direction of Pope Francis's reforms which aim at building "a poor Church for the poor," Lau points out that Pope Francis advocates reforms of the Church at various levels: the mentality, ecclesiastical structures and pastoral directions of the Church. They are all equally important.

In "The Understanding of Revelation in the Church in China before Vatican II," Fr. Geng Zhanhe explores the notion of revelation in the context of China before Vatican II as a foundation to understand the development of Christianity in China throughout history. In examining a church document and two theological works of the Chinese Church, Geng argues that the Chinese Church inherited the concept of revelation in the universal Church at that time but failed to develop an inculturated theology. With different context in terms of time, place, and people today, Geng claims that Chinese theologians should be able to contribute to the construction of an inculturated theology.

In the third section, there are two book reviews on *Chinese Theology: Text and Context* and *World Christianity: China*, written by Fr. Patrick Taveirne, CICM and Miss Annie Lam respectively. In addition, there is also a review of the major events of the Church in China in 2019, as appeared in past issues of *Tripod*. Many events concern the transition of bishops, and the development of both official and unofficial church communities, that took place after the signing of the *Sino-Vatican Provisional Agreement*.

This is the first issue of *Tripod* after renewal, in terms of its contents and style. We hope to strengthen theological reflection and analysis on the Catholic Church and society in China through this change. We are grateful to the authors for their insightful contributions. The thoughtful comments and careful editing from the reviewers and members of the editorial committee are highly appreciated. We also thank the designers who give us a new appearance for *Tripod*. We will examine different topics and try to balance the language of the articles in the future. If you have any comments and ideas, please feel free to share them with us.

While we were editing this issue of *Tripod*, the coronavirus (COVID-19) became widespread in China and all over the world. Most sectors of society, including the Church, are seriously affected. I was reminded that in times of crisis we do not benefit less, but more from prayer. I read this small prayer on the Internet and would like to share it with you:

May the good and gracious God, be with us in these turbulent times. Stir our hearts to care for those who are sick and suffering. In small ways or in sweeping gestures, may our lives give witness to your compassion and holy mercy. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.

Mary Yuen
25 March 2020