

# TAIWAN CATHOLICS CELEBRATE ANNIVERSARY

by Peter Barry



On Sunday May 13, 1984, a Mass was held in the Kaohsiung City gymnasium to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the introduction of Catholicism to Taiwan. The principal celebrant of the Mass was Cardinal Agnellus Rossi, Secretary of the Vatican Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, and the Pope's representative at the commemorative ceremonies. Also in attendance were Archbishop Stanislaus Luo Guang, President of Fugen Catholic University, Archbishop Joseph Zheng Tianxiang of the Kaohsiung diocese, Msgr. Giglio, charge d'affaires of the Vatican nunciature, Bishop John Cummins of the Oakland, California diocese, who represented the U.S. Bishops Conference, and Bishop John Baptist Wu of the Hong Kong diocese. Eight bishops from Taiwan and about 150 Chinese and foreign priests concelebrated the Mass, and about 10,000 Catholics attended.

At the Mass, 125 new Christians received baptism, one for each of the 125 years of Taiwanese Catholicism. The prayers of the faithful were recited in Mandarin, Taiwanese, Hakka and aborigine to signify that although the Catholics of Taiwan speak different dialects, they are all united to form one church. After Mass, the bishops, priests and Catholics marched in procession to the Cathedral of the Holy Rosary, where Cardinal Rossi celebrated Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Cardinal Rossi had already blessed the newly erected nine-storey Kaohsiung Catholic Center on the morning of May 13.

On the occasion of the 125th anniversary, it is perhaps appropriate to review briefly the history of the Catholic Church in Taiwan.

In 1858, after the opening of the port of Anping (安平港), near present-day Tainan, by the Treaty of Tianjin, the Roman Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith asked Father Antonio Orge, O.P., Superior General of the Spanish Dominican Order, to assign missionaries to Formosa. Accordingly, Fathers Fernando Sainz (郭德剛) and Angel Bofurull (洪保祿) of the Manila-based Holy Rosary Province of Dominicans were given the task of opening the mission. They set sail from Amoy (Xiamen) in May, 1859 and arrived at the port of Takao (present-day Kaohsiung) on May 18.

In reality, however, this constituted the second attempt by the Spanish Dominicans to establish a mission on Formosa. Over 200 years previously, in May, 1626, a contingent of six Dominican missionaries, led by Father Bartolome Martinez, landed in the north of Formosa with a Spanish expeditionary force. This Spanish force was meant to offset the influence of the Dutch colonizers, who had settled in the southern part of the island in 1624. A church was soon built in Keelung. Not long afterwards, Father Jacinto Esquivel opened a mission at Danshui, where the Spanish soldiers had built a fort.

At the time, most of the inhabitants belonged to several aboriginal tribes and head-hunting was still a common practice. The Chinese were just beginning their migration from Fujian Province across the Taiwan Straits. The mission work was not without its difficulties, however. Father Martinez died by drowning in 1629. Soon thereafter Father Francisco Vaez de Santo Domingo was killed by the inhabitants of the village on the other side of the Danshui River from Danshui. Father Luis Muro was killed in an ambush in 1636, as he traveled inland with a contingent of Spanish soldiers.

In 1638, the Spanish governor of the Philippines ordered the abandonment of the fort at Danshui and the removal of three of the four companies of soldiers stationed there. This weakened the defenses of the Spanish considerably. In August, 1642 a large Dutch force attacked the remaining Spanish stronghold at Keelung. Since the Spanish garrison numbered only 30 men, surrender was inevitable. This took place on August 24, 1642. Three Dominican priests and three brothers were among those captured. They were first taken to Anping, then to Jakarta, and finally, they were repatriated to Manila.

The Dominican apostolate suffered a hiatus of over 200 years. In the meantime, Zheng Chenggong (Koxinga) defeated the Dutch in 1661, expelled them from Formosa, and established Chinese rule on the island.

Of the first two missionaries who arrived in 1859, Father Bofurull soon returned to Amoy (where he died in 1863), leaving Father Sainz by himself. Father Sainz built the first church in southern Taiwan at Qian Jin (前金) and it was consecrated on Pentecost Sunday, May 24, 1863. In 1862, Father Sainz received word that he had been appointed vice-provincial of Holy Rosary Province with responsibility for church affairs in Taiwan. Qian Jin became the center of the mission.



*The original inhabitants of Wan Jin, and the earliest Christians.*

*Father  
Andres  
Chinchon*



In 1870, Father Andres Chinchon (良方濟) built a second church at Wan Jin (萬金) in what is now Pingdong County. This church still stands and is the oldest church building in Taiwan.

By 1883, when Fuzhou and Xiamen in Fujian Province were divided by Propaganda into separate vicariates (with Xiamen having responsibility for the Taiwan mission), fourteen churches had been erected in the southern part of the island. Evangelization of the northern part of Taiwan began in 1887, when Father Chinchon opened a mission there. By 1913, when Taiwan became a vicariate apostolic in its own right (with Father Clemente Fernandez (林啓明) as its first vicar), two parishes

had been set up in the Taipei area. In that year (1913) 18 churches had been built throughout Taiwan and the Catholics numbered 3,400. Eight priests, three sisters and 29 catechists were in charge of the mission work. In 1917, Father Clemente Fernandez founded Jing Xiu Girls Middle School (靜宜女子中學) in Taipei, the only private girls school in Taiwan at that time. It exists to this day.

In 1949-50 other missionary groups, besides the Spanish Dominicans, began to come to Taiwan. In December, 1949, the Congregation of Propaganda created a prefecture in the northern part of the island and gave it to the jurisdiction of the Chinese Order of the Disciples of the Lord (Discipuli Domini). In August, 1950, the central part of Taiwan was assigned by Propaganda to the care of the American Maryknoll Missionaries. This section was known as the Taichung Prefecture and comprised the civil counties of Taichung, Changhua and Nantou. The Dominicans retained jurisdiction over the southern part of Taiwan, until the early 1960's when further ecclesiastical divisions were made. At the time of the 1949-50 divisions, there were fifteen Spanish Dominican Fathers and three Chinese priests serving an estimated 9,000 Catholics living in ten parishes throughout Taiwan.

From the humble beginnings made by the Spanish Dominican Fathers, the church in Taiwan has grown to seven dioceses containing a total of 407 parishes. Catholics number 291,588. They are served by 760 priests, who are equally divided into Chinese and foreign missionary. There are 1,150 religious Sisters (over 2/3 of whom are Chinese) and 435 catechists. The Taiwan Catholic Church administers three colleges, 27 middle schools and ten elementary schools. There are also 20 church-run hospitals on Taiwan.

The Taiwan Catholic Church can be proud of its accomplishments in the spiritual, educational and medical fields. The Chinese Church throughout the world rejoices with the Taiwan Church as it celebrates the 125th anniversary of its establishment. It is an occasion for offering prayers of thanksgiving to God for his past blessings and prayers for continued growth in the future.