

# SYMPOSIUM ON EVANGELIZATION



**Editor's note:** The following article is a modified version of the Delegates at the recent Symposium on Evangelization held at Fu Jen Catholic University, Taipei, Taiwan on February 13-20, 1988. 230 participants took part in the discussions.

We, the delegates of the Chinese church, gathered together at the Catholic University of Fu Jen in Taipei for the Symposium on Evangelization, give thanks to God Our Father for a week spent in union with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, where with one heart we "joined together in continuous prayer" (Acts 1:14). We have, indeed, experienced the presence among us of the Risen Lord in the Holy Spirit, who has been promised us by the Father (Luke 24:49).

2. This week has been for us an enriching faith experience, a journey of disciples from the village of Emmaus back to the city of Jerusalem (Luke 24:13-35) in our recognition of the Lord in the "breaking of the bread", our deepening understanding of the Pascal mystery in the reading of the Scriptures, and now our return home to bear witness to His presence in the world. We have been renewed by the Spirit to make new efforts to proclaim the Good News among men. For this reason, we cannot but share our joy with all of you Chinese brothers and sisters in the Lord, and in communion with you continue to proclaim the gospel to all our compatriots. As we do this we are ever mindful of the words spoken to us by our Pope, John Paul II: "Precisely because you are Chinese, you are the natural evangelizers of the Chinese family" (Instruction to the Chinese Regional Episcopal Conference, November 8, 1985).

3. The purpose of this week-long Symposium has been to have us reflect on and review the progress of the church in Taiwan since the closing of Vatican II, with special regard to the episcopal pastoral plan of the 1970's, a plan that called for the renewal of the Chinese church. This Symposium has been four years in preparation; for it was felt that "the process of preparation was to be more important than the Symposium itself" (Pastoral Letter of the Chinese Bishops Conference, February 2, 1980). We need now to devote an even longer period of time and expend even greater efforts in the process of its implementation.

4. During the days spent in intense discussion, the 230 delegates, as well as the 150 sisters and brothers who offered their services to the entire assembly, were aware of the guidance of the Holy Spirit, of whom St. Paul reminds us "is granted to each one for the use of all" (1 Cor 12:7), and reveals to all "the way that is above all others" - the way of love (1 Cor 12:31). As a result, while the Symposium took many directions, a common meeting point was always found. A consensus of opinion was always possible amid the multiplicity of ideas and, while emotions at times ran high, a spirit of openness and acceptance prevailed. Our communion was to be found in Christ's love, and our common understanding in the sharing of His light.

5. During the meeting, we first considered the present environment of Taiwan in relation to evangelization. Economic values dominate; philosophical trends are toward utilitarianism, materialism and atheism; we are strongly influenced by social and political ideologies, and limited by the narrow confines of humanism. However, the soil of Taiwan is good soil and ready to receive the good seed. Many in the deep recesses of their hearts yearn for the Good News of Christ. But we must first admit to our many limitations in carrying out the work of evangelization: our personal lives do not yet conform to the gospel spirit; we have not made enough effort to understand and digest the teachings of Vatican II; we are wanting in due appreciation of our own Chinese cultural heritage; and, most importantly, we fail to read the signs of the times. While all of this is true, yet the prophetic voice is not lacking in our midst. There are men and women among us of dedicated and holy lives, who are model evangelizers, and who spur us on to confront the world with the standards of Jesus of Nazareth in positive and constructive ways. They summon us to take a more active part in the great task before us - the unifying of China.

6. During our six days together, we sought out the will of God through prayer and personal renewal. We resolved to work to build up an ecclesial community through realistic goals and practical planning

oriented towards concrete action, in order that the gospel message might be spread to all the people. At the same time, we were deeply aware of the fact that in Taiwan the Catholic Church is but a "little flock" (Luke 12:32). Therefore, the direction we take must be in harmony with God's salvific plan. We must make a preferential option for the poor, without diminishing our care and concern for all other groups and classes. All our actions must be carried out in Christ that through them people will be drawn to his Good News and be confronted with the same question Jesus asked of his disciples: "Who do you say that I am?" (Matt 16:15). At the same time, we have committed ourselves to an ongoing renewal in the Holy Spirit that all our energies and efforts may be directed towards the spread of the gospel.



## II

7. Most of the reports, reactions and responses of the Symposium focused on four major concerns: the identity and mission of the laity, communion, formation, and discernment of the signs of the times. These topics echo the concerns of Vatican II. The identity and mission of the laity was the theme of last year's World Synod of Bishops. Members of the Symposium added their own affirmation to this concern of the universal church. Not only do the laity constitute the vast majority of the people of God, they also have, through Baptism and Confirmation, been commissioned by Christ to proclaim the gospel. Such is their rightful role and responsibility, and they must not be reduced to being merely assistants to the clergy and Religious in the work of evangelization. The generous spirit and high motivation of the laity was very much in evidence throughout the meeting. It is from their vitality and zeal that a new image of what it means to be a basic Christian community in the church of Taiwan will emerge.

8. The church as a communion was given great emphasis as an ecclesial model in 1985 during the 20th anniversary observance of Vatican II. This

model has as its foundation the communion of the Blessed Trinity and was very much a part of the week-long Symposium. The Chinese church awaits with hope the full realization of communion among all its members and on every level. By its very nature, communion, when experienced in small groups by Christians who share their life and faith, contributes greatly to the work of the apostolate. Communion is to be found in the relationships of the church in China with overseas Chinese Christian communities. Vatican II has also described the union of bishops worldwide with the pope as a communion. For these reasons, our work of evangelization takes on a universal character.

9. Formation is an essential factor in building up the local church. It must take place on every level of church life. It should be orderly and systematic, ongoing and constant, and it should not be reserved merely to the clergy and Religious but include the laity as well. Those who are placed in charge of organizations within the church should give special attention to the spiritual formation of those they serve.

10. All of the above is closely linked to the necessity to discern, with the help of the Holy Spirit, the signs of the times. Taiwan today is a society characterized by change, brought about by rapid scientific and technological development resulting in increased freedom and openness to the world. It is also a society in need of humanizing agents to nurture spiritual values in the face of wide-spread materialism. To become "the light of the world...the salt of the earth" (Matt 5:13-15), Catholics must be actively present in this kind of world. We must bring to our professional commitments in the secular world, our commitment of faith. There were many assurances during the Symposium that the church in Taiwan is becoming more aware of this responsibility and is moving in this direction as a means of spreading the gospel.

11. The Symposium addressed itself to the concept of the traditional parish in great detail. Research studies have shown a gradual shift from its traditional tendency towards self-seclusion to adopting a more open attitude of concern for the larger, non-Christian community within which it exists. The importance of the parish as a locus of faith, where Christians form themselves into groups and associations, was underlined. Such social structures are deeply rooted in human nature and are a part of our Catholic Church tradition. However, the Symposium saw a direct connection between parish communities and the evangelization of non-Christians when these communities open themselves more and more to neighbourhood involvement. For Christian parishes to establish, maintain, and increase contacts within the larger neighbourhood community is one of the means whereby the church incardicates itself in the world. Parish



councils should be willing to open the doors of the parish to their non-Christian neighbours; the parish as parish should be more involved in neighbourhood concerns; Catholic families should act as mini-parishes, i.e. nuclear Christian communities bearing witness to their faith within their neighbourhood communities. All that was said about the identity and mission of the laity, communion, formation, and reading the signs of the times finds its expression in parish life, and help to further a spirit of openness to the world.

12. The recent expressions of enthusiasm for and acceptance of democracy, personal freedom and modernization in Taiwan, especially during the past two years, are examples of signs of the times which the church can use as an opportunity for proclaiming the gospel. The church must stand up and express gospel values in just such a context. It is the responsibility of all Catholics to bear witness to the gospel in this contemporary world of change, bringing the revelation of God to bear on the rapid changes in our traditional Chinese culture.

13. The church in Taiwan has had to bear, often silently, the burden of its past history, but given the past two years of dramatic social changes, the time has come for it to play a more vocal role that will



enable it to reveal its true identity. The church is from Jesus Christ; it is a community mandated by Christ to spread the gospel; while not of the world, it is deeply rooted within the world. The church and the government are both social entities but with fundamental differences. The goal of the church is the full realization of the Kingdom of God, that of the government is the welfare of the people. Between the church and the government there is no fundamental conflict of interest and both should be motivated by a spirit of mutual cooperation. However, the gospel demands of the church that it speak out against social injustices, whatever threatens human dignity,

freedom of worship, and respect for the sacredness of human life. The church is above any particular political party, for a political party does not constitute a government. The church acts at all times in

accordance with standards laid down in the gospel. The Symposium felt strongly the need for a Catholic newspaper in Taiwan to serve as a vehicle for communicating its concepts to society at large, and it also supported organized efforts to make known the church's views and positions through other agencies of the mass media.

14. Within the community of the people of God, it is the laity who, by virtue of their role and identity, are called into direct engagement with the secular world. It is they who, proclaim the gospel through their everyday work life, thus bringing their Christian ideals into the marketplace. They are the special instruments of God whereby the church is able to penetrate and illumine modern society. The Symposium encouraged this kind of awareness among the laity, especially those active in the professions. The church in Taiwan is not lacking in Catholics who have leadership roles in education, economics, communications and commerce. However, this is not so in the field of politics. The Symposium paid particular attention to this area of need and sought to encourage more and more Catholics to enter the political arena, either by active participation in local elections or by entering government service. This would insure that the gospel message of concern for the people's welfare would have a voice in the political forum. Catholics, in order to serve the needs of the people with greater effectiveness, are free to join any particular political party whose aims are not in conflict with the gospel spirit. Their active political involvement would open up many more channels for proclaiming the Good News in our society.

15. Evangelization must also be directed towards a people's culture - to create what Pope Paul VI has called "the culture of love". Our modern culture continues to preserve essential features of our tradition while absorbing elements of western cultures. Church doctrine, theology, liturgy and spirituality all are in need of further inculturation. If Chinese culture is not influenced by the gospel, this will be our own failure and will result in our church remaining outside the boundaries of our society.

16. Just as movements towards democracy and more personal freedom are signs of the times, so too has been our rapid industrial development, which has led to an ever increasing percentage of our people joining the ranks of the working class. In fact, the vast majority of our people today are employed by those industries that have brought about our present condition of economic prosperity. It is to these workers that Taiwan owes its present economic progress. But our workers find themselves today at a crossroads. Many delegates at the Symposium urged the

church to become a more visible sign in the development of a just and equitable society. It should proclaim the gospel message through widespread dissemination of its social justice teachings, which have shaped its own understanding about modern industrial societies for the past one hundred years. Although we cannot hope to solve every problem that a complex industrial society present to us, we should not let history say of us that we stood apart from those problems, passing over them in silence.

### III

During the six-day Symposium, much energy and thought went into deepening our awareness of new dimensions in evangelization. Along the way, we uncovered fresh problems and new demands. These raised certain anxieties amongst us and reminded us once again that we are but "a little flock" confronting vast difficulties. Yet we were not downcast. We realized that evangelization covers every aspect of human life, and it calls us to closer cooperation not only with our Christian brothers and sisters but also with other religions and all people of good will, in order to work together to build a better society. We also agreed that we are in need of a practical plan, with a built-in process for self-evaluation, in order to insure that the work of the Symposium might continue on into the future.

18. In closing, we place our faith in the Risen Lord, who is always with us (Matt 28:20). "It is God who...gives you the intention and the power to act" (Phil 2:13). We are also aware of our constant need for repentance, reconciliation and conversion. And we are, indeed, always in need of prayer. We join with others in asking God's blessings on our efforts. Pope John Paul II has assured us of his prayers and has told us that he prays "daily for the Chinese church". Likewise, we join in prayer with our brothers and sisters on mainland China and those in the Chinese diaspora throughout the world. Let us go forth then as true disciples of Jesus Christ. With courage, let us bravely move forward to meet the challenge of the third millennium of the incarnation of the Son of God, that we welcome as holding the promise of a new springtime in the history of the Chinese church.

