

The Promotion of the Bible in Contemporary China and Evangelization

John Baptist Zhang Shijiang
Translated by Purple Kwong

In modern China, the Catholic Church translated the Bible into Chinese much later than the Protestant Christian Church. However, some Chinese Catholic scholars did take up the task of translation in the early 20th century. Li Wenyu published *Xinjing Shi* (Annotations of the New Testament) in Shanghai in 1907. Xiao Jingshan (Joseph Hsiao) translated *Xinjing Quanji* (The Complete Works of the New Testament), and it was published in Xianxian in 1922. A new edition of this book was published in Taiwan in the 1950s, and it gave great impetus to evangelization and pastoral ministry in Taiwan. In 1949, the Commercial Press in Shanghai published *Jiushi Fuyin* (The Gospel of Salvation), which Ma Xiangbo translated in 1937. *Xinjing Quanji* (The Complete Works of the New Testament), translated by Wu Jingxiong (John C. H. Wu) and annotated by Luo Guang, was published in 1949.

The Studium Biblicum and Its Edition of the Bible

There are always coincidences and connections in history. John of Montecorvino, the first Franciscan to attempt a translation of Sacred Scripture, died in Beijing in 1328. Five hundred and seventy-nine years later, in 1907, Gabriel Allegra was born. Like Montecorvino, he also was a member of the Order of Friars Minor (OFM). Influenced by his predecessor, Gabriel Allegra “decided to go to China to translate the Bible.” At last he completed Montecorvino’s unfinished work.

At Christmas time 1968, the Studium Biblicum's translation of the Bible was finally published in Hong Kong. It was a milestone for the Chinese Catholic Church. This Chinese translation of the Bible was the fruit of 20 years of conscientious work by Father Allegra and his team of OFM biblical scholars at the Studium Biblicum in Hong Kong. They translated the Bible one book at a time from the original texts, and finally compiled the translations of the Bible into one published volume. It is the authoritative Catholic Chinese Bible today.

The first principle the Studium Biblicum followed was that the Bible had to be translated directly from the original text. In some circumstances, they consulted earlier translations. They also referred to translations in different languages to see how the words of the Bible were expressed in modern languages. They maintained the chapters and verses of the original texts, and tried their utmost to keep the style and tone of the original texts. Among the three criteria for translation, "fidelity" to the original text was of prime importance. "Fluency" came next, followed by "elegance" of expression. All the names of people and places were transliterations of the original language. They would retain terms commonly used in the Church, to preserve the uniformity of a commonly used Church glossary. As for the language, the criteria were: "the part on law should be serious and concise; history should be lively; proverbs should be sharp and penetrating; psalms should be gentle and passionate; admonitions should be mournful; words of praise should be solemn and holy; teachings should be patient, and given with confidence and composure."

The publication of the Studium Biblicum edition of the Bible was indeed a milestone for the Chinese Catholic Church. Father Mark Fang, SJ, remarked, "the contribution of the Studium Biblicum edition of the Bible to China's Catholic Church was immeasurable. All liturgy books use this edition of the Bible as the blueprint; Bible courses conducted in seminaries or other educational institutions also use the Studium Biblicum Bible as the starting point for exegesis."

The Translation and Printing of the Bible in China today

On January 28, 1979, Deng Xiaoping, the then vice-premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, visited the United States at the invitation of its president Jimmy Carter. During the visit, Deng Xiaoping and President Carter had several meetings. When they discussed religion, Deng Xiaoping, the chief designer of the reform and opening-up of China, said that the Church in China could have Bibles.

In 1980, the Catholic Church as well as the Protestant Christian Church in China separately convened their own national congresses. They promulgated the "Letter to clergy and laity of the nation" and "Letter to brothers and sisters in Christ of the nation" respectively. Both letters announced that the reprinting of the Bible would become the new mission of the Church in China.

Translation and publication of the Bible in the Catholic Church today

In 1981, the Catholic Church in China re-printed *Xinjing Quanji* (The Complete Works of the New Testament). In 1983, Bishop Jin Luxian began to translate the New Testament of *The New Jerusalem Bible* in Shanghai, and one by one individual books of the New Testament were published. In 1990, the Old Testament of the Studium Biblicum Bible was published and distributed in Beijing. Finally, in 1992, the complete Studium Biblicum Bible was reproduced, printed and distributed throughout the country.

(1) *Xinjing Quanji*, filling the gaps in the 1980s and relating the past to the future

In November 1980, the "two associations and one conference" resolved to reprint *Xinjing Quanji* (The Complete Works of the New Testament) that was originally published in Xianxian. This translation was in the vernacular of northern China and was done by Father Xiao Jingshan. It was very popular among both clergy and laity. On August 15, 1981, the Chinese Catholic Church Affairs Committee reprinted 40,000 copies of *Xinjing*

Quanji. It was reprinted three more times, bringing the total number of copies to 280,000. The preface of the reprinted edition clearly states: "In order to fulfill the need of the clergy and laity of the nation to hear the teachings of Christ, we hereby publish this new edition (5th edition) of *Xinjing Quanji*, which was originally published by the Xianxian Diocese."

The publication of *Xinjing Quanji* did fulfill the needs of the vast number of clergy and laity who had survived the ten years of turmoil. It also facilitated teaching in seminaries, which later opened one after another. Most young Catholic students who grew up in the 1980s have read *Xinjing Quanji*.

(2) Another *Xinjing Quanji*—The Translation in Shanghai of the New Testament of *The New Jerusalem Bible*

In 1983, Bishop Jin Luxian in Shanghai began translating the New Testament of *The New Jerusalem Bible*. Lu Shuxin of Shanghai's Guangqi Press helped Bishop Jin in some of the translation and proofreading. After three years of hard work, in 1986, the Shanghai Diocese published the Four Gospels of the New Testament. Thereafter, the Acts of the Apostles, the Letters of St. Paul, the Catholic Epistles and the Book of Revelation, etc. were published one after the other in separate volumes. In 1994, Guangqi Press of Shanghai published the bound copy of *Xinjing Quanji* and its commentary.

The New Jerusalem Bible is a translation of the Bible published by the Biblical Institute of Jerusalem. In recent years, the Institute has made numerous scientific investigations on the original text of the Bible, including its original languages, Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, and corrections were made. It is generally recognized as one of the best contemporary translations of the Bible. In order to ensure the accuracy of the translation of the New Testament, since 1995 Bishop Jin Luxian has once again dedicated himself to a revision of his original translation. First of all, basing himself on *The New Jerusalem Bible*, and with reference to the Hebrew and Greek editions, Bishop Jin revised his previous translation of the

New Testament. Furthermore, Bishop Jin consulted the *Sacra Pagina Series*, commentaries on the books of the New Testament, published by the Liturgical Press of the United States, to revise the annotated *Xinjing Quanji*. After several rounds of revisions and polishing, the Chinese translation of the New Testament of *The New Jerusalem Bible* was further improved and refined. It marked a big step forward in achieving fidelity, fluency, and elegance of translation. In 2004, the re-translated and revised annotated *Xinjing Quanji* was published. In this way, from 1986 to 2004 the Shanghai Diocese printed 598,900 copies of books related to the New Testament.

Translating the Bible is a difficult task. If scholars, exegetes, and experts on the Bible from all over China come together to form a team to translate the Old Testament of *The New Jerusalem Bible* into Chinese, and to make a thorough revision of *Xinjing Quanji*, the new edition would be a marvelous contribution to the Church in China, and would also be a great help to the pastoral and evangelical work of the local churches.

(3) The printing and distribution of the Studium Biblicum edition of the Bible in mainland China

Following the printing and distribution of the Xianxian edition of *Xinjing Quanji* in Beijing in 1981, on April 14, 1990, the Chinese Catholic Church Affairs Committee printed 50,000 copies of the Old Testament of Studium Biblicum Bible. Although the Old Testament and the New Testament were two different translations, nonetheless the Church in China now had an entire Bible by provisionally combining the separate editions of the Old and New Testaments together. This solved the pressing need of the formation of seminarians and novices, teaching in seminaries, and the pastoral and evangelical work of local churches.

Bishop Zong Huaide, who was chairman of the Chinese Catholic Bishops Conference at that time, solemnly offered the first Studium Biblicum edition of the Bible in China to Our Lady of China in the church of the National Seminary on August 15, 1993,

the feast day of the Assumption of Our Lady. Bishop Zong and the clergy and laity who had contributed to the publication of this Bible were filled with tears of joy and gratitude. This Bible was in the first batch of 50,000 copies of the Studium Biblicum Bible (Old and New Testaments) reprinted by the Chinese Catholic Church Affairs Committee at Xinhua Printing Press in Beijing in the year 1992. It was printed in the original complex Chinese characters with vertical typesetting. 50,000 copies were reprinted in Beijing in the years 1994 and 1996 respectively, thus bringing the total number of printed copies to 150,000.

Since 1998, the United Bible Societies and the Chinese Catholic Church have collaborated in sponsoring the publishing of the Bible for the Catholic Church, by providing an average of 100,000 volumes of bible paper free of charge each year. By the end of 2006, the Nanjing Amity Printing Company Ltd. had printed 590,000 copies of the complete Studium Biblicum Bible.

In recent years, the Chinese Catholic Church Affairs Committee has printed different editions of the Studium Biblicum Bible, such as the 64-mo pocket edition of the New Testament (100,000 copies), and the 32-mo edition of the New Testament (100,000 copies). Altogether over 1,700,000 copies of various sizes and editions of the Studium Biblicum Bible have been printed.

The Studium Biblicum Bible was first published in Hong Kong. So it was printed in complex Chinese characters with vertical typesetting. This is inconvenient for most people in mainland China. This barrier to reading the Bible would adversely affect young people's study of the Bible, and pastoral work in local churches. In view of this, the Hong Kong Studium Biblicum is preparing a Bible in simplified Chinese characters with horizontal typesetting to better serve the Church on the mainland.

(4) Chinese translation of the *Catholic Pastoral Bible*

The Chinese translation of the *Catholic Pastoral Bible* was published in Hong Kong in 1998. In 2000, the Chinese Catholic Church Affairs Committee printed the *Catholic Pastoral Bible* in

horizontal typesetting with simplified Chinese characters. Up to the present time, mainland China has printed 450,000 copies of the *Catholic Pastoral Bible*, of which 50,000 copies are 64-mo pocket size.

The Chinese translation of the *Catholic Pastoral Bible* is easy to read because of the horizontal typesetting and simplified Chinese characters. This edition of the Bible is quite popular among some people on the mainland. Nevertheless, in the course of reading the Bible or doing some Bible-sharing, or when some Bible-study groups compare the *Catholic Pastoral Bible* with the Studium Biblicum Bible, errors of translation in the former edition become obvious. During the past few years, this problem has been seriously bothering some Chinese clergy and laity.

Around 1990, Father Bernard Hurault, the initiator of the *Catholic Pastoral Bible*, contacted Father Mark Fang of Taiwan and Mr. Stanislaus Lee of Hong Kong separately to discuss the translation of the *Catholic Pastoral Bible* into Chinese. Both Chinese Catholic biblical scholars “insisted that the translation should be done by qualified exegetes directly from the original languages (Hebrew and Greek).” But their opinion was rejected. Father Hurault insisted that the *Catholic Pastoral Bible* be translated into Chinese quickly from existing translations (English, French, or Spanish). He organized a group of people to go to the Philippines for training, and they translated the Bible at the same time as they were undergoing training. In this way the Chinese edition of the *Catholic Pastoral Bible* was produced.

Mr. Stanislaus Lee and Father Mark Fang in their respective writings “Notes on the *Catholic Pastoral Bible*” and “The Development of the Chinese Bible from the Perspective of the *Dogmatic Constitution Divine Revelation* of the Second Vatican Council” have made a fair analysis of the Chinese *Catholic Pastoral Bible*. Mr. Lee confirmed that one of the characteristics of this Bible is that “it contains numerous annotations for pastoral use, on national cultures and for application of the Bible to daily life.” On the other hand, Mr. Lee pointed out that there are some

problems with the Chinese translation. First of all this Chinese translation is not “a translation from the complete Hebrew and Greek versions of the Bible,” as stated in the introduction. The outstanding mistakes in the Chinese translation “clearly show that the translators did not translate from the original languages of the Bible, nor did they have a required common knowledge of the Bible.” Since this Chinese Bible was translated from English (French, Spanish) translations, Father Lionel Goh of the Studium Biblicum, who gave the *nihil obstat* to the Chinese *Catholic Pastoral Bible*, had to make a formal declaration in a newspaper in 1999 that he gave the *nihil obstat* in his personal capacity only, and that “the Chinese translation was made from an English original.”

Mr. Stanislaus Lee conceded, “The *Catholic Pastoral Bible* is different from the Studium Biblicum Bible in its purpose, target group, style, language, etc. Because of the way the translation was done and its level of professionalism, it is not suitable for academic use or for serious research. When one has problem with the text, it is of course most ideal to refer to the original text of the Bible, and in most circumstances, the Studium Biblicum Bible can be used as the standard.” At the same time, Father Fang expressed the opinion that although some people say that the *Catholic Pastoral Bible* has many problems in translation and has many shortcomings, yet it is hard to find an error that pertains to faith or morals in it.

After the Chinese *Catholic Pastoral Bible* was published on the mainland, its translators spared no effort to encourage people in all parts of China to read the Bible. They also went to parishes to initiate Bible-sharing groups. Their spirit and zeal was quite admirable. There is a great push in the local churches to give importance to the Bible, and to use Bible-reading as a starting point for evangelization. All the Chinese translations of the New Testament, Gospels, Old Testament, and the complete Bible throughout the history of the Catholic Church in China have contributed to the pastoral and evangelical work of the local parishes in China. We hope that the *Catholic Pastoral Bible* can be revised and improved by biblical scholars very soon, so that it can

better serve the clergy and laity and readers involved in pastoral and evangelical ministries.

The translation and publication of the Bible by the Protestant Christian Church in China

Since the reform and opening of China, the Protestant Christian Church in China has attached great importance to the publishing of the Bible. It started early, with great impetus, and an investment of many resources; therefore a great quantity of Bibles have already been published. In the past, the Bibles were printed in Shanghai, Fujian, and Jiangsu. Today, the responsibility for printing the Bible mainly rests with the Nanjing Amity Printing Company Ltd.

(1) From an emphasis on Bible publishing to the establishment of a specific organization for Bible ministry

After the establishment of the People's Republic, in 1955 the China Bible House (established in 1937) had already printed 100,000 copies of a 64-mo Bible. However, during the upheaval of the Cultural Revolution, most Bibles were destroyed. After the catastrophic ten years, supplying Bibles was a pressing need for the Church in China. At a meeting held on February 25, 1980, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China resolved: "to reprint the Bible, and print hymn books and spiritual books." In October of that same year, the third national conference of the Protestant Churches in China once again emphasized the reprinting of the Bible. The first task of the newly established "China Christian Council" was "to provide services to the laity and churches all over the country in their church ministries, for example, by publishing Bibles, hymn books and other Christian literature." The Protestant Christian Church not only emphasized the Bible at their national conference, they were also swift to respond, and efficient in mobilizing the local churches at the provincial and municipal levels to also help in printing the Bible. They also set up ad hoc Bible committees, and the local churches set up distribution

points. All this helped to promote and implement the work of publishing and distributing Bibles.

In November 1989, in response to the needs of the Bible ministry, the China Christian Council decided to form the "Bible Committee." Its duties are "to make recommendations to the publication department of the two councils on their annual plan for the printing and publication of the Bible; give impetus to the translation or revision of the Bible into modern Chinese; conduct international exchanges on the publication of the Bible." Moreover, from 1990 onwards, approximately 70 Bible distribution points were gradually set up all over the country, thus forming a national biblical distribution network. Through these distribution points, Bibles can be quickly distributed to Christians in municipalities, county towns, village towns, and villages.

(2) Action taken: from complex to simplified characters

In order to save time in typesetting and to avoid mistakes, the two councils of the Christian Church in China first reprinted 50,000 copies of the New Testament (*Shen* 神 version) as it was in October 1980. In late December of that same year, 85,000 copies of the complete Bible were printed in Shanghai. In 1982, under the coordination of the two councils at the national level, the two councils of Fujian Province also printed 50,000 copies of the (*Shen* 神 version) New Testament and Psalms. In 1983, the two councils of Jiangsu Province printed 450,000 copies of the vertical typeset (*Shangdi* 上帝 version) Bible.

Since young people in mainland China were not accustomed to reading the Bible in vertical typeset complex Chinese characters, in order to further promote the Bible, in 1984 the national Christian two councils decided to set up a special committee to convert the complex characters into simplified characters. The committee was headed by Rev. Shen Cheng'en, and was made up of 21 staff members of the church plus 20 laity. There was no computer at that time. So they had to copy the vertical typeset complex characters word for word into simplified horizontally written characters. At the

same time, they also corrected some old punctuation and other mistakes. In July 1986, the first volume of the New Testament and Psalms in horizontal typeset simplified characters was published. At Easter 1989, the complete Bible in horizontal typeset simplified characters was published. In the spring of 1993, the complete Bible in simplified Chinese characters, with new punctuation, and a *pinyin* index was finally published.

From 1980 until now, the Protestant Christian Church has already printed over 40 million copies of the Bible. From its average annual production of 2.5 million copies of the Bible in recent years, the Protestant Christian Church is now printing an average of 3 million copies of the Bible every year.

(3) The Nanjing Amity Printing Company Ltd.

To fulfill the Church's need for Bibles, the Amity Foundation and the United Bible Societies coordinated to form the Nanjing Amity Printing Press, the predecessor of today's Nanjing Amity Printing Company Ltd. The main purpose of the establishment of the press was to print Bibles. Today it is the officially appointed Bible printing press for the Church in China, and is a renowned printing enterprise.

According to the website of the Nanjing Amity Printing Company Ltd., by the end of 2006, the company has cumulatively printed a total of 53,219,332 copies of various versions of the Bible throughout the years. The complete Bible (Old and New Testaments together) alone already amount to 45,880,000 copies, of which 38,690,000 copies were printed for the Protestant Christian Churches in China, 590,000 copies for the Catholic Church, and 6,600,000 copies for overseas Churches. Bibles for export are printed in a wide variety of languages, including Chinese, English, Russian, Spanish, French, Japanese, Portuguese, Thai, Greek, Dutch, and Swedish, etc., and some twenty African languages. These Bibles are distributed to over 60 countries and regions. Every year Amity gives away a few million copies of Bibles to churches in China alone.

The Nanjing Amity Printing Company Ltd. has gradually developed into an important base for printing Chinese Bibles and Bibles in other languages for China and overseas. From the beginning, the Asia-Pacific Office of the United Bible Societies has taken an active part, and has contributed greatly to the professionalism and standardization of the company. This included importing machines, recruiting professionals in the printing industry, training staff, and designing factories, etc.

The aim of the United Bible Societies is "to enable every person to purchase a Bible within his/her affordability and in a language he/she can easily understand." At the beginning, the United Bible Societies invested 7 million US dollars to establish the Amity Printing Company. In order to reduce the cost of producing the Bibles, to also enable Catholics in China to purchase an affordable Bible, and to guarantee the quality of the Bible, from 1987 to 1994 the United Bible Societies has been importing Bible paper from abroad and providing it free of charge to the Amity Printing Company. From 1994 onwards, however, it has changed to buying similar quality paper produced in China itself. And today it continues to support the printing of Bibles in China by providing paper.

(4) Bibles in the languages of the ethnic minorities, and Bibles of various Chinese translations

In the past twenty years, in order to satisfy the different needs of the clergy and laity, the two councils of the Christian Churches in China have published 27 new editions of the Bible with different contents and formats. They include Bibles with various annotations, modern Chinese translation, a Chinese-English bilingual Bible, the Bible in big fonts, the Bible for the blind, and Bibles for various ethnic minorities. At the same time, color bonded-leather zipped Bibles and gold-rimmed thumb index Chinese-English Bibles are also published.

While printing Chinese Bibles, the two councils of the Christian Church also realized the needs of the ethnic minorities.

They have translated and published Bibles in the languages of various ethnic minorities, including Miao, Heiyi, Baiyi, Va (Wa), Dai (Tai), Lahu, Jingpo, Lisu, and Korean, etc. To take care of the blind, Nanjing has been publishing Bibles for the blind since 1996, and up to now a total of 52,100 such Bibles have been published. At present the two councils are translating and preparing the publication of a Bible in Mongolian.

There are differences in the editions of the Bible of the Catholic Church and of the Protestant Christian Church. The Catholic Church uses the *Greek Septuagint* as the standard. This Bible has 73 books, of which 46 make up the Old Testament, and 27 the New Testament. However, the Protestant Christian Church Bible has only 66 books, because they insist that only the Hebrew Scriptures are authentic. They do not recognize the seven books that only have Greek original texts, namely, Baruch, Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, and Ecclesiasticus. At the same time, the Bibles of the Protestant Christian Church have fewer annotations, while the Catholic Bible has many detailed annotations. For instance, when we compare the Studium Biblicum Bible with the Chinese Union Version of The Holy Bible, we see that the former has 2,050 pages, while the latter has only 1,241 pages; one almost doubles the other. No wonder the cost of the Protestant Christian Bible is comparatively less than the Catholic one.

Conclusion: The Bible — A Thermometer for Evangelical Work

In 1949, the Protestant Christian Church had 700,000 faithful, while the Catholic Church had 3.5 million. In 2006, the Protestant Christian Church published some 40 million different editions of Bibles for their 16 million believers, while the Catholic Church published 2.1 million Bibles for her 5 million believers. This number of believers are just the official figures provided by the government, which tend to be moderate. The actual number of believers could far exceed these figures.

Meanwhile, the Bible Ministry Exhibition of the Church in China was held in Hong Kong and in three cities in the United States (Los Angeles, Atlanta, and New York) in 2004 and 2006 respectively. These exhibitions attracted hundreds of thousands of visitors.

All this shows that the Chinese Protestant Christian Church has done an admirable job in the publication and distribution of Bibles. They have a close and harmonious relationship with Protestant Christian Churches abroad. Protestant Christians generally place much emphasis on the Bible, and the Bible plays an important role in their pastoral and evangelical work. The fruit of their missionary work is obvious. Needless to say, the Catholic Church has to reflect seriously on the small number of Bibles it publishes and on the numbers of converts it makes, as compared to the Protestant Christian Church. In fact, the publication and distribution of the Bible is like a thermometer for evangelical work, reflecting the energy and effectiveness of evangelization in each Church.

Finally, I would like to share an encounter I had with a Catholic who was recently baptized. This brother in Christ asked me: When can Catholics have Bibles in simplified characters? When can we have Bibles of different formats available at stores for religious articles? When will the Bible infiltrate all our families? He had these thoughts and feelings after he had met believers of both the Protestant and Catholic Churches in a certain region: Almost every Protestant Christian had at least one Bible, and they always carry it with them. On the other hand, only about one-fifth of the Catholics had a Bible, and they seldom carried it with them. Through day-to-day reading of the Bible, many Protestant Christians have gone through the Bible at least three to five times, and have memorized many of its verses. When they preach the Gospel, they can fluently quote from the Bible. On the other hand, very few Catholics have read through the whole Bible even once. Therefore, in their missionary work, Catholics teach dogma, the rules of the Church, the sacraments and liturgy. Rarely

do they quote directly from the Bible.

At present, there is an urgent need for the Catholic Church in China to deal with the following issues: How to give more emphasis to the printing and distribution of Bibles throughout China? How to coordinate nationwide, and arouse the active participation of local churches? How to get Bibles into the hands of clergy and laity all over the country? Obviously the cooperation, and the enthusiastic participation of clergy and laity all over the country in this task are of the utmost importance.

Note: This is translated from the Chinese original 「當代中國教會的聖經推廣與福傳」, which is also published in this issue of Tripod (No. 144). Please refer to the Chinese article for the Bibliography, since it is almost entirely Chinese.