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Francis K.H. So • Beatrice K.F. Leung  
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Editors

# The Catholic Church in Taiwan

Problems and Prospects

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*To the Catholic Community of the faithful in Taiwan*

## PREFACE

This second volume on the Catholic Church in Taiwan is, like the first, a work of high quality. The research on which it is based is thorough. Its coverage of the Taiwan Church and its experiences, both past and present, is comprehensive and authoritative. It is remarkably frank in its analysis of the Church's shortcomings, both pastoral and administrative. Readers will find that this work is not just a well-designed history of Taiwan Catholic Church, nor does its usefulness lie just in acting as the standard reference work (together with the first volume) on the Catholic Faith in Taiwan. The book also lays the initial foundations for Taiwan to take its research into the wider world of Catholicism.

Space makes it impossible for this Preface to comment on all the chapters. It focuses, instead, on those which deal with issues of particular importance not only to Taiwan Catholics but to a wider Catholic community. The second chapter offers a fascinating account of the conflicting views among Taiwan's Catholic "literati" as to how to present the Faith in a Chinese world. One conclusion reached by the author after detailed analysis is that "integrating different faith traditions and forming an integrated culture with depth is an extremely time-consuming process." This admission is very revealing. Taiwan is repeating a well-known experience in the history of the Catholic Church. Indigenization of its theological and liturgical presentation has always been long-drawn out because "Christianization" of the indigenous culture has to be the first priority.

Chapter 3 deals with the nuts and bolts of this process and offers a detailed overview of efforts made to create a comparable match between local cultures and the Church's universal teachings. The careful tracking of

the progress made and the barriers encountered over the years offers readers an unusually well informed insight into how “modernization” of Catholic thoughts and teaching takes place. This chapter’s conclusion includes a pastoral reality which is a defining experience of the church everywhere—by itself, theology does not win souls.

The book also reveals another hurdle to be overcome in seeking to create “an oriental way of spirituality”, with Chap. 5’s account of the work initiated by the Sheng Kung sisters in Tainan. The explanation the chapter offers for the slow uptake of “oriental” spirituality is convincing. It is difficult to compete with the Church’s treasure chest of mystical prayer. “One has only to think of Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross and the Rhineland mystics among many others,” the author points out. “The Eucharist together with the traditional vocal prayer of the Rosary and many other devotions nourish the spiritual life of Catholics.” However, the contributor’s conclusion is optimistic. An unexpected ecumenical contribution is now being made by the Pure Heart Spiritual Center. It remains sponsored by the Sheng Kung Sisters but is run by a Protestant pastor because, at the moment, Protestants comprise the majority of adherents who profit from input lacking in their own tradition of prayer.

There are also practical obstacles in the Church’s day-to-day life, another aspect of which is, what should be the vernacular language of its liturgy in Taiwan? How are the diverse backgrounds of different groups of immigrant generations to be accommodated? And what will be their offsprings’ “dialect” of preference for the future. Chapter 6 gives full attention to these important issues but offers no solution other than patience. This attitude is very sensible in our modern era where the rate of change, socially as well as technologically, is so rapid. The Catholic view of language in the liturgy adopted by the author provides another justification as to why the Church should accept the delay. “The faith itself is a mystery,” the chapter notes, “Inculturation of liturgical language does not focus on the choice of language, but rather it is concerned with whether the liturgical language can penetrate the inner life of Catholics and influence their outer life.”

The most innovative chapter in the book is titled “The Implementation of Catholic Social Teaching in Taiwan”. This is a well-presented statistical study of Catholic attitudes to their Faith in terms of their religious duties and of their obligations to promote the social teachings of the Church. His analysis of the data is followed by an account of the Taiwan Church’s mixed—and sometimes confused—responses to the repeated efforts of

Popes to raise the awareness of the duty of individual Catholics, as well as Catholic institutions, to promote social justice and defend the rights of the family and the workforce in particular. His conclusions are mixed. Catholics give the impression of having a poor record in this respect compared with some of their religious groups. But that is not because Church leaders have neglected their obligation to promote social justice, nor has there been a shortage of priests, for example, willing to face state penalties for their unwelcome activities. The truth is that the average Catholic in Taiwan, as everywhere else, belongs to the lower strata of society and is the victim—not the perpetrator—of whatever social injustice society practices. The local Church’s duty is to promote the principles set out in the Bible and the teachings of Popes and Councils. The overthrow of unjust practices is a matter for political action aided by religious devotion rather than direct Church intervention, the author wryly suggests. The author concludes the chapter with the observation: “Are the bishops suggesting, like Fr. Thomas Merton, that social justice and contemplation should go hand in hand?” If it is appropriate to read it in this way, the future of our Church will be filled with hope.

A further area analyzed in Chap. 7 skillfully points out the extent to which the creation of new liturgical music to meet the inculturation goals of the Taiwan Church is difficult to achieve. Her presentation covers past and present, knowledgeably breaking new ground, and may well inspire and urge those with the requisite musical and administrative skills to unforeseen heights of creativity. The author’s conclusion is both well informed and sensitive.

There is also a considerable awareness among the contributors of the potential threats to the Church’s future in a society modernizing and globalizing as thoroughly Taiwan continues to do. This is an era in which religion appears to have lost its relevance. What is striking is the sophistication with which volume two deals with this crucial challenge to the modern Catholics. The contributors are well informed about the theological and liturgical controversies faced by the Church in recent decades and provide the much-needed foundations for further research into the needs and performance of the Church in an international context. Several contributors comment on the cause for concern over the loss of momentum in the Taiwan Church in recent years: vocations have declined, and membership is static. The laity is becoming selective about embracing the Church’s social teachings. A widespread explanation for this situation has been that the Church has been badly hit by the collapse of the

“infrastructure” created in earlier times to transfer the Faith from one generation to the next, to encourage vocations to the religious life and to protect orthodoxy in its theological and biblical discussions. Current questions about the Faith’s relevance to this world-class economic and political entity need comparative studies with Catholic communities elsewhere to better understand the distinction between the local and the international dynamics of Catholic belief, practice and culture. This book has laid ample foundations for such research.

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Leo F. Goodstadt

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIT	American Institute in Taiwan
AMOR	Asian Meeting of Religious Women
CBC	Chinese Bishops Conference
CBC	Committee of the Bridge Church
CBRC	China Bishops' Rome Convention
CCB	Catholic Central Bureau
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CDD	Chinese Congregation of Disciples of the Lord
CICM	Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary
CM	Congregation of the Mission
College of Apostles	Collegium Apostolorum
CPA	Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association
CR	Canons regular of St. Augustine
CRBC	Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference
CSA	<i>Correo SinoAnnamita</i>
CSJB	Congregation of St. John the Baptist
CSV	Clerics of St. Viator
CTC	Chinese Theologians' Colloquium
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
DTCP	Department of Tourism and Communication, Pingtung
EATWOT	Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians
FABC	Federation of Asian Bishops Conference
HKSAR	Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
IUM	Institute of Inter-University of Macau

JLAC	Jesuit Liberal Arts College
KMT	Kuomintang
MEP	Paris Foreign Missions
MI	Order of St. Camillus
MM	Maryknoll Missionaries
OFM	Order of Friars Minor
OP	Order of Preachers
OSB	Order of St. Benedict
PCJP	Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace
PRC	Peoples' Republic of China
RCIA	Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults
ROC	Republic of China
SDS	Society of the Divine Savior
Service Centre	Service Centre of the Bridge Church Committee
Sheng Kung Sisters	Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception
SIT	Spaniards in Taiwan, the collection of documents
SJ	Society of Jesus
SMB	Bethlehem Mission Society
SSC	Missionary Society of St. Columban
SVD	Divine Word Missionaries
The Work Report	The Work Report on Bridge Church Service Centre under the Bridge Church Service Committee
<i>UCANews</i>	Union of Catholic Asian News
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
Vatican II	Second Vatican Council
WWII	Second World War

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