

Conference on Asian Ecumenical Movement (2018/04/12-13) – intro

Louis Ha - Director of the Centre for Catholic Studies, CUHK

The Centre for Catholic Studies in the Chinese University of Hong Kong initiated a research project on the ecumenical movement in Hong Kong two years ago. The colleagues of the Centre have been trying hard to publish the research report before this conference but failed. It will be ready soon. However, it is fortunate that we are able to cooperate with the Tao Fung Shan Christian Centre in organizing this present conference on the Asian Ecumenical Movement. For the introduction of this conference, Dr. Tong has given you her view on the HK ecumenical movement. Let me add a few words from the point of view of a Catholic clergy in HK.

I will start with some observation and generalization, followed by questions.

In Hong Kong, we started a formal ecumenical movement with the annual Week of Prayer for Christian unity in January 1964. It was followed by an ecumenical concert and seminar by students 3 years later. Meetings of biblical scholars to have an unified Chinese translation of names in Bible were organized, although no decisive results were obtained, the scholars of both parties did reach certain mutual understanding and well wishes.

This was the 60s of the last century. It was a spiritual and intellectual awareness of the need of Christian unity or rather a regret of being in a state of separation which caused hostility and unfriendly attacks in the past.

In the 70s, services with an ecumenical nature were offered to seamen in the Mariners' Club(1970), an Ecumenical Social Centre was set up in Tsuen Wan (1973), and cooperation in the airport chapel in 1979. Within this decade, the agreement on the recognition of baptism between certain Churches was reached and Christian intermarriage between certain denominations was accepted.

It seems that the spiritual and intellectual awareness of the 60s has brought forth some concrete consequence in the 70s in form of service and agreement.

In the 80s and 90s, some new elements were added to the cooperation between Christian denominations. They were not the result of Christian unity, but rather Christians of various denominations marching forward with a common cause. Social and political issues of the day were taken up by social activists of Churches on advocating for a hospital in Eastern HK, in protests on the building of the Daya Bay Nuclear Power Plant, and in supporting a democratic government in HK and in China. These actions were not part of an ecumenical movement, yet they impressed the society at large as a witness of Church cooperation and in a certain sense the Christian unity in a concrete way.

Starting from the new millennium, some theological issues on ecumenism were discussed and the habitual ecumenical events were performed. However, a period of stagnation on ecumenical movement in HK seems to be present.

In looking backward, I see important personalities contributing to the cause of ecumenism in HK in various forms. They are the people who made the 4 decades from 60s to 90s so colorful for the ecumenical development in HK. The persons I admire at are Bishop Ronald Hall (何明華主教), Bishop Francis Hsu (徐誠斌主教), Rev. Peter Lee king-hung (李景雄牧師), Rev. Kwok nei-wang (郭乃弘牧師), Rev. Hans Lutz (陸漢思牧師), Rev. Lee Ching-chee (李清詞牧師), Fr. Harold Naylor (魏志立神父), Fr. Stephen Tam (譚坤神父). Certainly I must have missed many other significant persons.

My questions after these observation and generalization are:

What is the aim of Christian Unity? How much uniformity, and how much unity in leadership?

Is ecumenism just a symbolic action? Or it is an occasion for reconciliation?

Where is the Body of Christ?

How much weight should we put on working a social common cause?

In organizing the present conference, it is my wish that some of the questions may be answered in the course of these two days, and that Hong Kong may be inspired by the ecumenical experience in your countries and obtain an impetus to move forward. Thank you.