

## Additional Resources

- Anderson, H. and E. Foley (1997), *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. This book is a wonderful description and critical analysis of the interwoven nature of ritual and narrative. In focusing on moments of birth, life covenant and death, it also provides an excellent introduction into Christian theological insight about baptism, marriage and anointing of the sick. The ways in which it talks about parabolic and mythic narratives and rituals provide crucial insight into our media culture immersion, too.
- Kegan, R. and L. Lahey (2000), *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. For years I've been recommending Robert Kegan's work to people, particularly his books *The Evolving Self* and *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*. Unfortunately, for many people his ideas are drawn in too complex and evocative a way in these books. I still think his books are important! But if you can't find your way through them, or you'd like an easier or more practical place to start, give this book a try. Kegan is a crucial scholar of adult learning and development, and in this small book he and Lisa Lahey walk people through a process of transformative learning.
- McGinn, M. (2002), *Exploring Music and Theology*, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press. Music shapes meaning in profoundly important ways, but seldom do media studies scholars who are considering popular culture and religion understand the liturgical and theological elements of that shaping process. Here's a lovely little book that suggests some ways to examine how music shapes meaning in religious communities.
- Mitchell, J. (1999), *Visually Speaking, Radio and the Renaissance of Preaching*, Edinburgh, T & T Clark. This book is ostensibly 'about' radio preaching in Britain and America, but it is also deeply about conveying deep theological insights in ways that are attuned to the dynamics of media culture.
- Tilley, T. (2000), *Inventing Catholic Tradition*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. This book considers Catholic tradition from the standpoint of practice. Focusing on Catholic intellectual tradition, rather than Catholic theological tradition, Tilley explains why catechesis has to focus on performative practice, has to work with orthopraxis not just orthodoxy.
- Vella, J. (1994), *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. This book is chock full of great stories about learning and teaching in a variety of contexts all over the world. Vella has organized it around a set of 12 principles that are great basic principles for all kinds of learning environments.
- Weinberger, D. (2002), *Small Pieces, Loosely Joined*, New York: Perseus Books. The best book I've found for helping theologians and members of communities of faith begin to understand why the Net has had such an impact. This is a luminously written, accessible introduction that raises profoundly theological questions.

## Chapter 12

## Changes in the Thai Catholic Way of Life

Siriwan Santisakultarm

Stories about the Thai Catholic lifestyle are little known to most people around the world. I believe this is due to the fact that Thai Catholics are a minority in a mostly Buddhist country. In 2000, the population of Thailand was 62 million, but only 272,350 were Catholics (Thai Catholic Calendar, 2001). Furthermore, Thai Catholics have lived quietly and peacefully within the country, not creating any problems of media interest. Thus, the rich heritage of Thai Catholics is an untold story.

In this chapter I wish to share with you my experience and observations as a Thai Catholic. A number of significant shifts have occurred in the Thai cultural context over the past half-century. This chapter concerns the decline in Thai Catholic life as Catholic village communities changed for a number of reasons, including the migration of young people to urban, predominantly Buddhist communities. This trend has been compounded by the influence of materialism, consumerism, individualism and syncretism. My own experience growing up in a strong Catholic village community and migrating to the city offers an illustration of this cultural change.

Yet, I believe there are seeds of new hope emerging for fostering communities of faith through the new initiatives of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand and committed Thai Catholics of the twenty-first century.

## The Community of Thai Catholics Fifty Years Ago

I was born in 1957 and grew up in a small Catholic village. The members of my family were parishioners of the Church of St Peter's Chair (Ban Suek Nang) of the Talingchan district in the Thonburi province in the suburb of Bangkok. The village consisted of about 800 persons, of Thai, Chinese and mixed origins. This Thai Catholic way of life could be found in various provinces of Thailand. In the year 2000 there were about 447 such villages in Thailand (Thai Catholic Calendar, 2001).<sup>1</sup> The center of almost every Catholic village or community was the parish church with a Catholic school.

From my childhood I remember being a member of three different families: the first was that of my mother and father, the second that of my baptismal godparents, and the third that of my confirmation godparents. Each one directly influenced

my religious formation. The relationship and community we shared gave us an intimate sense of being one family. Larger Catholic families of eight or more children experienced more profoundly the sense of family or community, with more godparents engaging themselves in the lives of the natural family.

Godparents had a distinctive role to play in the upbringing of their godchildren. They not only participated in the baptismal ceremony in the church but also were expected to provide assistance to their godchild whenever possible. This was realized not only by giving gifts and money but also by the special care, attention and advice they offered regarding the faith and spirituality formation of their godchildren. People with many godchildren were respected as exemplary Christians and Catholics of profound faith.

### The Communication-rich Environment of the Catholic Village

In our small Catholic village everyone knew every family and its story. This is how it was before the influence of today's modern communications that appear to distract us from the intimate intercommunication and sense of community that bonded us as one family in the past.

Throughout my childhood, storytelling – communicating by word of mouth – offered us not only a sense of our Catholic identity but also a mechanism of moral control that helped ensure our adherence to the teachings of the church. News spread quickly in our village. If you did a good deed, you were surely admired. One might have even been elected or appointed a village leader, president, or member of the parish council committee by the good deeds remembered. One might have been sought after to be godparents, and good married couples were invited to be witnesses at new weddings. Parents or godparents of children who entered religious life or the priesthood were greatly admired and respected by other villagers. Within this communication-rich environment, therefore, parents tried to behave well and teach their children to pray so that their children's and grandchildren's faith might blossom into religious vocations. According to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand (Thai Catholic Calendar, 2001), there are 660 priests, 1429 religious sisters and 122 religious brothers in Thailand. The ratio of Catholics to priests in Thailand is approximately 412 to 1.<sup>2</sup>

Those in the Catholic village who misbehaved or committed such crimes as gambling, adultery, cheating, not attending mass or not participating in communion and confession were resented by other members of the village. Furthermore, people who committed terrible sins – such as divorce, abandoning their family, never confessing or going to communion – were not allowed to be buried in the graveyard of the church. The communication-rich environment created the moral climate of our Catholic villages.

One of my most joyful moments and vivid memories is the sound of the bell every Sunday morning calling the faithful to church. Almost every member of the

family went to church. Our parish had specially reserved seating for mothers with children, thus encouraging parents of newborn children to attend mass. Villagers looked forward to going to church every Sunday because they could dress up, children would play in front of the church, and beautiful pictures, newspapers, and magazines were available for reading and bringing home. The church's bulletin, which was produced by the school, was also available to everybody.

The homily of the priest was exciting for those who attended mass; everyone was curious, wondering who would be found fault with *this* Sunday and who would be instructed and corrected by the priest during the homily. The priest mentioned the names of people who always came late to mass or left early. People were even more interested in listening to the priest's ranting and raving about those who the previous week had misbehaved by fighting, gambling, practicing witchcraft or joining another religion. The image of the family or person criticized would be undermined – they could lose face. They would be challenged by the priest to stop misbehaving and convert themselves to the accepted religious view. Occasionally, people resisted the priest's intonations of moral behavior and did not attend church or participate in community activities.

The involvement of priests in people's private lives created conflict in the villages, but their involvement decreased with changes in the Catholic Church itself. The sacrament of reconciliation and holy communion are examples. Before the 1960s, the church taught that one could not receive communion without also taking the sacrament of reconciliation. As a result, few received communion, some because they did not want to deal with the priest for the sacrament of reconciliation. As transportation became more readily available, some went to churches outside their village. In 1965, the Catholic Church of Thailand began to teach that Catholics could receive communion without undergoing the sacrament of reconciliation with the priest, provided their sin was minor. As a result, the number of people receiving communion rose. Today few approach the sacrament of reconciliation but many receive communion.

Still, in the 1950s and 1960s, the priest was the center of village life. If a person were sick and unable to go to church, the priest would bring the holy communion to that person in the afternoon when he visited the Catholic houses in the village. After the mass everyone had the opportunity to talk; young men and women engaged in conversation and adults would not find fault with them. Parents conversed spontaneously and creatively exchanged the family and village news of the week.

Catholics were dependent on the Catholic community and believed in the priests. The policy of the Catholic Church in Thailand, following faithfully the ways of the missionaries who spread Catholicism since 1567, was that the priest was the head of the community (Chumsripan, 1994, pp. 63–85).<sup>3</sup> In this role, he controlled village land, a tradition that dates back to the sixteenth century when the king gave land to the first missionaries, who organized the first Thai Catholic villages. Priests continued the tradition of buying land and arranging for Catholics to live together,

giving the village priest powerful control over the village.<sup>4</sup> Today, priests do not have such absolute power, as they must answer to an elected pastoral council in each church, and land reform is done by a department of the church. Likewise, in the past the priest controlled the village school, but today the schools are run by the religious congregation. Village Catholics still respect the priest, but only in religious matters; the priest is not part of their daily lives as he was in the past.

These changes were in the context of gradual but profound changes in the means of communication and transportation in my village during the 1960s and early 1970s. In 1967, electricity arrived, replacing lamps and candles. Wealthy families installed television sets in their houses, and their neighbors gathered to watch with them after church on Sundays and sometimes in the evenings. The means of transportation along the canal also gradually changed, as engine boats replaced paddle boats. Little by little, the governor of Bangkok built a road around the village. And in 1974, the first telephone line came to the village, although only one or two families could afford to connect the line to their houses.

### **Living Together: The Foundation of Love and Sharing**

As a child, I studied the catechism every morning at school. The Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Bangkok taught us the basic truths of the Catholic faith, preparing us for the sacraments and introducing us to sacred music and prayers. A variety of rich liturgical year activities, such as Christmas, Corpus Christi and Easter, were brought to life through biblical dramas, dance and choral presentations. Everyone in the village participated in the planning and execution of these celebrations. Men built the stage and scenes for our shows, women prepared special dishes to contribute to the community meal and the leader of the village was ever present to supervise the entire process. By sharing and working together during these celebrations, our community became stronger and more unified in our faith.

One particular parish celebration was especially meaningful to me. Each year on the anniversary of our parish's patron saint, St. Peter's Chair, families would decorate their boats with flowers and banners and join a 'floating procession' around the village. We incorporated much festivity, pageantry and joyfulness in this celebration. In one sense this was a great demonstration of how we communicated, passed on and preserved our rich Catholic heritage.

Often in nearby Buddhist villages there were also grand celebrations around their religious holidays and commemorative religious events. There were fascinating entertainment shows that would draw the attention of a few Catholics who joined in the events. The elders of the village said that because the priest did not allow Catholics to join in the Buddhist activities, the Catholic numbers were always low.

There were times following evening prayer and before children retired that mothers would re-tell animating stories about the school and church in the village. They could capture the imagination of the children by poetically describing how the

men from the village traveled to the northern forests to cut wood and carry it down south along the Chao Praya River. One of the elderly men, the head of carpentry in the village, and his assistant helped build the local church. The women helped by preparing food for the workers.

Another important activity that helped ground our Catholic identity and enrich our bonds of community was the tradition of praying for the dead for seven consecutive nights following a person's death. All of the villagers would come to the home of the deceased after their daily work to pray. There was no discrimination in these times of sorrow. Food was served after our prayer, and, as it always did, food played an important role in holding our community together. Occasionally more than one person died within the same period of time and the community would come together daily for two or three weeks to pray and eat.

I recall one more religious event that seemed to bond our faith community together. There was a special statue of our Blessed Virgin that the parish priest would bring around the village in procession. The statue would be enthroned in a different house each night during a particular period of time. Every member of the family would pray together when the statue was present in their home.

These are a few examples of how our Catholic faith helped bring our village together better than any other social institution could. Those who shared the same beliefs found a variety of religious reasons to come together and celebrate their common bond. This bond became a source of inspiration for ongoing education and creative religious expression within our culture. Here was fertile ground for molding our moral character and sending the deep roots of our Catholic heritage into every fiber of our being.

Today, many of these practices have changed, and although the Catholic villages still exist, the community spirit in them is very different. Today, when someone dies, the body might be taken to a well-known church more convenient to mourners who do not live in the village. The practice of bringing the icon of the Virgin into the home for evening prayers is now rare. Television has contributed to the decline in this ritual, as people prefer to watch favorite evening programs. In addition, villagers who work outside the village often return home too late for the prayers.

### **The Three Main Means of Religious Media in the Community**

I hope to have conveyed something of the importance of relationships in the Thai Catholic communities fifty years ago. In terms of communication, I believe there were three major ways in which people in our villages communicated faith.

The first was human or personal media. Our fathers, mothers, relatives, neighbors, priests, sisters and teachers were the key communicators. This type of communication was very powerful and its influence was felt in many of the interactions we had with one another in the community. The communication-rich environment was a control mechanism of the community of religious faith.

Knowledge of the faith and religious experience was instilled in us through the human and personal media and stayed with us throughout our lives.

The second way of communicating faith was through religious activities that were embedded in our lives. We might refer to these as 'traditional media. In our Catholic community, these religious activities were the ceremonies we celebrated as a community that nurtured faith within ourselves and bonded the community into a unified and solid community of faith.

The third way was through materials produced by the Catholic Social Communications of Thailand, now known as UCIP (l'Union catholique internationale de la presse, or the Commission for Mass Media). At first, the organization produced only printed material such as newspapers, magazines, leaflets, posters and calendars. In 1968, the work was extended to electronic media, the video and audio sector, and is now called SIGNIS Thailand (The World Catholic Association for Communication). This association began with the production of cassettes, prayers and Church songs. These products could not compete with commercial media, with some exceptions. For example, the Catholic Office of Communication took movies such as *Ben Hur* and *The Ten Commandments* to Catholic villages, where they were popular with both Catholics and Buddhists. The practice largely ended in 1978 with the arrival of modern transportation to take people to the city and its new movie theaters. In 1977, the organization began to produce radio and television programs.

### Life Outside the Catholic Community

The rich sense of community that we once experienced began to fade when we left the village. Young people left every day to attend the university; as I did in 1974 when I enrolled at Thammasart University in the heart of Bangkok. As we looked toward the future, we had to travel to find good positions with high salaries in the city, in hopes of securing comfort and security for ourselves. Fifty years ago, Thais would attend school for only four to seven years before they turned to farming. Instead of leaving after elementary school to work in the field, I traveled from my village to high school each day, then to the university, where I got a master's degree. My family was the first in the village to have someone attend a university. When I went to work at a government-owned television station, the largest communication organization in Thailand, everyone in my village talked about it. When I became a television news reporter, people talked about it even more. Little by little after that, young people in my village made their way into higher education.

Young educated Catholics left the villages because there was little work, except in the schools, for educated people. When they moved to the city, they were surrounded by Buddhist society. At first, many found it difficult to preserve their Catholic identity. This was due to the fact that Catholic instructions had forbidden them to join other religious activities. In contrast, religious ceremonies were integrated into the daily working lives of Buddhists, as new building projects,

company anniversaries and receptions for guests were all celebrated. Catholic employees who attended found it difficult because church law at the time forbade participation. Some Catholics who were promoted to high positions in companies were careful not to reveal that they were Catholic.

### The Powerful Means of Communication no Longer Exist

As time passed, many of us intermarried and started families with people of other religious faiths. Thus, we lived further away from the fundamental Catholic context, which originally nurtured our profound experience and identity as Catholics. A recent survey found that 66 to 75 percent of Catholic families in Bangkok are families with only one Catholic parent (Muangrat, 1998, p. 105). That number has increased in the past two decades, from 368 Catholics married to non-Catholics in the Bangkok diocese in 1985, to 495 in 2002 (Saengtham College Thailand, 2001).

Communication research states that communication between persons, which is firmly grounded from the beginning, has a definite effect on attitudes, faith and opinions. The integrated and foundational communications in the Catholic society 40 to 50 years ago had a profound impact on how fervently Catholics lived their faith later in lives. The research of Nipa Muangrat (1998) confirms that Thai Catholics who receive religious messages early in life have a higher level of Catholic knowledge, faith and engagement in fervent religious activities.

Both families and individuals in Bangkok are challenged by the changing profile of neighborhoods and the lack of religious conversation and experience on a regular basis. Today we seldom have Catholic neighbors. We no longer hear the sound of the church bells on Sunday morning inviting us to church. Modernization brought about an increase in families in which one parent is Catholic and the other is of another religious tradition. Modern families have no time to care for and educate their children in the traditional ways. The more critical factor facing them today is that they are not prepared to impart knowledge and communicate faith and religion within the family. Thus, our once fertile ground has lost the means for nurturing strong communities of faith in the postmodern world. Yet, we discover that some families do not always go to church. Sunday worship or the liturgical life of the church seems to have lost meaning for some. People seem to accept the rituals of religious practice as a routine without participating in them as a means of nurturing faith and strengthening the community of faith, as was the goal in Catholic Thai villages of years gone by. Furthermore, we find that Catholics in the city have many different Catholic parishes to choose from, and as a result, people no longer have a close bond with any particular parish. People escape quickly after the mass. They return home and do not linger to chat and share news of the faith community because they hardly even know who their co-worshippers are. The powerful moral chastisement that once at least animated conversation among the villagers no longer

exists. People no longer live on church land and under the ever-present gaze of the parish priest; the power of the priest as a means of human media (communication) has been lost. Thus, the interest and curiosity of a bonded faith community has weakened in the twenty-first century.

### **Self-adjustment to Survive in Society**

As Catholics who emerged from a strong traditional Catholic community, we are discovering that the new cultural context of the twenty-first century demands that we reevaluate the world in which we live in the light of gospel values. However, the new Asian context offers us profound challenges influenced by the convergence of new social economic factors and new political arenas and environments.

Thailand's economy declined dramatically in the mid to late 1990s. As a result, Thailand's government borrowed money from foreign countries, which intensified the insecurity problems in the political arena and led to cheating, corruption and bribery. Social problems related to drugs, unemployment and injustices further stimulated the expanding crises we face. Competition has justified an attitude of selfishness and possessiveness to the detriment of community. The movement toward globalization has only intensified a growing sense of insecurity and loss of identity that amplifies our problems.

Each of these factors, I believe, has a direct negative influence on faith and religious behavior. The fertile ground from which we originally emerged is being washed away by individualism and capitalism. Muangrat's study (1998) of the relationship of modernization to Catholic beliefs, faith and religious practice in Bangkok indicated that Thai Catholics in Bangkok are 'medium' in modernization and religious beliefs. This contrasts with an earlier study by Joseph A. Kahl (1968), who argued that modernized people would be more rational in religious belief, and the level of belief would decrease. However, Muangrat's research also indicated that religious practice, such as family prayer, is very low. The only religious practice then left to them is going to church on special religious holidays such as Christmas, Ash Wednesday and Easter. Currently in Bangkok only 61 percent of Catholics go to church every Sunday (Muangrat, 1998, p. 108).

These questions and concerns continue to haunt us. Thus, as Thai Catholics we are faced with finding new ways to handle with care and preserve the faith in the modern society of Bangkok. Being able to influence the expanding new negative realities and attitudes toward faith and religion is the challenge that faces us. What are we to do? How can we do it? My own answer was to work in communications with the Catholic Church in Asia. As president of SIGNIS Asia, I hope to encourage the growth of faith in modern urban contexts in Thailand and elsewhere in Asia through the media.

### **Does Catholic Communication Help Delayed Faith?**

Somprasong (1994, p. 84) surveyed the efficiency of using the media of the Catholic Social Communications of Thailand (now the Commission for Mass Media) for communicating faith and news about the church. Somprasong stated that the activities of the Catholic media office brought about movement of news and information, knowledge and understanding about the church. However, questions persist: is the communication inspirational? Does it bring faith into the lives of its hearers and/or viewers? Furthermore, Thai Catholics receive information from many parts of the world, distracting their attention from church initiatives. Often the church cannot compete.

The role of the Catholic media in the past 20 to 30 years is a remarkable story. When the Catholic media office established its radio and television sector, the audiences were Catholic but later expanded to other religious groups as well. Radio and television catered to all. The Catholic Church organized a religious event for the Bangkok bicentennial celebration in 1982 and bought airtime from the government television station, Channel 9, and broadcast live throughout the country. At the same time, the assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops met for the first time in Bangkok, with bishops from other countries in attendance, including 100 from elsewhere in Asia. The live broadcast had a large audience, as the government-owned station went to virtually every house in Thailand. For the first time, the Catholic Church of Thailand paid for a wide broadcast of inner activities of the church. In the past, the church had live broadcasts of such things as a special mass on the King or Queen's birthday, but this conference had nothing to do with non-Catholics. Thus it was considered a major event.

After that, the Catholic leader Bishop Michael Kitbunchu was appointed cardinal in a ceremony covered live from Rome and downlinked locally. At that time the Thai government prohibited all live television broadcasts in order to conserve energy. But Catholic Social Communications of Thailand obtained permission from General Prem Tinnasulanon, then the Prime Minister. The live broadcast event became big news in Thailand.

As a result of this major television advance, a small group of Thai Buddhists attacked Christian religions and Christians in an official statement. The event moved the Catholic media to review its use of television and to conclude that Catholic news should emphasize love, service and sharing more than religious ceremonies that might bring about division in society.

### **A New Approach to Thai Society**

While Catholic villages declined in the ways I have described, Catholic education became more popular in Thai society. As the value of education grew with modernization, the reputation of Catholic schools became widespread. They had

long been considered elite schools, and in fact the first Catholic school, established in 1665, was intended for male members of the royal family as well as for Catholics. In Bangkok, the Catholic education system is comprehensive, with educational opportunities available from pre-school through universities. Modern Catholic families depend upon this system. As Bangkok's population continues to grow, with well over 12 million people in the year 2000, there are approximately 79,015 Catholics who state they plan to pass on their Catholic values and traditions to the next generation in this way (Muangrat, 1998, p. 110).

Catholic educational institutions also try to strengthen values and traditions. The Jesuits first arrived in Thailand in 1954. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand entrusted the care of university students to the Jesuits and in 1976 the Catholic Youth Council was established to look after Catholic youth in the education system and after they leave school. In each university, Catholic students are organized into an association, the Federation of Thai Catholic University Students. A priest chaplain visits the students, organizes prayers, masses and recollections, seminars, workshops on relevant topics and the like. During the summer vacation, Catholic students organize joint activities for community outreach programs in which students construct schools or teach. These projects take place in non-Catholic communities and in communities of hill tribe minorities as well among Catholics.

Another significant approach to Thai society is the Thai Catholic Church's role in refugee relief. In the 1970s and 1980s when people in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos suffered from a cruel and devastating war, large numbers of refugees entered Thai territory to escape war, hunger, hatred, sickness and persecution. In 1978, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand established The Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees (COERR) to provide emergency relief for victims of natural disasters, render assistance to refugees and displaced persons, and to help Thai nationals and their communities affected by forced migration into Thailand. COERR's activities were and are based on a humanitarian ethos and the principle of Christian charity and solidarity regardless of benefits, color, creed, sex, or political beliefs. Hundreds of volunteers from about thirty countries came to work with COERR. The organization also worked with the United Nations, Thai authorities and about one hundred NGOs and foundations concerned with refugees.

There are other aspects of the Thai Church that should be considered in this process of change. For example, there is a renewed spirit of evangelizing the hill tribe people or 'Thai People of the Mountains', as the King calls them. In addition, there are advances in the road map towards inculturation in the sense that all bishops are Thai, and the liturgy and music is Thai. The Catholic Church today has a major seminary in Thailand for the training candidates to the priesthood, while before we sent them abroad. In civil society, Catholics are more active, along with Buddhists, Muslims and other Christians, in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) than in the past. It has been a long journey for Thailand, from a military dictatorship surrounded by Communist countries to a democratically elected government with ASEAN partnership.

With these changes have come other social problems, such as the AIDS epidemic, increased drug use, gambling and commercial sex. The Catholic Church is doing something about these problems within its own limited resources of personnel and means. The church sponsors AIDS shelters and drug rehabilitation centers in Thailand, and several Catholic NGOs are working against the abuse of women and children. So to be 'Thai Catholic' today is to be 'more Thai' and 'more civic' minded, more inserted into the social, political, and economic life of Thailand than in the 1950s and 1960s, when being a good Thai Catholic meant going to church, practicing religion and being a good person. It also meant obeying the priest, sharing life among other Catholics, marrying a Catholic and not taking part in Buddhist ceremonies. Today, to be a good Catholic in Thailand means being concerned about society and not discriminating between Catholics and other religious groups. The idea is to help one other to have a better life without boundaries and to live together in unity.

### Thai Catholics are United with Thai Society

The social activities mentioned above are channels for Catholics to lead a good Catholic life and witness to their faith without separating themselves from the local culture. While the strong traditional means of human communication mentioned before might not exist, we are finding that social participation in these Catholic groups helps Catholics be less isolated from society, as they work with Buddhist society and Buddhism, the national religion and base of our Thai culture.

Since the Catholic lifestyle of Thai people has shifted as a result of the new cultural context within which we live, we need to find new ways of being and becoming dedicated Catholics. We can begin by responding to the needs of people by working for peace and manifesting this peace through our own approach to communication in our everyday lives. We can introduce meaningful content that stimulates the religious imagination of our viewers and hearers. We can prepare women and men to become effective leaders witnessing to the faith in their ordinary lives.

### Conclusion

Catholics in Thai culture have experienced radical shifts in the cultivation of their faith. As we have seen, the past offers a solid ground of formation that penetrated the environments of our lives. We could not but think 'being and living' Catholic. Rapid cultural change has influenced a movement away from the traditional media for faith communication. As we have seen, this resulted in weakening the fundamental grounding in faith, creating a diaspora of Catholics in our urban communities and distracting Catholics from their faith commitment. The ultimate impact is the



lessening of one's Catholic identity and understanding one's role as a Catholic in a Buddhist culture.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand in collaboration with Thai Catholics has energetically accepted the challenge to find a practical solution to our dilemma. The formation of new Catholic lay associations of groups of all interests, ages and professions, to bond together to be a bridge of unity and healing within the church and our Thai culture for working toward justice and peace is one possible solution. Thus, we are finding that human media continue to be the fundamental means for communicating and nurturing strong communities of faith in shifting times.

### Notes

- 1 There are no records of how many Thai Catholic villages existed in the 1950s, but it is likely that this number has not changed. The villages today are different because their Catholic identity and spirit of unity are not as strong, a point I will discuss later in the chapter.
- 2 There are no comparable figures for the 1950s.
- 3 For the most part, missionaries came from France, but some also came from Portugal and Italy.
- 4 One had to be baptized a Catholic to live on this land. Originally only Catholics married to Catholics had the right to live on the Church's land, but later an exception was made for those who married non-Catholics with the permission of the Bishop. Thai Catholic families did not own the land, but had a right to live on the land by virtue of their commitment to the faith.

### References

- Chumsripan, S. (1994), 'The history of the Catholic Church of Thailand', in *Twenty-five Years of Thai Vatican*; Bangkok: Assumption Printing Press.
- Kahl, J. A. (1968), *The Measurement of Modernism*, Austin, TX and London: The University of Texas Press.
- Muangrat, N. (1998), 'The relationship of communication behavior, modernization and the people's beliefs, faith, religious practice among Catholics', Bangkok: Department of Public Relations, Chulalongkorn University.
- Saengtham College Thailand (2001), 'The research of marriage between different religions', Nakhonprathom Province, Thailand: Saengtham Printing.
- Somprasong, C. (1994), 'Media role and strategy for evangelism: Mass media usage for evangelism distribution by Catholic Social Communications Center of Thailand, 1966-1993', Bangkok: Department of Mass Communication, Chulalongkorn University.
- Thai Catholic Calendar (2001), Thai Catholic Office of Communication, Bangkok: Assumption Printing Press.

### Additional Resources

- Adiwatanasit, C. and P. Kanchavamonai (1979), 'Can Buddhism survive modernization?' Bangkok: Department of Social Science, Kasetsart University.
- Saint John's University, Bangkok, Thailand, 'History of The Catholic Churches in Thailand', [http://www.stjohn.ac.th/Department/info/ch\\_history.html](http://www.stjohn.ac.th/Department/info/ch_history.html). Text in English.
- UCIP World Congress (2004), 'Religion in Thailand: Buddhism Plays a Profound Role in People's Reactions to Events', <http://www.ucip.ch/cong/ath#2>, Bangkok, Thailand. Background for World Congress 2004 in Bangkok. Text in German, English, Spanish and French.

### Catholic Media in Thailand

- Catholic Internet network in Thailand, <http://lox2.loxinfo.co.th/~thcatcom>. In English and Thai.
- Information and Technology Section of The Archdiocese of Bangkok, in Thai: <http://www.catholic.or.th>.
- ISSARA, Catholic Magazine online, in Thai: <http://www.issara.com>.
- UDOMSARN, Catholic Weekly Newspaper and Monthly Magazine, in Thai: <http://www.udomsarn.com>.

### Catholic Productions in Context of Thai society

(For all items, contact Catholic Social Communications of Thailand by email: [thcatcom@loxinfo.co.th](mailto:thcatcom@loxinfo.co.th) or <http://www.udomsarn.com>)

- Choice for a Better Life*, video, 23 minutes. Presents facts on the drug situation in Thailand based on data from 1997. A co-production of many Catholic Commissions in Thai Society. VHS-PAL in Thai and English.
- The Cry of My Appeal*, video, 25 minutes. Filmed and produced in Thailand, the first to trace child prostitution back to its root causes and masked myths. Based on data from 1993. VHS-PAL in Thai, English and Spanish.
- His Foot Speaks ... in Painting*, video, 21 minutes. The life story of Lonson Loh-Come, a young man born with no arms, and a self-taught artist. A production for the Society in the economic crisis in Asia, 1998. VHS and VCD-PAL, in Thai and English.
- The Moment of Life*, video, 21 minutes. Produced as a video campaign for a social collaboration. Produced in 2002. VHS and VCD-PAL, in Thai.