

Chapter 4

Fieldwork

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the situation of Catholic believers as encountered in the urban context of Taipei City, where very often only one member of a family is Catholic, and where the relationship between Taiwanese people and the Catholic Church cannot be considered in a univocal way, but rather as a kind of dialog. A dialogue in which the two symbolic systems reciprocally use their own cultural view of religion – as the structural division between gods, ancestors, and ghosts and the biblical definition of idols – in order to understand each other.

4.1 Fieldwork Place

I carried out my fieldwork in the older district of Taipei, the Wanhua district (萬華), Méng-chià in Taiwanese. Taipei is the capital of the government in Taiwan and the island's largest city, located on the western bank of the Danshui River at the northern end of Taiwan Island. Taipei, which means “northern terrace” in Chinese, is the political, economic, cultural, and transport center of Taiwan. The city owes its prominence and growth to its designation as an administrative capital in 1894, a role that was enlarged in 1949 when the Kuomintang lost the Chinese civil war on mainland against the Communists and retreated to the island of Taiwan¹.

The spot where my fieldwork took place was the Resurrection church, a little parish established by the CICM missionary priests. The international religious missionary Institute, C.I.C.M. (*Congregatio Immaculati Cordis Mariae*, Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, *shengmushengxin-*

1. The Kuomintang (KMT), also referred to as the Guomindang, the Nationalist Party of China or the Chinese Nationalist Party, is a major political party in the Republic of China, initially on the Chinese mainland and then in Taiwan since 1949. It was the sole party in China during the Republican Era from 1928 to 1949, when most of the Chinese mainland was under its control. The party retreated from the mainland to Taiwan on 7 December 1949, following its defeat in the Chinese Civil War.

hui 聖母聖心會 in Chinese), is an international group of over 1,000 religious men dedicated totally and exclusively to the foreign missions of the Catholic Church. The Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM) was founded in the year 1862 by Rev. Theophile Verbist (1823 – 1868), a Belgian diocesan priest. He was appointed as National Director of the Work of the Holy Childhood in 1860, and during this time he showed great dedication, with special concern for missionary work among Chinese people².

Between 1949 and 1954, 250 CICM missionaries were expelled from Mainland China. Two of them made a visit of exploration to Taiwan in order to prepare for a new mission on the island. After this first approach, four CICM missionaries left Genoa by ship in December 1954 and arrived in Jilong (基隆) in January 1955. Archbishop J. Kuo (郭若石) assigned to them the Wanhua District of Taipei. They started to study Taiwanese right away and opened the first little church on Xiyuan Road which was soon followed by two other small churches: Dapu Street and Dongyuan Street. Beyond these early initiatives, they established the parishes of Wanda Road (Holy Rosary Parish), St. Theresa Parish, Resurrection Parish (Dali Street), and Christ the Savior Parish (Liuzhou Street)³. In 1958 bishop A. Van Buggenhout started the first Catholic primary school in Taiwan: Guangren primary school (光仁國小), situated on Wanda road (萬大路) in the Wanhua district, next to the Holy Rosary Church. In 1965 CICM started Guangren Middle School in Banqiao (板橋). In that period many Catholic schools were built in Taiwan to give Catholic instruction to the children of the faithful. Most educators or teachers were priests or nuns, and as a believer told me, at that time, after the war the economic situation of many families was uncertain, and many parents felt that society was unsafe. In this situation, many of them considered Catholic kindergartens and schools to be safe places to leave their children while they were out to work⁴.

In the 1970s, CICM initiated several centers for special education. First in Guangren Primary and Secondary School, and later in St. Theresa Parish. In the St. Theresa Parish, a kindergarten was opened next to the church, and an activities center for old people was opened in 2006. In 1972 CICM signed an agreement with the Taipei Archdiocese stating that most of its work and all the parishes would be transferred to the local Church. In 1988 CICM agreed with the Archdiocese to create the Guangren Foundation: an arrangement by which all the schools, centers of special education, and kindergartens were transferred to the Taipei Archdiocese.

It is important to note that the CICM missionaries worked particularly for the welfare of poor people. In line with this, CICM started the *Jingren* (敬人) Labor Center which had its center in the Resurrection Parish. This

2. D. Verhelst and Nestor Pycke, *C.I.C.M. Missionaries, Past and Present, 1862-1987: History of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Scheut/Missionhurst)* (Leuven University Press, 1995).

3. Verbiest, *Special Issue on the Catholic Church in Taiwan: 1626-1965*.

4. Verbiest.

was a Catholic Church-based NGO working for the promotion of workers' involvement in labor health and safety issues. The center provided technical, material, and moral support to the labor unions and other workers' communities, in order to increase the health and safety awareness of the workers and improve existing working conditions. Because of financial problems, the center was closed on January 2006. The original functions of the Jingren center were transferred to the Taiwan Labor Information & Education Association (TLIEA) in Muzha (木柵), another district of Taipei. At the time of my research, no parishioners were involved in this kind of activity, two individuals – both non-Catholics – worked there. The situation Catholic centers like the Jingren center was not an isolated case. As many priests said to me, after the Second World War it was relatively easy to build schools or hospitals, partially because of the good relationship between the bishops (who came from Mainland China) and the Nationalist government. But in the 80s, when the Church started to care about foreigners and indigenous workers' rights while opposing the choices of government on the questions of abortion and the use of condoms, the relationships between the Catholic Church and the Taiwanese government gradually became colder. On the other hand, the economic development of the island made Taiwan famous in the world because of computer technologies. In fact, many priests said that European and American organizations did not consider Taiwan to be a developing country any longer. Therefore, the help missionaries used to receive from these organizations was now allocated to other countries.

Furthermore, the development of education and the quality of the schools and universities created a problem for the Catholic traditional education system. What I mean is that the priests and nuns were the teachers in their schools, but with the development of educational norms by the Taiwanese government, secular requirements of qualification and specialization for teachers cut off many priests and nuns from this type of apostolic work. As a priest told me, the problem now is that in most Catholic schools, teachers are not Catholics; therefore, it is very hard to do evangelization work inside these schools. The Resurrection church is situated on Dali Street, not far from the Huaxi (華西) night market (Fig. 1). The first church was built in 1957 and was completed by October of the same year. According to the parishioners and the priest who showed me some pictures, the first church was just a little house made of wood, just like all of the houses on Dali Street at that time. On December 15th of the same year, the first Mass was celebrated. The present church was built between 1977 and 1979, a five-floor building belonging entirely to the C.I.C.M congregation. On December 16th, 1979 the first Mass was celebrated inside the new church. I participated in the Resurrection church activities, Mass, pilgrimages, and other activities of the Parish in the period between my arrival in Taiwan in February 2003, and July 2007, when I moved out from my house in Wanhua district to a new home in Taipei County. And during this time, for various reasons, the Parish changed priests three times.

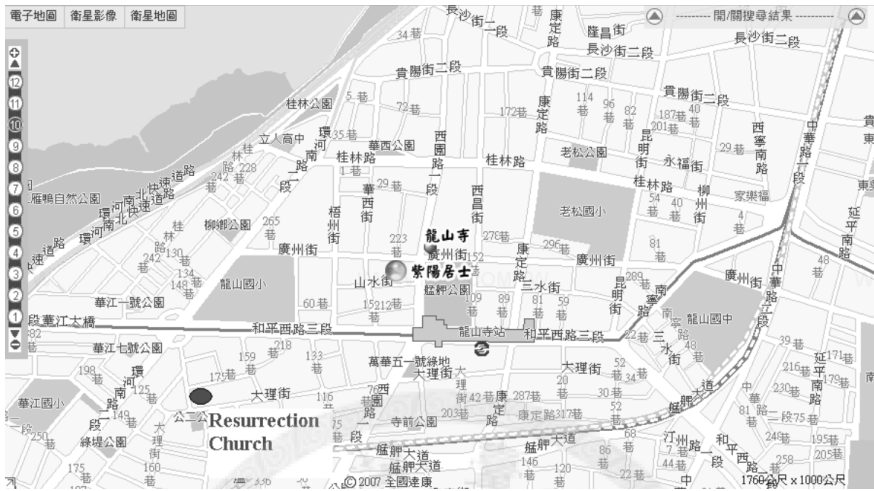


Figure 1: Location of the Resurrection Church

When I started my fieldwork, there were no priests specifically sent to take care of the Resurrection parish, but St. Teresa's priest – a bigger Parish in the neighborhood – was assigned to celebrate the Sunday Mass at the Resurrection church. Toward the end of my fieldwork, in March 2006, Father Martin, a C.I.C.M. Belgian priest who arrived in Taiwan almost thirty-five years before, was sent to take care of the Parish. Soon after Father Martin was nominated as parish priest of the church of Saint Theresa. In the Resurrection church, the Mass was celebrated only on Sunday mornings, while during weekdays there was no Mass because believers were used to going to the St. Theresa Parish which was only ten minutes on foot from the Resurrection Parish. According to the parish documents that Father Martin showed me, there were almost one hundred parishioners at the time of my research in the Resurrection church. However, during my fieldwork time, an average of thirty people came every Sunday to attend the Sunday Mass. Every Sunday most parishioners who attended the Mass were almost always the same, but sometimes new believers were coming in order to attend the liturgy, so during my year of fieldwork, I had met more than sixty people.

4.1.1 Who are the Faithful?

The definition of what is meant by the word “faithful” is another interesting topic. I once took part in a meeting for young Catholics. A friend of mine introduced himself in these words to a bishop who was present at that event: “Hello I am Chen Yizhang, I am not one of the faithful.” (*wo bushi jiao-you*

我不是教友). The bishop, with the intention to let the young people relax replied: “No problem because the friend of a faithful is already a faithful” (*meiwenti, jiao-you de peng-you yi-jing shi jiao-you* 沒問題,教友的朋友已經是教友). By saying so, he was playing with the meaning of the Chinese word *you* (友), which can be used in relation with the term *jiao* (教), with the meaning of faithful, church member *jiao-you* (教友), or in relation to the term *peng* (朋), with the meaning of friend *peng-you* (朋友). At this point, a pedantic Religious Brother who was taking part in the conversation started to complain about the sentence said by the bishop and argued that, according to him, if the friend of a faithful person could be considered to be a faithful, the term faithful (*jiao-you* 教友) would lose its meaning. His argument was that, if things were such, people could be considered faithful (*jiao-you* 教友) without having received the Baptism.

The opposing views between these two religious persons is significant and most probably linked with the history of the Catholic Church in China described in the previous chapter. On the one hand, the bishop tried to be friendly and showed an open attitude toward youth and non-Catholic people, without stressing the rules or the importance of the sacraments. On the other hand, the Religious Brother stands in a completely different position: it is vital to preserve the identity of the Roman Catholic Church in the complex contact and dialogue with non-Catholics.

After this experience, I met another one of the faithful, a 40 years old man, who told me that when he received the Baptism, he first attended catechism classes in a parish where the priest told him that only after one year (at least) of catechism he could be baptized. This faithful person then went to another parish where the priest immediately baptized him. In fact, different ways and approaches by priests can be found in different parishes, which show that different and sometimes contradictory positions can coexist within the Catholic world, or using Todorov’s expression⁵, different levels of relationship with “the other” are implemented by the Catholic hierarchy in order to carry out their evangelization process. There is no uniform way to manage these relationships with “the other”, this fact is linked with the complex and diverse process that both makes and informs the local expression of the Universal Church⁶.

The above-mentioned situation can be found within the Resurrection church. In fact, through the investigation of the believers’ experiences and memories, it is possible to learn that the approaches used by the different priests who worked there as parish priest sometimes differed significantly. For instance, when the church was built the priest invited children and adults to participate in catechism class, giving flour and milk powder, and the believers were baptized without a deep knowledge of the Catholic sacraments, rules, etc. The priests who followed started to do work of a different nature; namely, to train the faithful to become catechists and work actively

5. Todorov, *The conquest of America*.

6. *Catholicus*, from the Greek, means “universal”.

within the scope of the Church activities. During the four years of my participation in these activities, I was able to note differences between the behavior and the habitual practices and techniques of the priests who took care of the parish at this time.

Some priests stressed the importance of personal visits to the faithful at home; some others stressed the participation of the faithful in Church activities, etc. I based my research upon considering people who were baptized – according to the parish registries – as believers. Most of the Resurrection church’s faithful were baptized between the end of the Second World War and the 1960s, when - thanks to the significant material from the American charity Caritas, administered by the Catholic Church – many Taiwanese people were converted.

4.1.2 Experiences of Conversion

The examples of conversion which will follow have been collected during my fieldwork. They will help to bring into focus the above-mentioned concepts.

Miss Wu is the fifth of six brothers and sisters, the first is a male. She was born in Lugan, in central Taiwan. During her childhood, in the years following the war, her family was destitute, they were reduced to eating the flour and milk powder offered by the priest (*wo shi chi shen-fu de mian-fen, he shen-fu de niunai-fen zhangda* 我是吃神父的麵粉和牛奶粉長大). And that time clothes were provided by the American Caritas. The priest naturally hoped that someone from her family would be baptized, but her mother was afraid that a Catholic woman could not easily find a husband and get married, so she convinced her husband to receive Baptism. However, after he was baptized, her father never went to Church. When she studied at university, she felt freer. She frequented the courses of a Catholic University in Taizhong. However, she attended some meetings with Protestant Christians that, according to her, do their apostolic work better than Catholics. But their approach was too rapid for her: after two meetings they asked her to be baptized, but she didn’t want to because she felt forced, and then refused. The third time when people asked: “Who wants to become a Christian? Who wants to receive Baptism?” she didn’t answer. Shortly after, she stopped going to these meetings.

After her graduation, she moved to Taipei for work. In that period, she reestablished contact with some Catholics. At that time, she was deeply touched by the visit of Mother Teresa of Calcutta in Taiwan. She felt attracted by the charisma of Mother Theresa and she understood that Mother Teresa’s spiritual and moral strength came from her faith. Miss Wu felt deeply touched by this (*hen gandong* 很感動). After this, she started to attend classes in catechism, and although she did not know much yet about the Catholic faith, she decided to receive Baptism. Shortly after she had the opportunity to go to France for six months with a Catholic association. When she returned to Taipei, she started to take courses in theology, to

better understand her own new faith. The point that she stressed continuously during our conversation was that she felt that within the Catholic Church she had found her family, a global — thanks to her experience in France — and multicultural family.

Miss Wu was persuaded that even if she was baptized, she still respected her parent (*wo hai zunjing wo fumu* 我還尊敬我父母), because when she was baptized her father had already passed away and her mother agreed with her because Miss Wu's mother knew that Catholics were good people who helped them when they were in need and poor. Now, during every Spring Festival and Mid-Autumn Festival, she still returns to her hometown in Lugan, where she uses incense sticks to pray for her parents, but she doesn't pray for the gods in the shrine of the ancestors, her relatives know it and they don't force her to do this.

As I pointed out before, except for two families who are traditionally Catholic — which means they were converted before the Second World War by the Spaniard Dominican Fathers — other families or persons were converted after the war and, as the conversion of Miss Wu's father, these conversions are indisputably connected to the Caritas charity help. These causes have played a role in the conversion of the most faithful of the Resurrection Parrish. Some of them were “converted” by their parents because in this way it was easier to obtain material help as well as scholarly instruction. Mister Zhang told me that his mother brought him to the Church because she was afraid for his future. The family was very poor and letting the child become a Catholic allowed him to get good education at school.

When I asked Miss Lin if there were other members of her family who were Catholics, she told me that only she was baptized. And when I asked her why she received Baptism, she told me that it was because her mother had wished it, but that she did not know the reasons which caused her mother to take this kind of decision.

Miss Li was baptized with her sisters and parents in order to receive Caritas' help and go to the Catholic school for free. She told me an interesting fact that can help with understanding how the cultural dialogue between two cultures plays in many different ways and on different levels. She told me that the whole family was baptized with the exception of her elder brother, who now takes care of the ancestors' tablets. On one level, the parents of Miss Li decided to baptize the whole family because of the particular needs of that time. At the same time, they have consciously chosen not to baptize their first child, who according to tradition must look after the tablets of the ancestors, preventing them from becoming hungry ghosts that will wander aimlessly for all eternity.

Thus, especially in the 1960s, the benefit from schools and hospitals was a good motivation for many Taiwanese people to embrace the Catholic religion. But nowadays circumstances are different. The Taiwanese Catholic Church is a big and complex structure, a body that contains many different experiences. It can happen that people embrace the new faith because of

material needs or interest as shown by the above experiences; many young people who were coming every Sunday to the Holy Mass, for example, were attracted by the guitar lessons that a faithful organized after the Mass.

Nevertheless, according to the interviews that I made with some faithful, there is a significant number of other reasons behind the decision to convert to Christianity: a woman started to take classes in catechism because she dreamed of a Western man with long hair and a beard, and shortly after she discovered that the man who appeared to her in dreams was Jesus. Another woman told me that she was seriously sick when she dreamed of a woman who told her that she was the Blessed Virgin Mary and that if she would be baptized, she would recover from her sickness. She agreed, but her father did not let her receive the Baptism. However, she fell ill again, and at this point, her father agreed to let her be baptized.

It seems to me that the experiences of conversion have different origins than in the past: they are motivated by other kinds of needs, not material anymore, but psychological and social. As a priest told me, in Taipei people live under constant and significant pressure mainly caused by work, academic expectations, family relationships, and so on. Looking for a way out, people are often touched by someone, say a work colleague, a neighbor, or a classmate who is Catholic, and so they initiate contact with the Church. Most of the people that I interviewed told me that they were deeply touched by the fact that most of the Catholics that they met in their life were good people (*Wo ganjue dao tianzhujiao tu shi haoren* 我感覺到天主教徒是好人), maybe these individuals have been helped by these Catholic friends or may have been invited to some meetings or activities where they felt understood and accepted.

Miss Zhang was a fifty-year-old faithful. When she was around forty-five, she became deeply depressed, and because of this, she lost her job. At that time, she met some Christian believers who invited her to participate in their activities and after a little time asked her to be baptized. But her family opposed her choice and would not allow her to receive Baptism. At that point her physical and psychological conditions became worse, therefore her family allowed her to receive Baptism, within the Catholic Church, because Catholics are allowed to continue praying (*bai* 拜) to their ancestors.

As I noted above, most of these faithful live in a family context where only they are baptized, while the rest of the family does not have any relationship with the Catholic Church. Other believers registered at the parish were baptized, but they were not accustomed to attending the Sunday liturgy for several reasons: some of them were too old and there was nobody who could bring them to church, or sometimes because the husband did not allow the wife to go to Church, or never joined the activities of the Church after being baptized because they were too busy (*Tai-mang* 太忙). The parish priest told me that even the former mayor of Taipei city and

former president of Taiwan, 馬英九 Ma Ying-jeou⁷ was baptized in the old Resurrection church on Dali Street. He is the most eminent case of a believer who does not participate in Church activities.

Except for a few family groups and some young people, women represent the majority of believers. This situation is not peculiar to the Resurrection church, in every parish, the involvement of women in Church activities is more important than that of men. This type of situation generates a particular phenomenon. Where, very often, only one member of the family – the wife or the daughter – is Catholic, while the other members remain involved in Popular Religion practices⁸. Yet these Catholic women must participate with the rest of the family in all the rites, and practices that any believer of Taiwanese popular religion has to perform.

It is within this environment and context that I conducted my research. My fieldwork documents include several interviews with Parish priests and believers from other parishes. Through active participation in the Church rituals and interviews with the parishioners, through visits to their homes, and interviews with priests and theologians, I collected a significant number of ethnographic materials that I will present in the next pages.

4.2 The Taiwanese Catholic Ancestors' Rites

As already described above, the predominance of women among believers can be read through cultural frameworks. This situation is certainly linked with the importance of the concept of ancestors in the Taiwanese cultural environment. As has already been described the Catholic Church before the Second Vatican Council, did not allow the believers to have ancestors' shrine in their homes.

As a consequence, many of the old Catholic families which entered the Catholic Church before 1949 still do not have ancestors' shrine in their homes. When they have them, as in the Han people's religious world, the Catholics honored their ancestors at home, in the lineage hall, and in the church. They continue to participate in all the rites which were linked to their ancestors, such as Lunar New Year, Tomb Sweeping Day (*qing-*

7. Ma Ying-jeou (born 13 July 1950) is a Hong Kong-born Taiwanese politician who served as president of the Republic of China from 2008 to 2016. Previously, he served as justice minister from 1993 to 1996 and mayor of Taipei from 1998 to 2006. He served as chairman of the Kuomintang (KMT) from 2005 to 2007 and from 2009 to 2014.

8. Traditionally a woman was quite explicitly removed from the family of her birth (her *niangjia* 娘家) and affiliated to her husband's family (her *pojia* 婆家), a transition always very clearly symbolized in local marriage customs, despite their variation from one region to another. One of the first consequences of this particular situation is that it is easier for women to convert to Catholicism. In fact, it is a common opinion that they will anyway pray for ancestors belonging to a different lineage. Ahern also points out this fact when interviewing her informants: they told her that a daughter "does not belong to us. From birth on, girls are meant to belong to other people. They are supposed to die in other people's house" (Ahern, *The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village*, 127)

mingjie 清明節), Mid-Autumn Festival (*zhongqiujie* 中秋節), the celebration of death anniversaries, and so on.

The addition of a third place – the church – to the two where the reverence to ancestors are traditionally performed (The Freedman Domestic and Hall ceremonies), created new forms of veneration of ancestors. Communal celebrations are performed inside the church during the Chinese New Year and Tomb Sweeping Day. Apart from these traditional Chinese celebrations, the Catholic Church allows the performance of these rites also for the Catholic celebration of All Souls’ Day. All Souls’ Day is a Roman Catholic holiday celebrated on November 2nd (If that day falls on a Sunday, then All Souls’ Day is moved to November 3rd since it is not permitted to wear black clothes on Sundays). Formally, it is known as *Commemoratio omnium Fidelium Defunctorum* or “Commemoration of all the Faithful Departed”.



Figure 2: Ancestors' Ceremonies in the Resurrection Church

During this month, in many of the churches of Taipei, an ancestors' shrine is placed inside the church beside the altar. The “Parish Ancestors' Tablet” (堂區祭祖靈位), two candles, the incense burner, flowers, and fruits are placed on this shrine (Fig. 2a).

After the Mass, the parish priest, helped by a parishioner, goes in front of the ancestors' shrine, offering incense, fruits, and flowers, sometimes fruits can be substituted by holy water. In the month of November, in the Resurrection church and also in the churches administrated by the CICM priests, pictures representing the departed friends and family members of parishioners (親友亡者) were hung on a panel in the back of the shrine (Fig. 2a). These communal celebrations were always officiated by the priest, but as the priest of the Resurrection church told me, the rites of Chinese New Year for the ancestors can be performed by one of the parishioners, male, and head of the family. Especially during the month of November, believers

often ask the priest for a more specific mention of their own ancestors during the liturgy of the Mass. Before the beginning of the Mass, the believer went to the priest's office, wrote the name of the departed on a red envelope, and told the priest the reason behind this request for a particular mention. There are many reasons why people can ask for a special mention during the Mass. During the liturgy, the priest says the following prayer: "Remember, Lord, your people, especially those for whom we now pray (here the priest says the names of the departed for which the Mass is celebrated). Remember all of us gathered here before you."⁹.

It is perhaps important to note that the dead are remembered within each mass, and those specific prayers for them are already present in the missal¹⁰. Here are some of them: "Remember, Lord, those who have died and have gone before us *marked with the sign of faith*, especially those for whom we now pray (at this point of the celebration the Priest mentions the names of the deceased or loved ones whom the celebrant or parishioner wishes to offer the Mass to before God). May these, and *all who sleep in Christ*, find in your presence light, happiness, and peace". Or "Remember our brothers and sisters who have gone to their rest in the hope of rising again; bring them and all the departed *into the light of your presence*". Or as follows: "Welcome into your kingdom our departed brothers and sisters, and all who have left this world *in your friendship*." Or again, "Remember those who have died *in the peace of Christ* and all the dead whose faith is known to you alone"¹¹. But reading the same part of the liturgy translated in Chinese: "*Qiu ni ye chui nian suoyou de zuxian he qushi de ren, shi tamen xiang jian ni guanghui de sheng rong* 求你也垂念所有的祖先和去世的人,使他們享見你光輝的聖容"¹² it is possible to note that the concepts of "marked with the sign of faith", "left this world in your friendship" or "who have died in the peace of Christ" have disappeared from the text, extending the prayer to "all the departed". In a place where the believers are considered a minority and where most believers live in a completely non-Catholic environment (sometimes only one member of the family is converted to Catholicism), the symbolic boundaries of the peace of Christ must be widened to include the Taiwanese and non-baptized ancestors to whom prayers and Mass are dedicated.

To put this situation in relation to the concept of Universal Salvation preached by the Catholic Church. According to the Second Vatican Coun-

9. Roman Missal, "Eucharistic Prayers I-IV," in *Roman Missal*, Third Typical Edition (Vatican City: Congregation for Divine Worship / the Discipline of the Sacraments, 2001).

10. A missal is a liturgical book containing all instructions and texts necessary for the celebration of Mass throughout the year.

11. Missal, "Eucharistic Prayers I-IV," My emphasis.

12. Taiwan Bishops Conference, 主日感恩祭典(甲) (Taipei: 天主教教務協進會出版社, 1983).

cil¹³, the ancestors are an integral part of the “Celestial Jerusalem” the “Triumphant Church” – the Church formed by the faithful who have already left this world – thus not just Catholic ancestors are embraced in this celestial family, but the document asserts that “all men” are “called to belong to the new people of God. Wherefore these people, while remaining one and only one, are to be spread throughout the whole world and must exist in all ages, so that the decree of God’s will may be fulfilled. In the beginning, God made human nature one and decreed that all His children, scattered as they were, would finally be gathered together as one.”¹⁴

This universal concept of salvation became evident inside the Mass liturgy, where the priest prays for all the ancestors and for all the dead. And, during the month of November, many churches that have ancestors’ shrines simply display a generic phrase in order to remember all the dead, or if the ancestors’ tablet is communal, a collective celebration is made for all the parishioners’ ancestors. In my view, this concept illustrates that the Catholic Church is considered one, unique but large extended family, where all the believers are brothers and sisters who “received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, Abba, Father!” (Rm. 8, 15). In this large family, “the Church” which further says “that Jerusalem which is above” (Galatians 4,26) is called “our mother”. The Church is described as the spotless spouse of the spotless Lamb (Jesus), whom Christ “loved and for whom He delivered Himself up that He might sanctify her”, whom He unites to Himself by an unbreakable covenant, and whom He unceasingly “nourishes and cherishes”, and whom, once purified, “He willed to be cleansed and joined to Himself, subject to Him in love and fidelity, and whom, finally, He filled with heavenly gifts for all eternity, in order that we may know the love of God and of Christ for us, a love which surpasses all knowledge.”¹⁵.

I stressed these concepts because, in my view, this is one of the ways to understand the ancestors’ rites in the Catholic world. If we make a simple comparison, we can see that while for believers of popular religions the rites have to be performed at home or at the ancestor hall, the Catholic believers add a third performing place, the church, which represents this new universal family, where all the members honor their own ancestors in order to venerate the ancestors of every believer, as well as the ancestor of each and every man: Jesus Christ. But “does God belong to Jews alone? Does he not belong to Gentiles, too? Yes, also to Gentiles” (Rom. 3,26). Therefore, all people are beneficiaries of God’s love and mercy. Inside this new family, all the festivals dedicated to the *gui* (鬼 the Chinese ghosts) disappear, and they have no reasons to be celebrated. What disappears is what Feuchtwang defines as a spatial code: inside/outside, left/right, and

13. *Lumen gentium*, *Lumen gentium*, 1964, accessed March 8, 2022, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

14. *Lumen gentium*, see also Jn. 11, 52.

15. *Lumen gentium*.

upper/lower¹⁶. All the rites are directed toward the inside, in the church as in the home. No rites are performed toward the outside (the rituals that are usually performed to the Gods and to the ghosts).

According to Feuchtwang¹⁷, this spatial code is a way to differentiate soldiers, notably, gods or gods of heaven, and also to distinguish Gods and *gui*. In conjunction with the spatial code, there are other means of making distinctions in the presentation of offerings: through an ordered sequence of offerings of food. This "order of privilege" represents a syntagmatic hierarchical order. But this order suffers radical changes inside the Church's rites: all the ancestors have been honored the same way in the funerals, with incense, fruits, and flowers (and in some churches also with wine and holy water). No food is offered to God, just incense and sometimes flowers (which are especially offered to the Blessed Virgin Mary).

In summary, it is possible to see that both spatially and hierarchically, one of the categories disappeared: the category of *gui*.

What I have explained above is, in my view, the fundamental approach of the Taiwanese Catholic Church toward what we call the Taiwanese popular religion. A semantic change of some symbols of the faith in order to provide the native people with a new key for the interpretation of – in some ways dominant – religious concepts. But, according to what I wrote above, how can it be explained that many believers still believe and are scared of ghosts that they still continue to see? How can it be explained that many believers still burn paper money at their ancestors' graves or that others go to the temple during the Spring Festival? How can we explain the fact that many believers participate in the Mass only when they encounter some problems, or when they don't participate in Church activities at all? Why is there a great emphasis on the miracle-working experience of the faith?

It is evident that there are no easy answers, but what I want to try to do, and what I want to demonstrate is that these questions can be answered only by putting them into a single cultural framework. I believe religion with its sacred symbols is embodied in a wider symbolic system which is commonly called culture. As I will illustrate in the next chapter, Catholic believers of Taiwan are still linked in a deep way with the traditional symbolic system, which means that the Catholics use symbols from both religious and cultural systems in order to face and solve daily problems.

16. Feuchtwang, "Domestic and communal worship in Taiwan."

17. Feuchtwang.