



## Where contributions to the mission of God are lived

HONG KONG (SE): “Don’t speak ill of the Chinese, they are a great people,” the father of primary-school-aged Cyril Hally told his son. Although he never explained why, his chiding words were to prove prophetic and set the young boy from Temuka, New Zealand, on a path in life that would see him eulogised some 85 years later as “a long time friend of the Chinese people,” by John Li Sheung Yee, in Beijing.

Father Cyril Hally died in Melbourne on May 18 and was buried from the home of the Columban Mission Society on May 21. Father Noel Connolly described him at the funeral Mass as a man who had been put to the test through the isolation of a prophet. “Cyril spoke confidently, challengingly and fearlessly. He occasionally suffered the criticism, isolation and misunderstanding that passionate prophets do,” Father Connolly said.

Born in 1920, Father Hally cherished the education he received from the Christian Brothers during the years of the Great Depression. A reminder from the principal that education at such a time was a great privilege and bequeathed a responsibility to use it for the common good, stayed with him for the rest of his life.

The prophetic seed sown by his father blossomed and saw him in the seminary after leaving school, with the expectation that, as a Columban priest, he would head off to the mystical Middle Kingdom of his dreams. However, the ways of God are not the ways of man, and when ordination in 1945 left him stranded in New Zealand, a course in anthropology at Wellington’s Victoria University set the budding, young missionary on a different path.

With his way to China barred, he worked in the chaplaincy to Asian students in New Zealand and later Sydney. He formed lasting friendships that for decades gave him a constant flow of first hand information about events and developments in the newly-independent nations of Asia.

The closest Father Hally came to China was Japan, in the early 1950s, where, with a canon law degree under his belt, he was asked to help straighten out the many marriages frustrated by the vast number of unaccounted for men, as a result of the war. However, teaching was his vocation, but a succession of posts in Columban seminaries in Australia and Ireland never contained him. A quick Google search gives testament to his wide exposure across Australia and New Zealand, around the Pacific Rim and as far away as Fu Jen University in Taipei, Taiwan.

His former student, Father Sean McDonagh, said his most uttered phrase was, “In my opinion...” He added, “Cyril expected missionaries to have opinions about a broad range of issues, based on solid reflection and research.” He also believed that the strength of mission lay in the New Testament, with its ability to adapt to any host society and be expressed in any culture or language without diminishment of revealed truth.

He was instrumental in establishing a National Catholic Missionary Council in Australia and worked with the Catholic Education Office at placing the agendas of mission into school curriculums. For many years he taught preparation courses for missionaries, stressing how to think about the Church in the world, explaining how historical trends, sociology, demography and cultural anthropology are all sources for theology.

While he could have been accused of being an armchair-missionary speaking from the comfort and safety of his home, he lived his passion in grass roots organisations. He was behind the formation of the Paulian Association to promote the lay apostolate in society and the setting up of the national lay mission movement in Australia, PALMS, in the early 1950s. He took great pride in his membership of the Ku-ring-gai Partners, a small group of people dedicated to making Aboriginal culture and wisdom better known and understood in the wider community.

Another of his great passions was peace and he cherished his membership in the local branch of the international Catholic movement, Pax Christi. He worried about Jerusalem and counselled people to pray for peace in the Middle East. In his love for the Church in China, he prayed for it daily and begged others to do the same.

He travelled to Hong Kong whenever possible to attend symposiums organised by the Holy Spirit Study Centre and devoured every copy of its publication, Tripod, as soon as it arrived in the mail. His collection of the journal goes back to the very first publication, which came out under the name of Ding, in 1981.

His first visit to China around 1990 gave him the determination to make the affairs of the China Church better known in Australia. He was energetic in recruiting teachers to go to work in Chinese universities under the auspices of the Hong Kong-based AITECE (Association for International Education and Curriculum Exchange) recruitment agency, as well as helping to set up a group to promote relations with the China Church and, with his usual dedication to working at the grass roots, offered his pastoral services to a budding Cantonese-speaking community in Sydney.

He was behind an invitation to Bishop John Tong Hon to be at the launch of the community in Sydney in 1997, when he became the first Chinese bishop to celebrate Mass publicly in the land down under and, as a member of the National Council of Priests, organised an invitation to the bishop to spend time at a gathering of clergy from across the country.

He believed in giving a voice to the voiceless and was part of establishing a national missionary journal to air the opinions of the mostly unheard Church of the Pacific Rim. First published on an ecumenical basis in 1989, it still comes out today under the name of *The Australian Journal of Mission Studies*.

He also loved nature, cultivating roses wherever he lived and taking pride in his garden. He was proud of the grounds he helped to create at the Columban seminary in Sydney and laboured amongst nature almost every day. He saw his green thumb as somehow joined to the creative hand of God bringing order into the chaos.

For all his physical strength, he was a gentle man, at home with the marginalised. He was relaxed with the Aboriginal people and sought their companionship at a Sydney parish they frequented. He was relaxed with the Catholic gay community and listened to and supported migrants, refugees and the displaced as part of his daily life.

However, his seminary class mates say his gentility deserted him on the football field and simply describe his play as rough. Nevertheless, this too can be an endearing quality. While his academic achievements were recognised with a Doctorate of the University (honoris causa) from the Australian Catholic University in 2005, possibly the warmest ovation he ever received came shortly before he died at the parish where he had attended St. Kevin's College as a teenager, when they were reminded that, on top of his international achievements, Father Hally still remains the only person to ever captain the much-loved A-grade college rugby team for three years in a row!

He allowed himself one little boast in life. Three members of his team went on to wear the famed New Zealand All Blacks jersey. "And I was better than them," he would say with his impish grin.



*Father Cyril Hally, left, at a reception to celebrate being made a Doctor of the University, with the former chancellor of the Australian Catholic University, Edward Cardinal Clancy.*