Appendix II
Interview with Fr. James Hurley SJ by Roberto Reyes
April 18, 2007

1. I was born 80 years ago in a village called Arbor, a place beside the sea. It’s a very saintly spot, a lot of history.

2. We are two boys, two girls. I was the youngest. The other boy became a Jesuit as well.

3. And the home was a very good home. The mother was a saint, the saint of the village. She had to work. The times were very hard. The father put together a business.

4. I was educated in the National School. A nice school in the countryside. I like that. Then I went to Mellery, a place where there’s the Monks, the Cistercian monks. They came from somewhere in France. They were driven out and they came to Ireland. And that was their first foundation. They started a school there. You know the Cistercians don’t have a school.

5. There was a Cistercian monk there. Column Cille. There was a famous Irish Saint called Column Cille. He loved the country. He was involved in the first recorded case of plagiarizing...he went to exile in Scotland...there were monasteries as well...

6. Anyway this monk Column Cille had us for history in second year. We were supposed to finish the text book but he spent most of his time talking about contemporary Irish politics. He had a very interesting story. He was pro-IRA(Irish Republican Army). We discovered something only years later when I was a Jesuit. A man came to lecture to us and he told us about his brother, Column Cille. And a town closes to where I live, there was a shooting incident there one Sunday night. The IRA had come in to look for somebody who had given information to the police. And they went to the big barn. And his mother told them that he was in the big barn. And they called him out. And he ran across the road to the Parish priest’s door and he was shot dead. He was the so-called informer. He was accused of being an informer by the IRA. So the IRA drove off anyway. One of the people arrested was a brother of this monk Column Cille. He was tried and sentenced to be shot on the day that his brother was to be ordained a priest. The judge at that time did something that I suppose he could not do at that time. He
commuted the sentence to life imprisonment. So that man at the end of
the Second World War came out of prison and he joined the Cistercians
as a brother. I presumed he could not join the Cistercians as a priest
because he was involved in a shooting incident. So he finished off in
the Cistercian monastery in the north of the country. He was Column
Cille’s brother. The interesting thing was…I had a distant cousin who
was high up in the Irish police, a very good man. He visited that
monastery. He was a friend of the abbot there. But during the war he
was often looking for his brother, a member of the IRA.

7. My years at Mellerey were good years. It was a tough school. It was
good. I was happy with that. And to the surprise of everybody, I
applied to join the Jesuits. That was a surprise because there was
trouble in the school. There was some kind of a strike on the last year
and I was identified as one of the leaders. In fact when I went to Ireland
recently I came across this letter which I had at home. The head of the
school, Fr. Finbarr wrote my father complaining about my behavior.
Anyway, they thought of expelling me. (see P.192)

8. So anyway to the surprise of many, I joined the Jesuits and I was
accepted. Then, two years novitiate. That was uneventful. Then three
years at the Dublin National University (studying classics) to do my
degree. And at that time I got interested in the writings of a man called
Patrick Pierce. Pierce was one of the great Irish patriots. Because in
Ireland, in 1916 there was a big rebellion which lasted for a Week. It
was suppressed and the 16 leaders were shot. One of them was Pierce.
Pierce was a great writer, a great poet. He had a great influence in my
life. One of those shot, Michael Mallin, had a son (Joseph Mallin), a
priest in Hong Kong. That had a big influence on me.

9. (1952) Then I went to Philosophy. I applied to go to the missions. I was
keen on China. Five of us left on a boat. We studied the language for
two years then one year of teaching. One of the students then was
Martin Lee who is now a famous politician. We were told that we will
never go back to Ireland. But after three years we were sent back to
Ireland for theology. Then I went to Dublin for four years of theology. I
was ordained in 1958. Then one year of theology as a priest. Then 1960
we did Tertianship. Then after that they were thinking of sending me to
study scriptures because I knew Greek that was the main reason.
Anyway I came back in 1960 and we were told again at that time that
we will never go back to Ireland.
10. I applied to teach in one of the refugee Chinese universities called Chu Hai (Star of the Sea). I was there for six or seven years. There were two other Jesuits there as well. I was teaching there and that was my first brush with activism. This was a place for Chinese Nationalism. But there was a group of students there. They were already influenced by the student movement. They were talking about the inadequacies of this place. They wrote an article, a very scientific critique of this college. And the school took action and they expelled 12 students. So I knew some of them. They came to see me. These kids were thrown out without any reasons given. This built up. There was a demonstration at the college and I visited them there. I promised to talk to the administration. The reasons had not come out. For expelling students there should be reasons. So I went to interview the people in the colleges and I was always brushed off. The issue got to the papers and my name was not mentioned. But there was mention of a certain Foreign Buddhist monk. Because at that time, the Buddhist monks in Vietnam were rather active as well. If I were named, there will be legal problems.

11. So that was my first beginning then. The bishop called me. Bishop Francis Hsu wanted to see me one day. The papers had been following this issue. There was a nationalist press at that time which was very much in favor of China. So they were highlighting the case. I went to see Bishop Francis Hsu. I went to his office. There were other people there high up in the church. He was very angry about the whole thing, so I defended myself. …they were expelled; no reasons were given…So I left the office anyway. I was chaplain of the Federation of Catholic Students at the time. I left the office anyway, and felt that things were pretty bad, that I was in trouble. The thing was the Bishop was a great friend of our superior then Fergus Cronin. And Cronin defended me. In fact at one stage, there was a press conference. I was invited so I asked Fergus what I should do. He answered, “Go Jim that’s where we want you, which was the best act of obedience that I have ever seen.”

12. So I was at this press conference (around 1969, 70 maybe), my first press conference that I have ever attended, and of course I was a kind of a key figure. So from then on, I was a well known figure around there. Cronin defended me and the bishop came over to defend me. He spoke to Cronin and said, “I understand what you are doing. Write to the papers and explain what you have done.
13. So that was good, and that was the beginning of a great friendship with the Bishop. The bishop himself was a man from Shanghai, Oxford trained and spoke beautiful English and Mandarin, not so good in local Cantonese... He was an outstanding Bishop but that was the beginning of a good friendship. After that, the student movement had begun... I would see Bishop Francis Hsu about four or five times... every two to three months. And you see him in his office. He would always tell me to come over at 5:00 p.m. Our meeting went from one to two hours. And he generally was sympathetic. And leaders of the student movement had come to me to ask if I can arrange a meeting with Bishop Hsu. The Bishop had become a public figure, a well known public figure. So, he was very supportive in general about the whole thing.

14. And then that went on for a while but it kind of died down since then. Then I decided that it was time to hand on the work to a Chinese priest. At that time, Stephen Tam came along. We had lots of seminarians in the student movement and the federation. The idea was that someday some of them could take over. The seminary was cooperative. Everybody thought that Stephen should be chaplain. So I decided to move out.

15. So I went to the Philippines. I went to do a renewal course at the East Asian Pastoral Institute. I was there for seven or eight months. During that time Martial Law had begun in the Philippines. I went to the Philippines 1972-73. When I left, Bishop Hsu had arranged that three people take over: Stephen Tam, Jack Clancey and Sr. Beatrice Leung. So I was in the Philippines when Martial Law came. Those were exciting times. I remember one time when they came to the Ateneo. They surrounded the buildings there. I saw that with my two eyes. That was my first brush with Martial Law. Then we met Ed de la Torre. He was a chaplain in the student movement. I had meetings with him before. In India, I went to Ed. At that time Ed was in trouble. He was on the run at that time. We met him next door to the EAPI, at the Maryknoll School. He was in a room there and he went off secretly at night.

16. Then the best thing there was our contact with Bishop Claver. There was the effect of Martial Law on EAPI. There were some people there who were very partial to Marcos. But one, Fr. Doherty, a sociologist. And he would be rather critical of Martial Law. He did a study of Martial Law that came out shortly after Christmas. During the
Christmas holidays I had a break from the EAPI. If you want to know the Philippines, you have to go out. So I went out to Bukidnon. I stayed with Bishop Cisco Claver. He was very good to me. He drove me around for two days. That was a very good experience. He shared some of his experiences with me as well. He was the first bishop of Bukidnon. He describes the procession of Christ the King. Before, it was always led by the landlords. He decided that this time it will be led by the farmers. So this was a revolution in the Philippines.

17. 1973. At the end of EAPI, I went back to Hong Kong and stayed in this house (Wah Yan College), and reported to the Provincial here. At that time there was talk that I will become the Asian chaplain, to take the place of Tissa Balasuriya. Then I met the Provincial who says, “I want you to be master of novices.” So the next three years I was the master of novices. But I was in contact the whole time with the Federation of students. There were strikes and demonstrations.

18. So then we ran out of novices. Initially, I had two or three. Then, I applied to work in the factory to see how it was. So I was in the factory, two periods, two months each time. And that was a great experience for me, working on the factory floor as an ordinary worker. I didn’t announce who I was. But when they ask me. I told them I was a priest.

19. Then after that, I went on retreat and decided to go to a parish, the Christ the Worker parish. It was a down and out area. I wanted to work with the grassroots. I went out there to work. They were very welcoming. So we started the faith and justice group there. Then Amnesty International group also. I was one of the founders of Amnesty International. I informed the Police of the formal set up. So I set up these groups at Christ the Worker parish. From that point of view it was a very active parish. I became parish priest eventually. So we had a very active parish. We had a workers group, faith and justice and Amnesty International. That was a very good experience. I was eleven years there. Then it was time to get out, you know. Then I took a sabbatical, went home to Ireland.

20. 1991. Then I came back from Ireland and worked in another parish, at Wong Tai Sin. Again that parish was in a deprived area. We did very well from the point of view of Basic Christian Community. At that time the Basic Christian Communities had started in Hong Kong. This parish was picked out as some kind of a pilot. And we worked with the Pastoral Center.
21. 1996-98. I was shipped out to Chai Wan, Star of the Sea Parish. Just before the turn over of Hong Kong. I stayed there for four years. I was ready to spend another ten years in the parish. This was a Jesuit parish. There were three of us there. We left one by one. And I have been here since then.

22. 1998. Pastoral Zone of St. Ignatius, Waterloo Road. I have been here ever since. It is quite a contrast to the other parishes where I have been. There is no public housing. All the other parishes where I was there was public housing, government housing. There is private housing all around here.

23. You have planted many seeds. What has happened to the seeds? At the beginning the work was rather western. Now it is very local. They were all talking about active violence then. We were concerned about “prisoners of conscience.” Recently, in one of the parishes where I was they were talking about “abortion.” I am totally against that. It’s a kind of violence.

24. The man of Westminster, Cardinal O’connor. They used to come down to our place before the war. The father was a doctor. There were five boys there. He was the youngest. They were very fervent. Mass every morning. We wrote him a letter and he answered. My sister wrote a book about the village. And he read it from cover to cover. He was a kid there. He lived across the road. There was a kind of a guest house there and he used to come in and play the piano. He is a musician. My father asked him, “What do you like to be when you grow up?” He answered, “I want to be a poke.” He wanted to say pope.

25. Well about the seeds. Many of them have grown. Students. Talking about students. The Federation of Catholic Students were socially committed then. As a student movement, they kind of petered out and other groups and other activists have taken over. There is across the road. The workers…they have more or less taken over. The Justice and Peace Commission. They were very active before. There was one lady, Mary Yuen. She was very active, a very interesting woman. She went to the school of Sacred Heart. Sacred Heart was very conservative. But she came in and was very vocal and articulate. And for ten years she worked well on the Justice and Peace Commission. Then she went for study in Berkeley in the States. She was now a member of the Justice and Peace Commission. Then she
became the vice-chairperson. She was very much in the news. Very vocal, very articulate, very admirable.

Wong Tai Sin ceased to be a parish. The Basic Christian Communities that we started there is not as active as it was before.

Here (St Ignatius) we have a Justice and Peace group, a social concern group. They are ok…but not the same as those we had at Christ the Worker parish. We meet on a regular basis. They are more concerned about the immediate poor people. They are not concerned about the other issues…the more macro issues. I should remind them of the macro from time to time. I discovered something in the Catholic directory, 2007, the other day. They put something that every parish can do. They have it in Chinese but not in English. But could be done in a parish justice and peace commission. They put two pages. I’ll be using that in my own group here anyway. Pages 622-623.「關社使命」So they do things here alright but not as active as the other parish. Anyway those were interesting times.

The Jesuits also have a Justice and Peace group. We used to invite two to three speakers each year to speak to the local Jesuit communities.

I am concerned about the rights of workers. Nothing much is being done there. What to do to improve their situation.

The four Jesuits which include me, who worked on the Justice and Peace Commission, are tending our resignation. We hope to see a new group take our place.

On the Basic Communities again…I had hope that groups that tend to be pious associations could become a community. The choirs for instance can become a community. The question of how vital and developed the BCCs are has to be looked into. There is a BCC commission in Hong Kong. It’s headed by a lady from our parish. But it is not that active. I was hoping that the pious organizations could become the BCCs as well. But they’re on the way to it. It takes some time.

26. Helping someone in prison. When I was still at the Christ the Worker Parish, there was this man on remand. His story was that he was a member of the Triads.

He was involved in some kind of a killing. He escaped to the Philippines. He had some kind of liaison with some girl there. He was brought back and was awaiting trial. So when the trial went up, the mother asked me to accompany her. We went to the place which is now the High Court at Central. We went there for the trial that lasted for two weeks or so. The Triad was there and so the mother wanted me to go with her. She was afraid of the Triads. The thing was, another brother
was on trial downstairs for rape and robbery. We got off and were tried for murder but got off on manslaughter. He was sentenced to fifteen years and was sent to the Islands. So I would visit him for three to four times a year. It took most of the day going there and coming back. I got to know him fairly well. I got to know that he was a very talented guy. Every year they had some kind of a big celebration in prison. He was picked three times to be MC (Master of Ceremonies). He accepted the first two but declined the third invitation. When he came out of prison, I was there on the scene with the rest of the family. We went back to Wong Tai Sin. We went to the chapel and said a prayer of thanksgiving. We went upstairs, sat and had some tea and celebrated. He started working and things went bad for him. I asked him to share at Mass one morning. I asked him to share about being a prisoner. So he did. He spoke about the Gospel. But really I was afraid that morning. Because that was a poor parish and they will be somewhat against prisoners. So he stood up and he spoke very well. And really I was moved by it. So……at the end of the Mass, they crowded around him, welcomed him, invited him to join the legion of Mary. Then he was with the Legion of Mary for three years. But interesting enough. There was somebody from the press that morning and wrote something on the South China Morning Post which was a complete distortion of the truth and said that he was not received and that people went off for coffee. But there was no coffee there at all. That was one case of misrepresentation and I should have written something about it. But you could see he was a very gifted speaker. He spoke very well. I said he was in prison for twelve years. Then became a member of the Legion of Mary. Then he went to business and things didn’t go too well. And he lent money to people. He became heavily indebted. Then he got married. I performed the marriage for him. Then the big debt accumulated and I got some friends who had some money. So I went to them and asked if they would be willing to help this man. Their reaction was, “Father we trust you, I will give to you, but are you sure this man can be trusted.” I said, every time he pays the debt I will be with him to supervise the payment. So I was every payment. I was and supervised that. And so we cleared the debt. When we cleared the debt, eventually we danced on the street outside. He was so happy. Then he went on. Then he was in contact with other businessmen. There were great prospects there but he was short of money. So you speak to this businessman. You know now. For eighteen months you looked over this money. You have done very well. And tell him a little bit about your past and see what happens. He went and …the bank got rid of him. He was in a very bad way for a while. But things began to pick up.
Now he is in Indonesia. His family originally came from Indonesia. He has a big project there. And he is earning HK$ 30,000 a month. A very big thing. He is a very bright kid. Thanks are to God. When he comes back to Hong Kong, he comes straight here to report. He sits on that chair where you are on right now. The prison experience, going to prison that was another experience for me. When I went to the parish I did not expect that experience but I got that.

27. Helping other poor people. There was another man. He is not a prisoner. But he was very involved with the student movement. And he was studying in two colleges. He was found out and was punished for that. He got out of that but now he is blind and getting a blind pension. But he is still working. But when he got down and out, I raised some money. I asked some of my friends. He is alone and does not have any kind of relations in Hong Kong. These are the people I have contact with. And I appreciate it very much. Contact with the grassroots. It makes me more human to have contact with them.

28. The other man who sees me is the one who made that stole behind here is from Shanghai. George came to Hong Kong from Shanghai in 1958 or 59 and he went to Chu Hoi College. That college took all kinds of students. Some of them top notchers and some at the bottom of the ladder. George never had a regular employment. He was involved in shady business. He was going to the Star Ferry. And ...he was bringing the girls. And why he was never arrested, I never know. Was he helping the Police? I don’t know. But he always came to see me anyway and he still comes to see me. He is married now to a Filipina. They are happy. He is really a talented man. He never had a chance of developing. He did that stole for me. He has a bit of a prayer. He says a prayer from time to time. A minimum of prayer. He washed dishes for a protestant pastor and earned HK$ 800 a month. Sometimes business was good. He had enough money. Sometimes it was not. But it is good to be in contact with this people.

29. Johnny, he still comes. He does well a very good speaker, but no qualification whatsoever. Never given a chance. He joined the triads, was caught, put into prison. When he came out of prison, he suddenly found himself. When he came out, the Triads gave him a big sum of money. He wanted to get rid of it. He gave it back to the Triad. Now he has two children. But with my past...there is a good job as policeman now in Hong Kong. But if their father has a record in the past, they are just out. Automaticly, they will not be considered. He has the kids. And
the kids don’t know his past yet. So he is doing well for the moment. He has been both in the Philippines and Indonesia. He met his wife at Wong Tai Sin parish. So that was Johnny. That contact with the prisons, I found that very helpful.

30. Spirituality. Even as a master of novices, I was trying to make up for the lack of the social aspect of spirituality. I would give long retreats to people and I would always emphasize the social as well. When I speak about the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius I always mentioned sin, social sin. The official catechism put out by John Paul II had social sin. So I would explain what social sin is. And it takes a while for that to be grasped. And so I talk about redemption. Think with the church. There is the social teaching of the church. That is why I want to contribute to the idea of the Social Teachings in the Spiritual Exercises. I have done the annotated 8 day retreat. I don’t ever remember that they talked about the social doctrine of the church on Justice. They mention the poor al’right. But they stop there and that is disturbing. Justice, how this will be realized at the grassroot level. In some places yes. But in all the retreats done throughout the year I don’t remember any talk on social justice. That is disturbing.

I went to Latin America. I went to El Salvador. Spent a few weeks there. I visited the place where Rutillo Grande and the six Jesuits were killed. I spent time praying and reflecting on the spot where they were killed. And there I met Jon Sobrino. It was a great experience to be in the place where Rutillo Grande and Bishop Romero were killed.