

# A Glance at Catholic Education in Hong Kong

*(This is the reference material presented by Dr. John T.S. Chen, one of the delegation members, during discussions with officials in Beijing and Shanghai.)*

In the pluralistic community of Hong Kong, there are not only government schools, but also schools run by the Catholic Church and many other voluntary organizations. Furthermore, the number of such "private" schools is by far greater than that of government institutions.

## Some Statistics on Catholic Schools

Although Catholics (totalling 270,000) represent only 5% of the population of Hong Kong, because of the great importance the Church attaches to the exercise of its functions in education, students enrolled in Catholic institutions total 331,780, representing 24.1% of the total student enrolment (1,377,400\*) in all schools in Hong Kong.

(\*Excluding students enrolled in the universities, polytechnics and technical institutes.)

The Catholic Diocese and its various religious communities operate a total of 311 schools, including 58 kindergartens, 113 primary, 79 secondary, 7 pre-vocational, 12 vocational, 36 adult education and 6 special schools.

The enrolments in the Catholic schools are as follows: 20,520 in kindergartens (representing 9.1% of all kindergarten children in Hong Kong), 140,620 in primary schools (i.e. 26% of all primary pupils) and 79,650 in secondary schools (i.e. 15.9% of all secondary pupils). In addition, there are 5,040 pupils in pre-vocational schools, 7,350 pupils in vocational schools, 78,140 students in adult education centres and 460 pupils in special schools. Among the 331,780 students enrolled in Catholic institutions, 28,440 or 8.6% are Catholics.

The Catholic schools have a total staff of 10,521, consisting of 104 priests, 215 sisters, 47 brothers, 3,550 lay Catholics and 6,605 non-Catholics.

(The above data are taken from the "Hong Kong Catholic Church Directory 1985", p.394, and "Hong Kong 1985", p.330.)

### Links Among Schools

For the purpose of fostering closer links and cooperation among Catholic schools, formulating and reviewing policies and attending to other matters related to Catholic education, the Diocese of Hong Kong established a Catholic Board of Education in 1977. The membership of the Board includes supervisors, principals and teachers from primary and secondary schools and educators from tertiary and adult education.

Under the aegis of the above Board are the Diocesan Schools Council and the Religious Schools Council. The former is responsible for promoting closer relations and cooperation among schools directly established by the Diocese, while the latter fosters cooperation and links among schools run by various religious communities.

### The Church's Reasons for Establishing Schools

The reasons why the Church attaches great importance to educational undertakings are twofold. First, broadly speaking, the Church's mission of spreading the Gospel is a mission of educating its faithful to sanctify themselves and the world around them, and the establishment of schools is completely in line with this educational mission. (cf. "Declaration on Christian Education", 2,3)

Second, the Church considers that the establishment of schools provides a social service which is much needed by the Hong Kong community. In a pluralistic society, the schools established by the Church and other organizations provide a free choice to the community. In the past few decades, it is in response to an increasing demand for places in Catholic institutions that the Church has established more and more schools. The Church considers that because they have a primary and inalienable duty and right in regard to the education of their children, parents should enjoy the fullest liberty in their choice of schools. (cf. "Declaration on Christian Education", 6, and "The Catholic School", 20)

#### Providing a Comprehensive Education

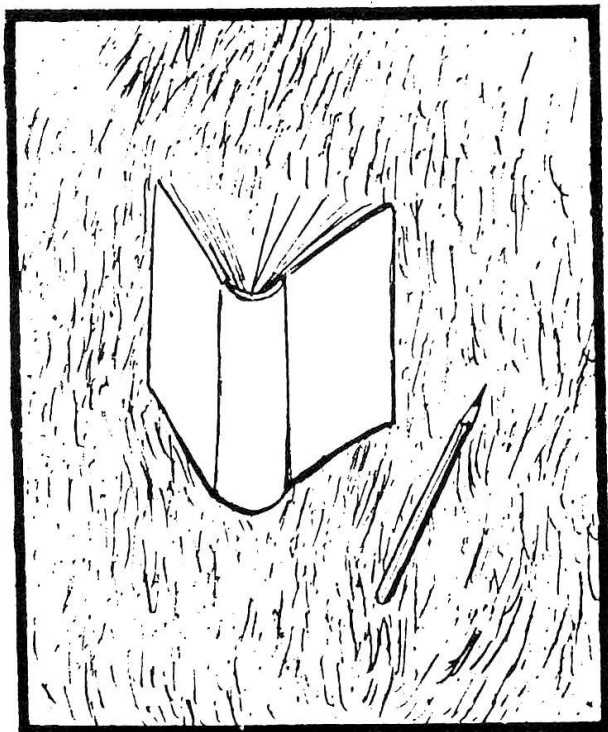
In establishing schools, the Church aims at providing its young faithful and other young people with a comprehensive and balanced education, which combines the development of the student's intellect, personality and spiritual life with career training. The Church considers that the development of the student's personality benefits immensely from an education which has religious and moral dimensions. (cf. "Declaration on Christian Education", 1, 8, and "The Catholic School", 19, 30)

#### Respecting Freedom of Belief

Although the Catholic school devotes much attention to religious education, the Church considers that faith is the human person's free response to truth. Therefore, when spreading the Gospel in Catholic schools, teachers must show the greatest respect for students' freedom of belief, i.e. respecting each person's right to seek truth according to his or her own conscience. (cf. "Lay Catholics in Schools: Witness to Faith", 28, 42)

#### Promoting Moral Education

In the rapid urbanization and commercialization of the Hong Kong community, young people have special need for moral education. The Catholic school assumes a heavy responsibility in promoting moral education. As mentioned above, the Catholic school not only helps its students to develop



their intellects and readies them for professional life, but it also assists in the development of their total personality. The Catholic school endeavours to help students to cultivate Christian virtues, a sense of responsibility, a zeal for seeking truth, a respect for other people's freedom, a spirit of service towards society, a sensitivity for justice, a special awareness of being called to be positive agents of social change and improvement, and to work with all men of goodwill to make human society more peaceful, fraternal and communitarian. (cf. "The Catholic School", 35, and "Lay Catholics in Schools: Witness to Faith", 19,30)

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