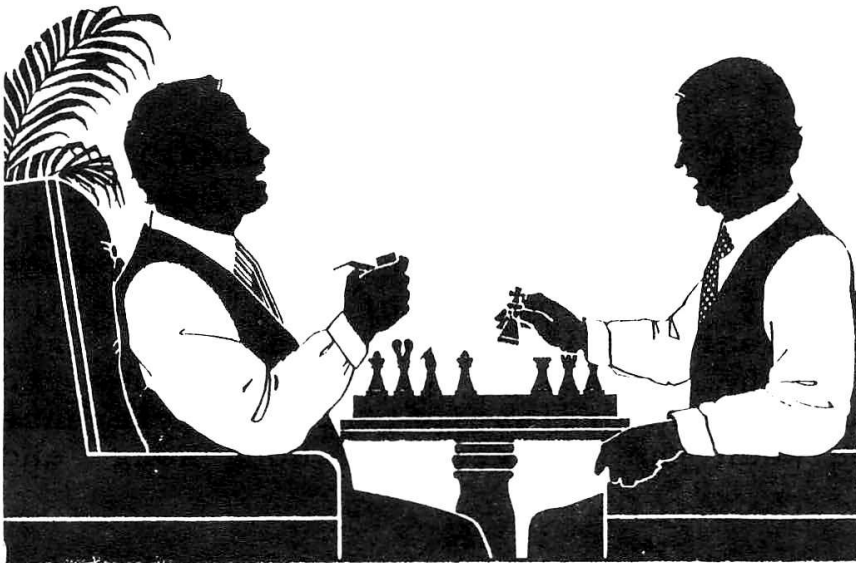


# A DISCUSSION ON

## 'SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE'

### IN HONG KONG AFTER 1997



*by Peter Barry*

From December 1986 to the present a lively discussion has been taking place in the "Freedom Forum" column of the popular, middle-of-the-road Hong Kong newspaper Ming Pao about the relationship of religion and politics in Hong Kong after 1997. The discussion started with an article by a certain Xin Weisi entitled "The Basic Law and Religious Freedom" which appeared in the December 5, 1986 issue of Ming Pao. The author is not known in Hong Kong. It is generally believed that his writing represents the thinking of certain persons at the New China News Agency, and therefore represents the thoughts of Chinese authorities on the question. Xin Weisi himself wrote two rather lengthy articles, and this writer has counted at least 15 responses to Xin.

Xin Weisi traces the beginnings of Christian church (both Catholic and Protestant) involvement in politics(参政) back to the late 1960's. Examples of this are the involvement of the Christian Industrial Committee and the Tsuen Wan United Social Service Centre in labor and housing problems. Since the 1997 issue arose, Christian pressure groups have formed, or they have cooperated with other associations, which concern themselves with political change in Hong Kong. Clergymen have also gotten involved in political issues like the Daya Bay nuclear power plant issue and the Kao Shan conference on a democratic political system, which was held November 2, 1986 and at which the vicar-general of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese and the secretary-general of the Hong Kong Christian Council "presented radical ideas on political reform," according to Xin Weisi.

Such political activity exceeds the boundaries of normal religious activity, Xin holds, and is not beneficial for the stability and prosperity of Hong Kong, nor to the advantage of the concerned religions themselves. For these reasons, Xin advocates that the principle of the "separation of church and state" be clearly written into the Basic Law. As a corollary to this, he emphasizes strict adherence to the principles of mutual non-subordination, non-interference and mutual respect between the religions of Hong Kong and China after 1997.

The author reasons in this way: it is not suitable for a religious organization to become involved in politics because religions obey a heavenly authority. If there is a conflict between religion and government, obedience to a heavenly authority can become the basis for opposition to the government. Political power is the central problem in politics, Xin writes, but the problems which religion handles are of an ethical and spiritual nature. Because in modern society political judgments and ethical-spiritual judgments belong to different realms, it would be better if the boundaries between religion and politics were clearly drawn. Then there would be less likelihood of conflicts arising between the two. Xin suggests that all religions should have an attitude of "aloofness" towards politics, like the traditional oriental religions of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism.

Xin points out that there is no history of union of church and state in Hong Kong. Although Anglicanism is the state religion, its "state" activities are limited to the ceremonial sphere. At the same time, since most of the people in Hong Kong are Chinese, they have a Chinese peoples' wariness towards the political aspirations of religious organizations. In the past, no Hong Kong religious organization has positively participated in politics. Rather, they have put their efforts into social service work. But author Xin expresses anxiety about the trends towards politicization which he observes among Catholics and certain denominations of Protestants. He is worried that certain clergymen desire to form a political force with the church at the centre. He claims that among some churches there is an over-zealous attitude in training Christian politicians. Xin points to countries where religious organizations have great political power, like northern Ireland, Poland, Iran and the Philippines, and claims that these countries have neither social stability nor economic prosperity.

Therefore the author thinks that the religious freedom guaranteed in the Basic Law should be limited to legitimate religious activity only. Activities which go beyond religious activities, like those of a "union of church and state" nature, would be excluded. Of course, activities which would harm China's administration of Hong Kong would also be excluded.

The Basic Law ought also to include the principle of mutual non-interference between Hong Kong's religions and religions on the mainland because some clergymen today, while discussing the manner in which the Basic Law will guarantee religious freedom, are in the habit of using Hong Kong's present standard of religious freedom to attack the religious policy in China. Foremost among these are clergymen who oppose China's prohibition of its Catholics having contacts with Catholics abroad, especially with the Pope, and who blame China for continuing to hold elderly Catholic priests in jail. However, these clergymen do not mention the background of these cases, that is, the inglorious history of China's religious organizations and clergy being used by imperialism to carry out espionage activities against China. This is a case of using one system to attack another system and of interference in the

relations between the religious organizations and the government of the attacked system.

Author Xin expresses the hope that after 1997, when Hong Kong's original religious freedom will be guaranteed in the Basic Law, that Hong Kong's religious bodies will not interfere in the carrying out of the religious policy in China. If we request that China not bring the religious policy implemented on the mainland to Hong Kong, then we cannot require China to implement Hong Kong's religious policy there, Xin argues. Otherwise, Hong Kong religious organizations could use the religious freedom enjoyed in the HKSAR to attack China's religious policy, or they could attempt to establish bridges for exchange between China's religious organizations and foreign religious leaders and organizations, or, with Hong Kong as a base, they could evangelize the interior, seek converts and even go so far as to set up secret religious organizations subject to foreigners, Xin concludes.

#### Responses to Xin's First Article

One respondent to Xin Weisi's article was Song Enrong. His response appeared in the December 15, 1986 issue of Ming Pao. Song asks for a clarification of the meaning of "separation" and "union" when referring to relations between church and state, or politics and religion. Man is a whole person, Song writes, and Christians get involved in politics because of their concern for the development of man's moral character and because of God's demands for social justice. The church does not seek political power, Song claims. However, Christians should be allowed to participate in politics, even to the extent of helping, as individuals, to form a political party. Business and labor groups exhort their members to participate in politics. Will the Basic Law have to draw boundaries between business-labor activities and political activities, or will the Basic Law discriminate against religious organizations only, Song asks?



On December 16, 1986, a response by one Ji Yunen appeared in Ming Pao. Ji called Xin's analysis of the so-called "politicization of religion" subjective, and not in accordance with reality. Xin's assertion that the church's concern for political matters will lead to it forming a political party is mere conjecture. Ji denies that religious organizations are "overly zealous" regarding society, because most believers are not interested in politics. Ji writes that the church encourages believers to be concerned about political reform and the drafting of the Basic Law because it has a sense of belonging to Hong Kong and wants to bear its responsibility for a Hong Kong which is undergoing changes. Christians, along with other citizens, are interested in implementing the stipulations of the Joint Agreement about "one country-two systems," "a high degree of autonomy," and "Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong," Ji holds.

Hong Kong is not the same as the Philippines, Poland and Iran, Ji posits. In the past, Hong Kong religions have peaceably presented their ideas to the government, and there have been no disturbances. The church seeks justice, peace and human rights in society, and only if these things are guaranteed will there be stability and prosperity, according to Ji.

Regarding the union or separation of church and state, since separation of church and state already exists in Hong Kong and since the church as an organization will absolutely not participate in politics, Ji feels that it is not necessary to state this principle in the Basic Law. However, the church does have the responsibility to inform its adherents about their duties as citizens and to encourage individual Christians to get involved in and speak about politics. But this cannot be labeled "union of church and state." The church supports "separation," but this is not to be equated with believers withdrawing from the real world. Christians are to be the "salt of the earth and the light of the world".

Ji claims that Xin's article contains a Marxist view of religion which is not suitable for Hong Kong. He sees this in Xin's promotion of an aloof attitude towards politics on religion's part, and thinks this has the flavor of religion as "the opium of the people." If religion is limited to

speaking only on ethics or spirituality, and not on politics or social issues, this is like the situation of religion on the mainland now. Does Xin want to transport the mainland situation to Hong Kong, Ji asks?

Further, Ji claims that Christianity is not like oriental religions. Christianity is "in the world, but not of it." Christianity has a holistic concern for man and a holistic mission, which is not limited to the confines of the spiritual realm only. Ji advocates that "separation of church and state" not be incorporated into the Basic Law, but rather the phrase "a Marxist view of religion is not suitable for Hong Kong," should be incorporated.

Another response appeared in Ming Pao December 23, 1986, written by Xiao Xintu, "the least Christian". Xiao Xintu writes that Xin Weisi exaggerates the influence religious bodies have had on Hong Kong society in recent years. Involvement in social issues is limited to only a few Christians, Xiao claims, and this is far from having "the object of forming a political force with the church at the core." Hong Kong is a pluralistic society, where unity in diversity is the order of the day. So, complete separation of church and state is not being faithful to the reality of Hong Kong. Xiao also points out that, according to the principle of mutual non-interference stated in the Joint Agreement, the mainland's religious policy should not be implemented in Hong Kong after 1997. Xiao suggests that an accommodation be made by all sides which is neither too radical nor too conservative.

#### Second Article of Xin Weisi

Xin Weisi answered his critics in a two-part article entitled "Further Discussion on the Basic Law and Religious Freedom," appearing in Ming Pao, February 3-4 1987. Xin reiterated that his previous article only emphasized the two points of the separation of religion and politics (church and state) and the mutual non-interference between the religions of China and of Hong Kong. The author denied using the Basic Law to interfere in a Christian's concern for, or right to participate in, politics. The author disagreed with the direct involvement by the church as a body in politics, and with clergy using religious gatherings to propagate their own political ideas.

Xin is opposed to direct church involvement or clerical participation in politics because politics and religion belong to two different realms. According to Xin, religion seeks freedom of the spirit; religion makes use of personnel and resources to teach doctrine, lead people to holiness and to work for the welfare of society. But if, in their religious activities, religious organizations give believers things which are completely and qualitatively different from religious faith, then such activity is a fundamental violation of the spirit of religion, Xin feels.

Every religious organization has an innate superiority, Xin writes, but if someone in religion has political ambitions and uses the church to accomplish his political goals, this is not in keeping with the spirit of religion. Clergymen have a great influence on believers because they believe that clergymen are called by God and follow God's will. So if a clergyman has political ambitions and uses the church to obtain political goals, or if other politicians use clergymen to obtain political goals, this will have a great effect on society at large. Thus it is better for clergymen not to be involved in politics, Xin holds.

However, the involvement of clergymen as individuals in politics is different from clergymen as clergymen doing so. Thus the six clergy on the Basic Law Consultative Committee and Bishop Peter K. K. Kwong on the Drafting Committee participate on these committees as individuals. They are involved in politics as individuals, according to Xin, and not as clergymen.

Religious organizations are different from business or labor groups because the church's purpose is to lead believers to shake off the chains of the material world and to seek freedom of the spirit. It is not the church's purpose to lead believers to seek material benefits. Believers enter the church to seek religious faith, Xin writes, not to obtain material benefits. Business and labor groups, on the other hand, seek material benefits for their members, and they use such methods as involvement in politics to obtain them. It is the nature of such organizations to seek political power and material advantages. However, this is not the case with religion. Religion and business and labor organizations pursue

different goals. Some clergymen, however, say that the purpose of the church's involvement in politics is to establish justice, equality and love in society. But this is like "Christendom" in the Middle Ages, Xin believes, and it is an attempt to bring about a union of church and state.

Xin Weisi also points out that there is a price to be paid for involvement in politics. An organization so involved must be able to bear an opposite reaction. Some clergy on the one hand hope that the Chinese government will not interfere in the freedom of Hong Kong's religions after 1997 and on the other hand advocate involvement in politics. In politics, where does one find the principle that people may interfere in your affairs, but you are not allowed to interfere in their affairs, Xin asks? So, after 1997, if the church gets involved in politics, it could lead to conflicts arising between the government and the church and to the government interfering in the church, Xin warns. Thus if religious bodies desire that after 1997 the future SAR government not contravene religious freedom, then the best way of insuring this, according to Xin, is to clearly define the principle of the separation of church and state in the Basic Law. In this way, mutual non-interference between government and church will be guaranteed.

Author Xin cites early European history where caesaropapism existed, in which the religious authority was superior to the political authority, and controlled it. To prevent this, European nations later adopted the system of separation of church and state. If the politicization of the Hong Kong church has for its object the establishment of a political force with itself at the center, then the possibility really exists of establishing a union of church and state and of the church's controlling and interfering in government, Xin feels.





As stated in the former article, Xin says that the meeting of Christian representatives organized by the Hong Kong Christian Council and the Hong Kong Catholic Social Communications Committee is really a case of clergy using religious faith to carry out political activities. If the future HKSAR legislators are chosen by direct election, and if the church can control a fair number of these legislators, it is not difficult to imagine how the church's interference in politics could happen, Xin writes.

In early Christian thought the realms of politics and religion were separate, Xin points out. Since religion and politics belong to different realms, why not clearly state this separation in the Basic Law, he asks again? This would prevent religious organizations from being used by politicians seeking political power, prevent political opportunists from springing up in the midst of the church itself, and prevent religious organizations from turning into political organizations, and losing their original religious quality.

Since the appearance of the 1997 issue, the phenomenon of the politicization of the churches is a reality apparent to all, Xin feels. However, he welcomes opinions and arguments against his point of view, but he hopes his critics will understand what his point of view is. Briefly, Xin concludes, all he desires is that the principle of the separation of church and state be written into the Basic Law, and that there be mutual non-interference between Hong Kong and mainland religions after 1997.

#### Further Criticisms of Xin's Articles

The Protestant Christian Shou Wang Society (Christian Sentinel) of Hong Kong responded to Xin's articles in the February 16, 1987 issue of Ming Pao. Their critique points out that Xin does not clearly define what he means by "zheng" (政) and "jiao" (教). In Xin's essays "zheng" sometimes means "government" and sometimes "political activity;" whereas "jiao" sometimes means "church" and sometimes "religious faith." Thus at least four different levels of meaning or four different relationships are referred to in Xin's articles: politics and religion, politics and the church, the government and religion and the government and the church. So, the Shou Wang members ask:

in talking about the separation of "zheng" and "jiao," what is to kept separate from what? If Xin writes again, they suggest, he should make clear what level of religion and politics he is talking about.

Chen Qiangli, also a member of the Christian Shou Wang Society, continues the discussion in a two-part article in Ming Pao, February 23-24, entitled "A Critique of the Logical Foundation of Xin Weisi's Theory of Separation of Church and State." Chen says he agrees with Xin when the latter writes that in criticizing someone's point of view, you have to be clear about what that person's point of view is. However, Xin does not state his point of view clearly enough for readers to be able to understand it, according to Chen. Xin does not distinguish between factors which can possibly lead to a union of church and state and that union itself. According to common practice, Chen writes, "union of church and state" indicates a union in system. However, the Christian community's involvement in politics is not this. Where Xin expresses the opinion that some church activities "could possibly lead to a union of church and state," and concludes that the principle of "separation of church and state" be incorporated into the Basic Law, Chen counters that laws cannot be based on probability or conjecture.

Chen also asks what does Xin mean by "involvement" and what political activities is he talking about? Does this include a small discussion group within a larger church membership which may offer suggestions or criticize government policies, Chen asks?

Chen takes up Xin's advocacy of the church maintaining a position of "aloofness" from politics, and points out that "aloofness" or "detachment" for the Christian means: "Do not worry about what you are to eat or what you will wear tomorrow." (Mt. 6:31). Of course, the Christian must work in society, and eat and be clothed, but he is not overly concerned about the latter things. Chen feels that when Christians work for justice and peace in society, this is not to be equated with establishing Christendom.

Finally, Chen thinks Xin probably misunderstands history and the values of a pluralistic society. For instance, Xin attributes the social instability in Poland

and the Philippines to religious organizations possessing political power. Chen denies that this is the case.

Zhao Huren, who identifies herself as a 50 year old Christian housewife, presents her opinions in "Anxiety over 'Separation of Church and State' ", Ming Pao, February 27. Zhao writes that the Chinese side's suggestion that the principle of separation of church and state be incorporated into the Basic Law aroused anxiety and fear in the Christian community. She claims that, since believing in Jesus over 20 years ago, she has never experienced a greater attack against her faith until now. In her experience, the church has never hindered society's structures. Rather, the church has spread Christ's spirit of love and sacrifice in Hong Kong. Hong Kong's present educational and social works are the result of the hard work of the church's religious professionals.

Moreover, Zhao points out that an "ambitious person" need not only use the church to accomplish his political goals. He can also use other organizations. Isn't it a good thing that Christians try to serve society, Zhao asks? Why do "zheng" and "jiao" have to be put in a position of enmity with one another? The incorporation of the principle of the separation of church and state into the Basic Law will shake the trust of many Christians in the freedom of the future social system, Zhao thinks.

The Ming Pao itself featured a summary article on the subject in its March 2, 1987 issue, but it adds nothing new to the discussion, except to note that the Chinese side fears that the Christian churches with a total membership of about 500,000 are a potential political force.

The March, 1987 issue of Nineties magazine (Jiushi Niandai, #206) carried a summary article on the religion-politics controversy written by a certain He Li. Entitled "The Church Enters Politics and Receives a Warning," the concluding paragraphs are perhaps the most significant:

In the present situation, what church people are most worried about is that since the Chinese side has manifested an aggressive attitude towards the involvement of the church and clergy in politics, once the principle of "separation of

church and state" becomes the religious policy of the Basic Law, whatever the church or Christians do in the future regarding politics can be censured as being outside the boundaries of religious activity.

Also, because for several decades now there has been a religious policy in China, without which religion would not be able to subsist, it is hard to imagine that there would not also be a religious policy in Hong Kong after 1997. In China, religion cannot separate itself from politics and is completely under official control. If there were to be a religious policy in Hong Kong, political regulations and restrictions would be unavoidable. In addition, for a long time now, there has been a policy on the mainland of controlling religious organizations, and Hong Kong religious bodies are not permitted to interfere with them. Therefore, not only does the Joint Agreement carry a phrase drawing a clear line between the two, stipulating the principle of mutual non-subordination and non-interference, but lately a new twist has been added, namely a warning that Hong Kong religious bodies should neither attack the religious policy of the mainland, nor should they act as bridges for exchange between mainland religious bodies and religious organizations and leaders abroad. (p.45)

He also writes that some people remark that the most important reason that China is sensitive regarding the church is that it represents an organizational force, and China is wary about, and pays special attention to, any social organization which may not "walk the same path" with it.

The final commentary comes from Rev. Zhao Tianen, founder and present director of the Chinese Church Research Center in Shatin. Rev. Zhao's reflections also appear in the above mentioned issue of Nineties magazine, under the title of "A Look at 'The Basic Law and Religious Freedom' from the Standpoint of the Religious Policy of the Chinese Communist Party."

Zhao feels that Xin's articles clearly reflect China's present stand towards certain trends in Hong Kong religions. He goes on to say that Xin's reasons for advocating a separation of church and state are not the same as those of Western countries. Rather, Xin's reasons are those of the Chinese Communist Party. From a review of the past writings of Marxist theoreticians, we can see that they consider religion as a problem in the "realm of thought," an ideological problem, which belongs to the "superstructure." Xin has this same idea of religion: religion belongs to another world; politics refers to this world. However, Zhao points out, as have other commentators in this discussion, that religious faith is also concerned with this world, is incarnational.

Also, Xin does not explain what he means by "religious freedom." Again from a look at past Party documents we see that religious freedom is limited only to lawful religious activities. Legitimate religious activities are limited within certain confines. According to Document #19, a Party document on religion issued in March, 1982: religious activities must be held only in a religious place, and they include such activities as worshiping Buddha, having Mass, reading the Scriptures, holding devotional services, preaching sermons, etc. And the freedom spoken about appears limited to freedom to believe in one's heart; in other words, a matter of thought. Other activities than those listed above, Rev. Zhao writes, which are not approved by the government or not carried out under the supervision of the patriotic associations of each religion, can be considered unlawful activities, and may even be called "anti-revolutionary activities carried out under religion's cloak." The latter are strictly prosecuted according to the law.

Zhao also points out that Xin does not define activities which are in the nature of "union of church and state." But again from a look at Document #19 we see that religions are forbidden from interfering in government administration, law courts, and education.

Finally, Rev. Zhao draws the following conclusions from a study of Xin's articles: the drafting of the Basic Law follows the traditional method of drafting a constitution by the CCP; Xin's stand is an extension of the CCP's religious policy in China; and it is difficult to see how the policy

of "no change for 50 years" can be maintained if the meaning of pre-1997 religious freedom is already undergoing change.

### *Elements for Further Discussion*

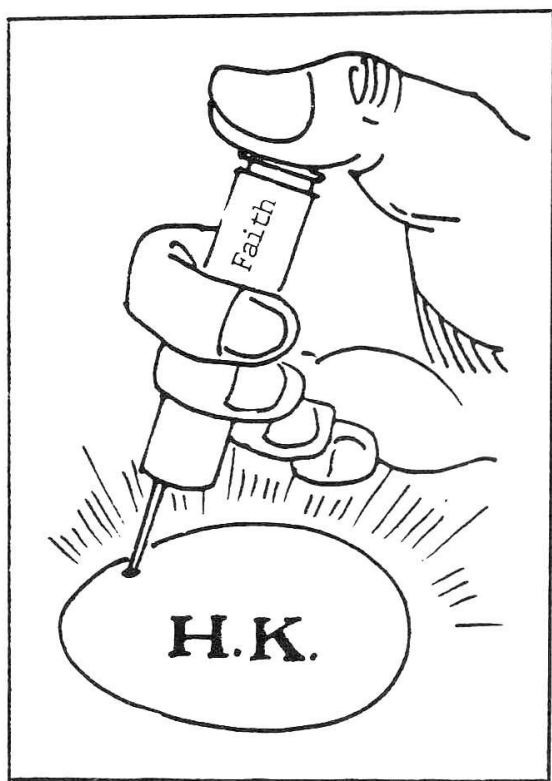
The above review of the exchange of views on the subject of religion and politics, and the relationship between them, is meant to acquaint our readers with the controversy as it appeared in recent Hong Kong newspapers. The responses provide much material for further discussion. Not a few respondents mentioned the need to clarify terms. What is meant by "involvement in politics," or by "separation of church and state" for instance? Basically, Xin Weisi's idea of religion in general, and of Christianity in particular, is in serious need of updating.

Actually, Xin raises a topic which is being hotly discussed in both church and secular circles in many places around the world today. Even Pope John Paul II does not want clergymen to run for public office, or if they are already in public office, they are being required to step out. Examples of this are Father Robert Drinan, S.J., who was told to resign from the U.S. House of Representatives a few years ago, and a similar command given to the priests holding official positions in the government of Nicaragua to resign. It is also interesting to note that the charge of clerical involvement in politics is not only leveled by left-wing authorities, but by right-wing ones as well. One recalls, for instance, that Archbishop Romero and the four American women missionaries (3 nuns and 1 layperson) who were murdered in El Salvador in the early eighties, were killed by right-wing death squads because they were "involved in politics," which was deemed to be incompatible with their "religious" vocations. The archbishop and the nuns believed they were only defending the rights of the poor.

So the topic of religion and politics (or church and state) is a complicated issue which requires much study to clarify the role of each and of their relationship to one another.

Perhaps it would be good to examine the Sacred Scriptures to see if they shed any light on the subject. Is the church, the company of the followers of Jesus, merely to

be concerned about another, spiritual world and leave the material world to the politicians, as Xin apparently holds? Why do we Christians say that we must be concerned with this world, and not just with the next? The first reason is that we believe that Jesus is "Emmanuel" or "God with us," that in Jesus God became man. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God...and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1:1,14) Or, as St. Paul puts it when he talks of Jesus: "though he was in the nature of God he did not consider being equal to God a thing to be clung to, but emptied himself, and taking on the nature of a slave, became man." (Phil. 2:6-7) In other words, Christians have an incarnational view of reality. Because God became one with man, so too, Christians must enter the world of men and take up their burdens.



The actual picture of Jesus which emerges from his public ministry as it is portrayed in the Gospels is that of a person who refused to be a "political" Messiah. The Palestine of Jesus' time was under the domination of the Roman Empire. A Roman Procurator (Pontius Pilate at the time of Jesus' death) ruled the country, and Roman soldiers were stationed on Palestinian soil. The Jews were looking for a Messiah, and in Jesus' time many zealots had a definite picture in mind of what the Messiah should be: a political leader, like the great King David, who would lead them to overthrow the Romans. Jesus refused to be such a Messiah.

This is strikingly brought home to us in the incident of the multiplication of the loaves. Mark's Gospel (Mt 6:40) has the detail that the five thousand men fed with the five barley loaves and two fishes were seated in groups of 100's and 50's, like platoons of revolutionaries. Jesus only had to say the word, it seems, and they would have marched immediately on Jerusalem to storm the Roman garrison there. John writes that when the people saw the miracle, they said:

"This is the prophet who is to come into the world." But when Jesus perceived that they were about to come, take him by force and make him king, he fled to the mountains all by himself. (Jn. 6:15)

This refusal on Jesus' part to be a political Messiah is seen in other parts of the Gospels as well. In the temptation in the desert, for instance, when the devil took Jesus to the top of a very high mountain, showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and said to him: "All these will I give you if you fall at my feet and worship me," Jesus answered: "Begone, Satan, for Scripture says you must worship the Lord your God, and him alone." (Matt. 4:9-10)

Another example is the dialogue with Pilate at Jesus' trial, where Jesus said: "My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, my followers would have fought..." "So you are a king then," said Pilate. "Yes, I am a king," answered Jesus. Jesus' accusers shouted: "If you set him free you are no friend of Caesar's; anyone who makes himself king is defying Caesar." "Do you want me to crucify your king?" Pilate asked. The chief priests replied: "We have no king but Caesar." (John 18:36-7; 19:12, 15-16). The high priest Caiaphas had previously said to a meeting of Pharisees (a faction in the Jewish religion): "Don't you see that it is better for one man to die for the people, than for the whole nation to perish." (Jn. 11:49-50).

So ironically, it appears that Jesus, who had previously refused to be a political Messiah was killed because of alleged involvement in politics. Jesus had disturbed the status quo, which was not appreciated by the Jewish religious authorities nor by the Roman political authorities of his day. Perhaps it can be said that he was indirectly involved in politics, because unintentionally his words and actions touched upon the political field. This is speaking on the merely human level, of course, because in God's eternal plan, Jesus by his death and resurrection redeemed mankind, and reconciled man with God by repairing the damage done to that relationship by the original sin of man's ancestors.

What had Jesus done to incur the wrath of the leaders of the Jewish religion and of the Romans? He had spoken out against the injustices of his day. He criticized the



scribes and pharisees for their hypocrisy (Mt. 23:1-39); he cured the sick on the Sabbath (the sacred day of rest); he was concerned about the poor. For instance, Jesus spoke one day in the synagogue of his native town of Nazareth. First he read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah: "The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, and to proclaim the Lord's year of favour." When he began to speak to the assembled people, he said: "Today this text is being fulfilled in your hearing." (Lk. 4:17-21)

The above are examples of Jesus' prophetic role, like the prophets of the Old Testament who spoke out against the evils of their day. This is the path many in the Christian church, both Catholic and Protestant, follow today. It is true, as Xin Weisi points out, that there were times when some spiritual writers in the church emphasized "separation from the world." There was also a time of "caesaropapism." This was after the time of the emperor Constantine when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. Up until then, for the first three centuries of its existence, Christians were persecuted as subversives because they refused to worship the emperor.

Christianity develops as it faces the problems of different ages, and it tries to make the appropriate response. Perhaps these problems did not exist in Jesus' day; so there may be no direct word about them in the Gospels. However Jesus' resurrected spirit is still present in the church and guides the church in addressing the problems of its times. "Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world." (Mt. 28:20) While being faithful to its roots, different emphases arise in Christianity as different needs are met.

Marxist thinkers might be able to appreciate this idea by a comparison to the changes taking place in Marxism. Party theoreticians today claim that Marxism is not static, but is in the process of development. We recall the famous commentary in the December 7, 1984 People's Daily which caught everyone's attention:

Marx has been dead for 101 years. His works are also over one hundred years old. Some were

tentative ideas for those times. Later conditions underwent great change. Some theories were also not necessarily correct. Marx and Engels had no experience about many matters; neither did Lenin. They did not come into contact with certain conditions. Therefore, we cannot require Marx and Lenin's work of those days to solve our problems today... We cannot have a dogmatic attitude towards Marxism.

Another example of Marxism's development is the change which took place in the CPC's guiding line at the 3rd Plenum of the 11th Central Committee, December, 1978, from class struggle to modernization. Marxists, then, should be able to understand how developments can take place in Christianity as she lives out her life out in the modern world.

One area calling for the church's attention today is the whole question of human rights and related injustices in various countries around the world. When the church speaks out against these injustices, she is said to be exercising her prophetic office, like Jesus and the Old Testament prophets did in their day. Some people may see this as "involvement in politics," but others see it as the church's rightful role.

This prophetic role of the church got great impetus, at least in the Catholic Church, from the Second Vatican Council (1962-5). In the document Church in the Modern World, issued December 7, 1965, the council addressed the question of the relationship between the political community and the church. It might be helpful for understanding the church's position today to quote some passages from paragraph #76 of this document:

It is of supreme importance, especially in a pluralistic society, to work out a proper vision of the relationship between the political community and the church... The church by reason of her role and competence is not identified with any political community nor bound by ties to any political system... The political community and the church are autonomous and independent of each other in their own fields. Nevertheless, both are devoted to

the personal vocation of man, though under different titles. This service will redound the more effectively to the welfare of all insofar as both institutions practice better cooperation according to the local and prevailing situation... At all times and in all places the church should have true freedom to preach the faith, to proclaim its teaching about society, to carry out its tasks among men without hindrance, and to pass moral judgments even in matters relating to politics, whenever the fundamental rights of man or the salvation of souls requires it. The only means it may use are those which are in accord with the Gospel and the welfare of all men according to the diversity of times and circumstance.

The church's prophetic role in addressing social issues of the day was given further impetus at a synod of world bishops in Rome in 1971, when the bishops declared: work for justice is a constitutive element of preaching the Gospel. Thus when the church addresses an unjust situation, e.g., the apartheid system in South Africa, is this to be considered involvement in politics, or rather carrying out its proper role of preaching the Gospel of Christ? The church today would claim that it is an essential part of preaching the Gospel. When present-day Christian church people, be they clergy or lay, speak out on justice issues, they may indirectly and unintentionally touch upon the political realm. This situation cannot be avoided, because most justice issues are also political issues. Distinctions between the two realms are frequently blurred, and an overlap exists between them. Political authorities may not be happy with such a situation, but the Christian evangelist must fulfill his vocation.

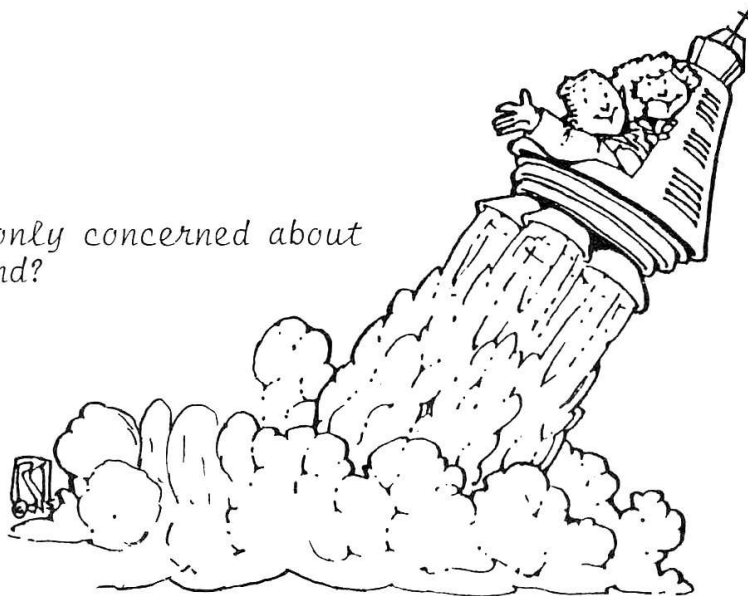
Closer to home, Xin Weisi claimed that certain churchmen overstepped their bounds and entered the political arena when, at the Kao Shan conference, they expressed, in Xin's words, "some radical ideas about political reform." What were these "radical" ideas? Apparently, support for direct elections and the idea of "one man - one vote" not being incompatible with the Christian faith. In this regard, let us again quote from the Vatican Council document Church in the Modern World:

It is fully consonant with human nature that there should be politico-juridical structures providing all citizens without any distinction with ever improving and effective opportunities to play an active part in the establishment of the juridical foundations of the political community, in the administration of public affairs, in determining the aims of public bodies, and in the election of political leaders. Every citizen ought to be mindful of his right and his duty to promote the common good by using his vote. (para. 75)

Thus to speak on behalf of direct elections does not seem to be "radical;" rather, it supports the legitimate right of the human person to have a say in his or her political destiny.

However, it should be pointed out that according to church law (canon #285), "clergy are forbidden to assume public office whenever it means sharing in the exercise of civil power." At the same time, canon #287 reads: "Clergy are to always do their utmost to foster among people peace and harmony based on justice," but "they are not to play an active role in political parties." The participation of the Catholic vicar-general in the Kao Shan meeting does not seem to violate these rules. He was not seeking public office or promoting a particular political party, but rather expressing a view on the justice of the notion of "one man - one vote".

*Is the Church only concerned about the world beyond?*



Regarding the addition of a clause about the "separation of church and state," we must be clear about what is meant here. In the West this phrase does not mean that church and state are not to have anything to do with one another, that there is to be mutual non-interference in each other's realms, as Xin Weisi apparently means. Rather, it means the non-establishment of any one religion as the official religion of a nation. Thus, the First Amendment of the constitution of the United States forbids Congress to make any law "respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." This clause about the non-establishment of a religion has come to be popularly known as the principle of "separation of church and state." Thus for instance the U.S. bishops are free to issue a pastoral letter on the U.S. economy, as they did last year, as part of their evangelical role of speaking out on injustices and inequality, but they cannot get financial aid from the government for their Catholic schools. The latter would be a case of supporting the establishment of a religion. As a result of lack of funds (and lack of religious priests, brothers and Sisters to teach in them), many Catholic schools have been forced to close their doors in recent years.

However, this is not Xin Weisi's meaning of "separation of church and state." If I understand him correctly, according to his meaning, even the U.S. bishops' document on the economy would be an example of the church overstepping its bounds, and getting involved in politics. Not understanding the origin and proper meaning of the term "separation of church and state," Xin therefore errs in his application of it to Hong Kong after 1997. To apply the principle to Hong Kong would mean to no longer support Anglicanism as the official, or established, religion of the territory after 1997.

Xin's greatest and most dangerous mistake, it seems to me, is when he makes a priori assumptions about Christianity which are not in accordance with reality. He describes religion (including Christianity) as being "aloof" from the world and arbitrarily labels certain social activities of the church as "being against the spirit of religion." Xin seems to speak of religion in Marxist categories. If so, Xin should recall the words of the December, 1984 PD commentary about Marx's 100 year old theories not being necessarily correct nor necessarily suitable to conditions

today, and apply them to his notions of religion. At the very least, in a spirit of "seeking truth from facts," he should inquire of religious believers how they see their faith, instead of making false assumptions about religion based on 100 year old theories. The danger here is that on the basis of his incorrect assumptions on the nature of religion, Xin wants to incorporate the principle of the separation of church and state (also misunderstood and wrongly applied) into the Basic Law. These assumptions are incorrect, and no law should be written based on false assumptions.

Perhaps the most important element in preserving the stability and prosperity of Hong Kong after 1997 is the confidence of Hong Kong citizens in the system's future. But if certain actions are taken by the Chinese authorities against religion based on false assumptions about its nature, then, this could do more to erode the confidence of the people and consequently do more harm to Hong Kong's stability and prosperity than the church's alleged "involvement in politics."

At the same time, the freedom and initiative of Hong Kong's people, which has brought about Hong Kong's present prosperity, ought not to be stifled, nor should the right of Hong Kong people to have a say in determining their future be suppressed. China has the chance to work a great marvel for all the world to see, if she keeps her word about "one country-two systems," and about granting Hong Kong "a large measure of autonomy." All the citizens of Hong Kong and her other friends from around the world hope that this can happen. Let everyone's opinion be taken into account, then, as they work to bring a successful transition about.

Xin Weisi has called for criticisms and suggestions about his opinions. I hope many people, especially religious believers, will respond. Actually, there are common elements of agreement in the discussion which have already emerged, e.g., clergymen not running for or holding public office, or the church not becoming a political party. However, other areas on the subject of the relationship between church and state need to be clarified. Only by an earnest and forthright exchange of ideas will misunderstandings be avoided. The above remarks are some personal reflections offered as a contribution to the ongoing dialogue.