



FROM THE EDITOR



At about the same time as a heated debate raged in the pages of Hong Kong's Ming Pao daily on the topic of the separation of Church and State, the Catholic Diocese was conducting a seminar on Constitutions and Religious Freedom. This will give you some small indication of the energy being directed here to the religious issue as Hong Kong approaches 1997 and its return to Chinese sovereignty. Our Centre was one of the seminar's sponsors, the others being the Diocesan Basic Law Committee, the Social Communications Office, and the Catholic Institute for Religion and Society. The seminar, which was held at the end of last year, brought together legal experts from a variety of countries in a comparative study of the ways different societies approach religion in their local constitutions and international agreements. All of this is played against the backdrop of the on-going drafting of the Basic Law, which is to rule Hong Kong after 1997. For the people of Hong Kong, religious freedom and its associated human rights issue are, at this stage of the game, of more than passing interest. They raise hard, practical questions demanding concrete resolution. It is strongly felt that extensive input is vital before legal decisions are made that will determine this people's future. And that was the reason for the seminar.

In this issue Tripod reprints some of the major papers delivered at the seminar. We are grateful to the participants for their permission to allow us to bring this material to you. We begin with Hong Kong Queen's Counsel Mr. Anthony Rogers' review of English common laws, its relevance to present legislation here in Hong Kong and its attitude towards religion both here and in England. Of particular interest is his indication of religion as not only being an object of protection by the law but also as one of its sources.

Richard Bush is an American professor of religion at Oklahoma City University. His article is a study of the modern Chinese constitutions, analyzing the place religious freedom plays in each, and the traditional Chinese cultural concepts on which they are based.

Ms. Iris Y.L. Tsang is a legal advisor for the Hong Kong Christian Council, a leading advocate for religious freedom and human rights. Her focus is Hong Kong, past and present, and how the people of Hong Kong have always taken their religious freedom for granted. She offers some very concrete proposals for maintaining its present status and for providing future guarantees through the Basic Law.

We trust you will find all three articles rich in scope and content. Certainly the religious freedom issue is not only timely for Hong Kong, but vital to every society and system of government as being a gauge whereby its authentic commitment to the welfare of all of its people can be measured.

Finally, Peter Barry, one of our editors, presents a summary of the Ming Pao debate on religion and politics, and adds his personal reflections.

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