

•From The Editor•

As the countdown to 1997 continues in Hong Kong, so also do the debates and controversies about Hong Kong's modus operandi after the return of sovereignty to China. While the terms of the Sino-British Joint Declaration have found acceptance among the general public, there remain many practical problems that have to be worked out if the transition is to be smooth and successful. Of paramount concern these days is the work of the Basic Law Drafting Committee, which is in the process of hammering out the legislation that will govern the territory for the first fifty years of its new life. The secrecy under which the Committee have been obliged to work has done little to quell the fears or stifle the initiatives for political reform among the populace. The present debate over "direct elections" is just one indication of the mood of the general public. Long considered apolitical and apathetic, the Hong Kong citizenry is now showing definite signs that it will not stand idly by while its future is determined for it from above. With heated arguments adding its toll to the already sweltering summer, Tripod once again turns its focus on the Church in Hong Kong as it moves irrevocably towards 1997 and its destiny.

Our first article is by Peter Cheung Ka-hing, who is the executive director of the newly established Catholic Institute for Religion and Society, the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong's vehicle of social pastoral concern. In his analysis of the Church's responses to the ever-changing realities of Hong Kong during major periods of its recent past, Peter looks for keys to the future and possible new responses to the reality presented by 1997.

In any discussion of the Joint Declaration and the return of sovereignty, a crucial point has to be religious freedom...if not in theory, certainly in practise. We reprint an address given by Rev. Hans Lutz to a church sponsored symposium held in Hong Kong last year. Rev. Lutz is a member of the executive committee on the Hong Kong Christian Council and well-equipped to deal with some of the problems Protestant churches are facing with regard to the religious freedom issue.

Of even more practical concern is how religious freedom is to be spelled out in the Basic Law. Tripod includes in this issue a report of a meeting called by Master Jueguang and Bp. Peter Kwong, two religious

representatives on the Drafting Committee, to up-date religious leaders here on the progress being made towards formulating legal texts to insure that religious freedom is maintained in accord with the present understanding of the concept among Hong Kong's local religious groups. From the audience response, one can see how the articulation of rights and freedoms in legal language is not easy, nor is creditability something that is to be given the legislators merely for the asking.

Peter Barry concludes this clutch of articles on the local church scene with his own commentary on the on-going controversy over direct elections. He sees the issue as central in maintaining the kind of creditability and confidence among local people that is necessary to insure Hong Kong's future stability and progress. To ignore the ground swell for more self-determination may well place in jeopardy the one goal which all interested parties share... the prosperity of Hong Kong.

Another important aspect in the changeover of sovereignty is the relationship of Christian churches of Hong Kong to the Christian churches on the mainland. The Chinese government has already articulated a policy of non-intervention and self-determination in regard to Hong Kong's churches, but what kind of relationship will emerge from the new political situation? Tripod continues to show its concern for this most sensitive issue by bringing to our readers the views of two of the mainland churches' most articulate leaders. Both Bishop K.H. Ting, who is the chairman of the Chinese Protestant Three-Self Movement, and Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian, auxiliary bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Shanghai, have appeared in our pages before. They are among the few mainland Chinese Christian spokesman who receive regular press coverage outside of China. In this issue, Bishop Ting addresses the relationship of mainland and Hong Kong churches directly, while Bishop Jin continues to inform those outside of China of the historical difficulties that have brought to pass the present problems of church unity that continue to stand in the way of communion with the universal Catholic church outside China.

With the struggle for unity among and within the Christian churches being underlined by the inevitable union of Hong Kong with China, we thought it an appropriate time to bring to our readers' attention a document from the past which could well serve as a working model for how churches can go about the task of christian reconciliation in a dialogue based on mutual recognition and respect. Our final article is the joint statement composed by Anglican and Roman Catholic churchmen and theologians entitled 'Authority in the Church' and first issued in 1977. We trust our readers will find it interesting, provocative and quite relevant to today's task of furthering christian ecumenism.