

# Hong Kong Roman Catholic Church and 1997

A SEMINAR HELD IN HONGKONG, JANUARY, 1989

## A Discussion Paper



## I. INTRODUCTION

On July 1, 1997, after 150 years of British colonial rule, Hong Kong will be returned to Chinese sovereignty as a Special Administrative Region. The historical problem that began with the Treaty of Nanking, which ended the first Opium War, is now resolved. However, the political problem of sorting out the transition has only just begun.

Over the past 40 years, Hong Kong has grown from a refugee shelter into a highly developed urban society. An important factor in its present stability and prosperity has been the British administrative system. The question that is now being asked is whether or not Beijing will be successful in maintaining the city's stability and prosperity. Those who respond negatively to the question tend to offer three general alternative approaches to a solution. The first group would minimize direct control from Beijing by establishing a democratic form of government through free elections. Such a government would be able to withstand pressure from Beijing and safeguard Hong Kong's present way of life, including its basic freedoms and human rights. A second approach is to place maximum focus on Hong Kong's economic development. This group would strive to continue Hong Kong's role as a useful and effective source of revenue and foreign exchange for China. It would lay politics and democratic elections to one side in an effort to keep Beijing happy with the hope that Hong Kong would be allowed to go its own way. The third group offers a final solution, which is to emigrate. As our parents escaped communist rule during the 1950's by coming to Hong Kong, so now it is our turn to move on, seeking refuge in such free

countries as Canada, the United States and Australia, before the People's Liberation Army marches across the border.

The issue of 1997 has also had a great impact on Hong Kong's Roman Catholic community. Through the past few decades, the Church has been viewed somewhat as a cooperative partner in government. And the church-state relationship has provided a framework for the Church's continuing development, allowing it to expand its educational and social welfare networks, which in turn are also linked to her pastoral ministries. 1997 will bring about fundamental changes in government. No longer will the Church be dealing with a British government that is basically sympathetic and supportive. After 1997, the Church will fall directly under the responsibility of the People's Republic, which is actively atheistic, socialist and harbours a history of suspicion about Christianity.

Among church people in Hong Kong, there are in general two responses to this situation. One is a strong inclination to maintain the status quo, while the other is to see in the historical situation an opportunity for church renewal, a chance to develop a Chinese-Hong Kong church, with its own Chinese cultural identity, sharing the destiny of the local Chinese people, and taking an active part in shaping the future.

In this paper, we wish to present various challenges confronting the church in Hong Kong as it moves towards 1997. Each section is written by a different author. The editorial board, aside from eliminating duplications in the material, is responsible for the final section "Direction for the Future". We are also grateful to Fr. Eugene Thalman, M.M. for his help in the final draft.

