

IV. CHURCH AND STATE



by Beatrice Leung

The Catholic Church in Hong Kong since the signing of the Sino-British Agreement in 1984 has appeared more political than before in its approach. Church leaders, like the chaplains of the Catholic Youth Council, the Federation of Catholic Students, the priest director of the Catholic Social Media have become more vocal in giving opinions on current social and political issues, such as the direct election in 1988, the Basic Law, and many more issues related to these.

Sometimes, Catholic Church leaders enter into coalition with social activists and non-Catholic pressure groups for united actions. Although these Catholic leaders claim that their involvements are in the capacity of an individual, yet no one in the society will take these as not being the involvement of the Catholic Church.

Their criticism has not necessarily focused on the out-going British Hong Kong government but has also extended sometimes to the incoming Chinese government and its Hong Kong policies. However, if these institutes were to continue to receive financial subsidies from the Special Administrative Regional government, as they do from the Hong Kong government, one has reason to expect that they will receive strong pressure to compromise in return, because whenever financial support is given, collaboration is expected from the recipient.

Not even 1% of Catholics in Hong Kong are involved in campaigning for justice and peace in this manner. On the other hand many Catholics, including many Catholic leaders of high position in the hierarchy are

rather detached from these social issues. The prelate though refuses to be involved directly in these issues and jeopardise his harmonious relation with the government. Yet he does not put a brake to all these involvements. The Cardinal of Hong Kong can stop any Catholic in his diocese from playing these socio-political games if he wants to. Here, it reveals that indirectly he gives leeway to his Catholics to engage in these socio-political struggles campaigning against social evils.

CATHOLIC CHURCH AFTER 1997

On Moral and Doctrinal Problems

The church and state relations in Hong Kong Catholic diocese largely depends on to what degree the Chinese government can tolerate the Catholic Church, especially if the latter wishes to continue its prophetic role of criticising the government in the name of justice and peace. Yet the Catholic Church's service in the fields of education, medicine and social welfare has been playing a considerably important role in the society. Are these Catholic institutes prepared to compromise to the demands of the government, when some national policies are not compatible with Catholic teaching? Where can the Church draw the bottom line of compromise in some sensitive and critical issues, such as, abortion as back up to family planning and the teaching of Marxism-Leninism in schools, and above all the question of independence from Rome? Although all these demands might appear in full scale only after 50 years, the Catholics in Hong Kong have to be prepared to survive after the termination of the 50 years of the 'one nation two systems' period.

Its Role in Modernisation

As a social organisation, in the eyes of the Chinese Government the Catholic Church is expected to participate in modernisation. What is the obligation of the Hong Kong Catholics to this great concern of China? Is there any contribution Hong Kong Catholics can make in this line? The Holy Father has called upon the overseas Chinese Catholics, including the Catholics in Hong Kong, to be the bridge enabling the Chinese Catholic Church to resume its communion with the Universal Church. What kind of bridge can Hong Kong Catholics build? What kind of assistance can the Hong Kong Church give to the local church in China to enable it to enhance its contribution to the modernisation programme?

While making friends with the Chinese Government and demonstrating the goodwill of the Catholic Church by cooperating with the Government

does in many ways manifest what the Holy Father said to the Chinese at Manila, "a good Christian can be a good citizen" (Sunday Examiner 28 February, 1981) can be put into practice, still when the Catholics encounter social problems such as family planning, how are they expected to act? Are they expected to become good Christians by following the Church's teaching on contraception or are they expected to become good citizens by following the state regulation regarding birth control?

In general, China has become more sophisticated in its approach, especially in many foreign and domestic issues. Facts have revealed that being too arbitrary in its approach to the people of Hong Kong will only accelerate the brain drain. We have reason to anticipate that China will not apply any prompt measures like those in the mainland in the 50's to aggravate the state and church conflict, but it is not impossible that gradual and subtle pressure will be applied to the Hong Kong Catholics who do not comply with demands because of their religious belief. What will church leaders do to help their grassroot Catholics cope with pressure in the form of social discrimination because of their Christian faith? It is expected that an appropriate programme on the formation of laity will be very relevant to their needs.

V. CHURCH AND SOCIETY



by Christine Tse

From the period of time beginning in 1949 up until the 1970's, the Hong Kong church addressed social issues mainly through establishing welfare services. The poor who were served by the church were concerned with their immediate needs such as food, housing, schooling, etc. They