

# *Society and the Catholic Church of Hong Kong toward 1997*

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## **Introduction**

Hong Kong's evolution from fishing village to commercial centre, and its transfer of sovereignty from China to Great Britain was accomplished in three stages. First, Hong Kong Island itself was ceded to Britain in 1842 by the Treaty of Nanjing. The Kowloon Peninsula was added 18 years later by the Treaty of Beijing in 1860. Finally, in 1898 Britain obtained a 99 year lease of the New Territories, by far the largest of the three land masses; thus completing the composite we know today as the Crown Colony of Hong Kong.



The problem of 1997 arose when China, in talks about renewing the lease, reclaimed sovereignty over the whole territory. After a period of prolonged negotiation the Joint Declaration was signed by both governments on 19 December, 1984. It stipulated that Hong Kong and all its territories would revert to China and become a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic on July 1, 1997. It also stated that its capitalist social system would be kept unchanged for the first 50 years.

The Basic Law which was to govern Hong Kong during this duration was promulgated by the National People's Congress in April of 1990, after five years of discussion and consultation. It gives Hong Kong a high degree of autonomy. It also guarantees the continuance of the present administrative system and the life style of its people.

The Basic Law states clearly that after 1997 the government of the Special Administrative Region will not restrict religious

freedom nor interfere in the internal affairs of its religious organizations, nor impede religious activities that do not contravene the laws of the Special Administrative Region. However, the right to modify the Basic Law is retained by the National People's Congress and the authority to interpret the law is retained by its Standing Committee. Many Hong Kong people have shown a lack of faith in the future by taking steps to emigrate elsewhere.

In the atmosphere of apprehension caused by the signing of the Joint Declaration at that time, Cardinal Wu issued a formal statement about the territory's future to the Catholics of our diocese. He called upon us to take pride in our three-fold identity: as Chinese, as Hong Kong citizens and as Catholics. As Chinese, we must value all that is rich and positive in our cultural tradition, but at the same time we must expand our feelings of patriotism to embrace the larger world. As citizens of Hong Kong, we must continue to work together with our fellow citizens to maintain our stability and prosperity, but more importantly, we should also work to insure a balanced development of the spiritual as well as the material aspects of our society. Finally, as Catholics we are to stand firm for freedom of religion as a fundamental human right given by God to all. The Cardinal urged us further to preserve our communion with the universal Church under the leadership of the Pope, while continuing to develop our special charisms as a local church, and to show forth by our lives a Christian spirit of service to society.

On his two visits to mainland China, once in 1985 and again in 1986, the Cardinal said on more than one occasion that the time had come for the diocese of Hong Kong to contribute to China's modernization with the same spirit and dedication that it has contributed to the welfare of Hong Kong. He also said that the church in Hong Kong had a bridge role to play in facilitating a more positive and unifying relationship between the local church in China and the universal Church. Later in his pastoral letter *March into the Bright Future* (1989), he urged us Catholics of Hong Kong to take as one of our highest priorities the Christian task of reconciliation, with special concern for our mainland brothers and sisters, and to develop small faith communities in which this can be more effectively accomplished.

I would like now to offer in more detail some comments

on what I have mentioned above about Hong Kong, its current state and future possibilities.

## I. "One Country, Two Systems"

With regard to the "One Country Two Systems" which is promised in the Joint Declaration and Basic Law, can these documents guarantee that Hong Kong will not experience any abrupt changes after 1997? I don't think so. It seems much more likely that the fluctuations of China's internal affairs over the next 50 years will in the end be the deciding factor for changes in Hong Kong.

Chinese leadership tends toward two different mind-sets, pragmatists and ideologists, and the "One Country, Two Systems" is open to interpretation by both groups.

Pragmatists tend to pay lip service to Communist ideology. For example, they tend to ignore such directives of the past as the Four Cardinal Principles (socialism, dictatorship of the proletariat, Party leadership and Marxist, Leninist, Maoist Thought) all but disregarding them in favour of more pragmatic policies in the present. They retain the vocabulary as a matter of form, but ignore it when it comes to practical planning. Many in Hong Kong are hoping that this group of leaders will be able to break through the restrictive ideology of the past and carry China forward into a brighter future. They could be receptive to the idea of "One Country, Two Systems" provided China would allow the capitalistic system to continue in order to insure a prosperous Hong Kong.

On the other hand, many Chinese leaders are still Marxists and remain loyal to the socialist road. While they are not above making slight concessions in the face of current realities, they still remain Marxists at heart. Professor Liu Shusheng of Chinese University of Hong Kong says of them: "All they can talk about is the superiority of socialism, and I have no reason to doubt their sincerity and faith."<sup>1</sup> For many of them one country two systems means socialist China only needs to borrow some economic methods from the capitalistic system. When Qian Junrui, an economist and adviser to the Academy of Social Sciences addressed an important meeting in Hangzhou in July of 1984, he outlined the direction the Party and Central Govern-

ment must take in the next half-century. Stating that the One Country Two Systems policy should serve as a model for China, he interpreted it in this way: "The government has been using capitalism to upgrade socialism by opening up ports and developing special economic zones to encourage trade and investments. At the same time we promote a "spiritual" civilization (i.e. socialist ideology) throughout the country. In sixty years we shall have created a China that will enjoy both an excellent material and spiritual civilization." Qian then added: "This is the direction we have taken with Hong Kong and is in line with our plans to develop the whole country."<sup>2</sup>. This promotion of capitalistic methods that does not engender in the individual the values of a capitalist society might strike the observer as wishful thinking. How can one separate the economic world from the spiritual world, which Qian sees as guided by socialistic ideals? But no one can deny that China in its relationship to the outside capitalistic world still struggles and will continue to struggle to obtain the best of both possible worlds. However, the result may be just the opposite of what they intended and suddenly they may find that they themselves are being transformed by capitalism.

When Margaret Thatcher visited Hong Kong in early 1992, she predicted that the current capitalistic economy of Hong Kong would continue to assert a great influence on the economy of Southern China, and this must eventually lead to a political reform in the mainland government. The experience of Taiwan and South Korea proves that, as the economy of the region develops, a middle class gradually emerges. With better educational opportunities, the middle class people begin to think more independently, to respect truth, to recognize the dignity of the individual person and to value freedom and openness in a society. People become convinced that the government should be responsible to the people. They call for the promotion of human rights and democracy. These new attitudes do not depend on outside influences; rather, in any region, they will spring up from deep within the people themselves. I am not praising capitalism as such. Nowadays there can be no successful capitalistic society that does not integrate some elements from socialism. A sound legal system and the cultivation of personal integrity are required for the progress of any society.

## II. Chinese Political Character

As 1997 approaches Hong Kong will be more and more subject to China's influence. As Chinese Catholics we must be guided by a spirit of solidarity and a readiness to dialogue. As our contacts and opportunities for working together with Communist authorities increase in frequency, we must make this clear distinction between an unacceptable atheistic ideology and the acceptability of working with persons whose beliefs are different from our own. We stand ready to cooperate with others for the greater good of society even if this means sacrifice, but we cannot compromise on fundamental matters of faith--to do so would be to betray who and what we are.

In the future, in our dialogue with the Communist authorities, we must be aware of the following: first, the "bottom line" of Beijing's policy towards Hong Kong, secondly, China's interpretation of reality in its own characteristic way, and thirdly, the difference that exists between "public" and "private" statements.

The "bottom line" denotes the outer limits of central government policy; to go beyond risks walking into forbidden and dangerous territory, i.e. directly challenging central government authority. The "bottom line" can vary with the policy, be it domestic or foreign, but for our purposes here it refers to the parameters of the relationship of authority between the central government and the government of the future Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. According to Appendix 1 of the Joint Declaration, "The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region is to be under the direct jurisdiction of the central government of the People's Republic of China, *and* it will enjoy a high degree of autonomy." But how high is this *high degree of autonomy*? At that time the former Foreign Minister, Wu Xueqian, at a meeting of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress drew the "bottom line" when he stated the high degree of autonomy does not include the sphere of practical political realities. In other words, the "bottom line" of the relationship of authority means that Hong Kong will not be "independent of," nor allowed to "seek independence," from Beijing's centralized control<sup>3</sup>.

For centuries, China considered herself to be the centre of

civilization. Barbarian nations who were willing to pay their allegiance to her and offer her tribute would not only be spared her antagonism but on the contrary they would be rewarded for their efforts. The Chinese communists also are heirs to this same authoritarian tradition. This means they are open to persuasion but not to coercion and open confrontation is for them a matter of "face" as well as principle. Some time ago leaders and some prominent Hong Kong intellectuals ran an advertisement in the local newspaper containing the following statement: "We think that the people of Hong Kong and the Chinese government should try to understand one another, and work to establish a basis of mutual trust." This aroused Beijing's dissatisfaction as it seemed to put "the Chinese government" and "the people of Hong Kong" on an equal footing and did not recognize the subservient relationship of central authority over and above local authority, a failure to distinguish between the role of leadership and of those being led. China felt that the Hong Kong people owed loyalty and faith to the Chinese government, and "mutual trust and understanding" was not the point of issue at all.<sup>4</sup>

Professor Shen Xuanren of the Chinese University of Hong Kong points out that in China there are really great differences between "public statement" and "private utterance". This has also been referred to as "on-stage and backstage" language. The people receive the "public word" from the mass media or from official documents such as editorials in the *People's Daily*. They listen, study, digest, and memorize this on-stage language and give it back when speaking in public places. They will do this especially when talking to or in front of foreigners. Only when a climate of mutual trust has been established will they risk using the "private word" or "backstage language" to speak their minds and reveal what is really in their hearts. You will, of course, also, find some resourceful and daring people making use of the "public vocabulary" to attack abuses in the system which have been widely expressed in private. An example of this is a group of young people in Guangzhou City who a few years back, under the pen name of "Li Yi Zhe", used the vocabulary of Mao Zedong thought to expose the corrupt practices of officials.<sup>5</sup> How does one distinguish the different levels of speaking in China? Much depends on a knowledge and careful observation of China's language, culture and political history.

### III. Hong Kong's Historical Role

Mr. Lee Kwan Yew, former Prime Minister of Singapore, in an address delivered in Hong Kong last December, pointed out in a rather general way: "Hong Kong's most important and advantageous factor is its legal system. This is the basic social structure which Shanghai and the whole of China will find the most valuable but the most difficult to establish.<sup>6</sup> But Professor Shen Xuanren described the historical role of Hong Kong in a more detailed way. According to Professor Shen, over the past three decades Hong Kong's economy has really taken off. This has largely been the result of the hard work and effort of the Hong Kong people. However, other important factors have also contributed to its stability and prosperity. First and foremost among them has been its legal system (originally British). Rule by law has protected, by and large, basic human rights and freedom. All citizens enjoy freedom of religion, of speech, of free association and personal mobility, the right to an education, choice of employment and residence. The industrial and commercial sectors, of course, also enjoy great freedom from government interference in carrying out their business. This rule of law, and the freedom it guarantees, has created in Hong Kong a sophisticated, pluralistic, and highly developed society, and one that is stable and prosperous.

Hong Kong citizens have become known throughout the world for their self-reliance, practical wisdom and creativity. They are enterprising and not afraid to take risks, especially when it comes to their economy where they are constantly developing new business concepts and methods. They have also produced a continuous flow of outstanding entrepreneurs from each new generation.

Hong Kong has also served as a place of refuge for those fleeing totalitarian governments or natural disasters. After 1949 a great number of Chinese refugees fled to Hong Kong from the mainland. Hong Kong gave them a place of rest, a taste of freedom, and the chance to make a new start. In recent years numerous refugees have come from Vietnam. So, the rule of law, freedom, the spirit of creativity and humanitarianism, all these are the ingredients which give meaning and value to the existence of Hong Kong. They also comprise the most important

contribution it can make to China.<sup>7</sup>

A Hong Kong government adviser has said that he is full of hope and optimism regarding Hong Kong's future. He based his opinion not on its material situation, but on the time-tested capability of the Hong Kong people to overcome all difficulties. He reminded his audience that at the time of the Second World War many citizens fled Hong Kong during the Japanese occupation only to return to rebuild in a very short time a city of international significance. He spoke of the 1950's when Hong Kong was deluged by refugees from the China mainland, most of them penniless and with only the clothes on their back. Yet Hong Kong quickly absorbed them, providing them with homes, food and jobs, and in return these refugees helped to make Hong Kong prosper and flourish. In 1967 while the Cultural Revolution raged out of control in China, Hong Kong experienced serious civil disturbances, but the city quickly quieted down. Hong Kong is without any natural resources; it relies solely on human resources. Its tourism industry is flourishing; its commercial and business enterprises are well developed; and it is one of the world's leading financial centres. Its frenetic and fast-paced rhythm of life have made its people highly adaptable to change. Today, great strides are being made in the economy of neighbouring Guangdong Province. This factor is rapidly closing the gap in the standard of living which has existed between the two places. All this bodes well for Hong Kong and leaves little room for pessimism about its future.

#### **IV. The Future of the Catholic Church in Hong Kong**

The Catholic Church came to Hong Kong in 1841. It is now the largest religious organization in the territory. It is also numerically the largest Chinese Catholic diocese in the world. According to statistics released in August, 1992, Catholics now number 350,000, which includes the nearly 90,000 Filipinas who work in Hong Kong as domestic helpers. There are 350 priests, evenly divided between Chinese and foreign. Sisters number 700, with Chinese Sisters in majority, and there are 70 religious Brothers and seminarians. The diocese has 63 parish churches. It administers 6 hospitals, 9 clinics, 275 schools with



nearly 300,000 students, 14 social service organizations, 11 hostels, 29 homes for the aged and centres for the handicapped. The church indeed contributes greatly to the social welfare and development of Hong Kong and its people.

Although many Catholics continue to emigrate to foreign countries, their number is replaced by 2,000 adult converts and 2000 children baptized each year, who bring much vitality to the church. Local clergy are taking over the leadership roles in the diocese. Both clergy and religious are given a variety of opportunities to go abroad for updating and renewal courses. The laity are gradually assuming more and more pastoral responsibilities in the parishes. About 500 lay Catholics are enrolled in the evening Bible and theology courses run by Major Seminary professors. Many deepen their faith by joining small groups that meet at a definite time each week for Scripture reflection and prayer. All of these are positive developments in the Hong Kong church.

Article 148 of the Basic Law reads: "The relationship between the religious organizations in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Regions and their counterparts on the mainland shall be based on the principles of non-subordination, non-interference and mutual respect." However, as 1997 moves closer the reciprocal influence of the local churches is unavoidable. We cannot but analyze the situation of the church on the mainland in some depth. In response to historical and political factors, the Communist government demanded that the church on the mainland maintain independence and sever its ties with the Vatican and the Pope. The Chinese church has been forced to carry out a policy of "self-government, self-support and self-propagation." One aim of this policy was to eliminate the influences of Western culture by expelling the foreign missionaries. However, the "Three Self" principle, as such need not in every case be opposed to Church teaching. Post-Vatican II theology emphasized that indigenization is as necessary as universality. It seems to me that it is only necessary to reverse the order of emphasis and to place "self-propagation" first. Self-support and self-government will naturally follow. This is not only sound ecclesiology but also in accordance with the Gospel spirit. Why should "self-propagation" be the first of the "Three Self" principles? Because it follows the order of Vatican II's *Constitution on the Church* where we speak first about the People of God,

and then talk about the church's hierarchical structure. At the time of baptism each Christian is given a pastoral mission. Each shares in the priestly, kingly and prophetic role of Christ. We are to take up the task of preaching the Gospel, which is a "self-propagating" ministry. As Catholics mature, nourishing their lives through the Scriptures and prayer, they will deepen their sense of belonging to the Church. Naturally, they will then give more to sustain the community, thus achieving the goal of "self-support." At the same time the sprouts of church leadership and religious life will spontaneously appear in the Christian community, eventually producing qualified and capable priests, Sisters and Brothers to fulfill the requirement of "self-government." Such clergy and church leaders will then most likely become involved in developing an indigenous theology which will blend the positive values of traditional culture with divine revelation and church tradition. This would help greatly in resolving many problems that arise within the local church and contribute to the universal church.

The Hong Kong church is following this path under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Many parishes already have trained their lay people to take up various pastoral ministries including ministry of the word and the sacramental ministries. The laity bring Holy Communion to the sick, lead prayer groups, or preside at liturgical services in the absence of a priest. This is already quite common practice. What is even more remarkable is the number of lay Catholics who volunteer as catechists and take responsibility for parish catechumenates. Bible study groups continue to grow and expand and Catholics are becoming more aware of their responsibility to support the church materially. The one regret we have is that vocations to the priesthood and religious life are still in short supply. Many religious congregations have only one or two aspirants, and in the last few years, only one new seminarian has entered the diocesan seminary each year. So, "self-government" in the diocese is a goal still to be attained.

Foreign missionaries still account for half the priests in Hong Kong. Their presence, besides helping to solve the heavy pastoral workload of the local church, also adds to the pluralistic nature of the Hong Kong diocese. They also serve as reminders to the local church of its mission mandate to preach the Gospel to the non-believer.

In the past when China's self image was weakened by inner turmoil and outside pressure, its citizens tended to accept as superior everything that was foreign. In addition, the local Chinese church was overly dependent on foreign churches for money and personnel. The older generation of Catholics still have a high regard for the foreign missionaries. Today local clergy are assuming more and more of the leadership roles in the local church and foreign missionaries are stepping back into auxiliary roles. What attitude should the foreign missionaries adopt in this new role? What contribution can they still make to the local church? Many find themselves in a perplexing situation. Some who in the past held positions of authority and enjoyed the accompanying prestige find it difficult to adapt to the present reality. They are often critical of and unsatisfied with the new turn in events, even at times making their complaints known in the mass media. The younger generation of foreign missionaries have a feeling of uncertainty, of not knowing what course to take. Some choose a passive role, not willing to take any initiative. Others will now and again express an opinion but when objections are raised by members of the Chinese clergy or Catholics, who in their eyes represent the "Chinese point of view," they make a prudent retreat. Actually, I think that the foreign missionaries should be definite about one important fact, namely, that they come from a background and culture where the faith is much older and more deep-seated than that of the local Catholics and clergy. Through their contacts with local Catholics they contribute in a special way. This rich deposit of faith helps to remind the local church to measure its faith in terms of what is lasting and eternal. While the strong point of the local clergy is that they are able in themselves to integrate the faith into local life and culture, the special contribution of the foreign missionaries is that they transmit the deposit of faith and help to deepen it in the local church communities.

Father Secundo Einaudi, a former Vicar General of the Hong Kong Diocese, pointed out that the Hong Kong local church has not been above the negative influence of the local society. Some church people following the modern trend of individualism think that nothing is more important than success. They tend to forget about the values of Christian detachment, poverty and selfless service. The foreign missionaries' gracious withdrawal to less obvious and more humble roles in service to

the church is a powerful witness to these Christian values. And it serves as a constant reminder to the local church of the theological meaning of "the cross." We are all aware that in Communist countries the Catholic Church's activities are subject to grave restrictions. While the Basic Law guarantees the situation in Hong Kong will be different, the Hong Kong church must still be prepared for any eventuality.<sup>8</sup> I think the example foreign missionaries give by assuming more humble roles of service, is a reminder to the local church that it must base its hope on sinking its roots into deeper ground. Even if in the future freedom of religion is compromised and outward religious activity and the freedom to preach the Gospel are subject to government restrictions, the Hong Kong church will still be present to bear witness to the Gospel. In such circumstances, the faith of the Hong Kong church will deepen and become stronger.

## **V. Diocesan Role as Bridge Church**

Since the late 1970's when Deng Xiaoping assumed political power and the Communist Party began to promote the four modernizations, religious believers in China have been treated with a greater degree of tolerance and allowed more room for activity. However, Article 36 of the 1982 Constitution, which is concerned specifically with religious belief, still makes a distinction between "freedom to believe in religion" and "religious activity." It points out that the state protects "normal" religious activity. In other words, religious activities which have not obtained government approval are always open to the possibility of being labeled "counter-revolutionary". Furthermore, in 1980 at the government's urging the Catholic Church in China reorganized its structures. The Patriotic Association, first established in 1957, was then sub-divided into three groups, namely, the Patriotic Association, the Church Administrative Commission, and the Bishops' Conference. However, in September, 1992 they reverted to two groups. The Patriotic Association will still be responsible for the Church's external affairs, while the Bishops' Conference will be responsible for its internal affairs. However, the relationship between the two bodies is not clearly spelled out. Moreover, in several cases the

same people hold positions of authority in both of the organizations. Placing this to one side, we can see from the statistics - about 3,000 churches reopened along with 24 seminaries and more than 37 Sisters' novitiates - that the Communist government has shown a certain sincerity in its open door policy.

As a result of over 30 years of isolation from the outside world, many bishops and priests in the open church live and work under trying conditions. Personally, they face a number of psychological and spiritual problems; from without they also must face the difficulties of catching up with the spirit of Vatican Council II. Their most important problems at the present time, however, are not doctrinal, but pastoral.

The majority of Catholics in China (4 million according to official statistics, but 8 to 10 million from unofficial estimates) including clergy are very loyal to their faith. Their courageous loyalty, which has made great contributions to preserving the integrity of the faith, is worthy of our admiration. However, they are almost completely cut off from present day church trends, especially from an ecclesiology that stresses community and the necessity for Christians to live as brothers and sisters, giving support and encouragement to one another. They could be more open, more understanding, and more compassionate towards efforts to foster communion among all Catholics.

In order to receive the sacraments, Catholics who do not belong to the Patriotic Association will some times attend a church which is administered by the Association. In some places joining or not joining the Patriotic Association has become irrelevant. Some clergy, who in the past refused to join the Association and spent many years in prison, now for the sake of the Church's future and also for present pastoral needs have come forward to take up their priestly work again.

China's social and political situation is in a continual state of flux. It is difficult to paint a clear and complete picture of the church that will include all its variations. She has suffered many deep wounds in her recent past, which only love can cure. She is a pluralistic church which at one and the same time faces both crises and opportunities. She is subject to great pressures, but at the same time continues to received abundant graces. The Chinese Catholic Church has been under even greater pressure since the "June 4th" crackdown and the political changes in Eastern Europe. The government has adopted even stricter

measures in its dealing with the "Underground Church." However, after the visit of Deng Xiaoping to the southern part of China in early 1992, China's political climate has turned warmer and thus the Church is enjoying more toleration. No matter what, the Holy Spirit is always with the Church, breaking through the barriers erected by systems, continuing the divine action as the church is led forward. The church continues to add many new members to its ranks each year, due to the life witness of many Catholics and catechetical instruction conducted within the boundaries of the church. Vocations to the priesthood and religious life are also flourishing. Many places have initiated programmes of liturgical reform.

Besides praying for the Church in China, Catholics throughout the world should heed the recent calls of the Pope in Manila, Seoul and the Vatican, and with fraternal affection seize the moment to show their concern in concrete ways. We should foster a balanced and prudent attitude, which is neither fearful nor naive, and through appropriate means, always avoiding unfortunate misunderstandings, offer Chinese Christians both spiritual and material support. In this way, we can help the Chinese church attain a reunification with the one, holy, catholic and apostolic universal church. At the same time, we would be helping to strengthen its foundations so that it will become a flourishing local church in China itself.

The Diocese of Hong Kong, because of the initiative and enthusiasm of many Catholics and clergy, along with the open situation of the mainland, offers China various kinds of assistance and exchanges: assistance in improving and developing social services in China, teaching theology and philosophy at the request of seminaries and convents, promoting liturgical reform in the Chinese Church, providing books to pastoral workers, funding the construction or restoration of seminaries, convents and churches, etc. Such assistance and exchanges are offered more formally through Caritas which emphasizes social services, and the Holy Spirit Study Centre which is concerned with pastoral formation. Because some of the work overlaps, all of the groups concerned maintain close contact with each other.

Caritas' connections with China began in 1980 when officials from the Shenzhen Economic Zone made a request for training courses in English, administration and hotel management. Since then Caritas has expanded its work to include a

broad base of government and church related services, mainly in the educational, medical and social areas. In 1986 Caritas set up a special fund that elicits donations from local people and outside funding agencies to finance its work in China. The primary motivation behind Caritas' involvement is to implement the Christian ideal of love in practical ways. The Gospel is not proclaimed explicitly but such service bears witness to the Gospel within the contexts of China's law.

Holy Spirit Study Centre represents a pastoral approach. The Centre was set up to enable the diocese to keep in touch with the changing situations in China and make appropriate responses. It fosters among the Catholics in the diocese, in union with the Universal Church, a sense of responsibility and concern for the church in China.

Since its foundation twelve years ago our Centre has been busy gathering documentation, furthering research, and encouraging active dialogue with mainland Catholics.

Our Centre subscribes to over 100 magazines and newspapers, most of which are in Chinese or English. These provide us with up-to-date documentary material. We publish a bi-monthly magazine, *TRIPOD*, that promotes interest in Christianity in China and dialogue with religious people on the mainland. We also publish monthly inserts-- *God Loves China* in the Chinese Catholic weekly and *China Bridge* in the English weekly. Their purpose is to help Hong Kong Catholics increase their knowledge of and concern for the church in China. We also send *Vox Mundi*, a monthly newsletter, to China in an effort to narrow the gap between the Church inside China and that which functions outside. In addition, our staff and researchers make frequent visits to the mainland to promote social exchange and personal dialogue. We serve as hosts for church groups from the People's Republic visiting Hong Kong. Upon request, we offer orientation sessions for individuals and groups from overseas intent on visiting China. Our Centre provides some assistance to the newly opened seminaries and novitiates in China, providing educational equipment, books and other materials for their use. Such assistance is supportive and advisory, and is a way in which the Centre can make a small contribution to the formation and training of China's future priests and religious.

When Cardinal Wu called me to his office in 1979 to inform

me of the diocese's wish to establish the Centre, he also indicated what he hoped would be its underlying philosophy. It should avoid being too far to the right or to far to the left. But rather it should pursue a path that would show that the diocese is open to dialogue with all parties while maintaining a firm commitment to Church policies, especially as outlined in the Second Vatican Council.

Cardinal Wu has encouraged us to use St. Augustine's principle to deal with divisions in the Church: "In necessary things, unity; in doubtful things, liberty; in all things, charity."

## **VI. The Bridge Church Role of the Parishes**

Because of the land connection between Hong Kong and China, the close blood ties among its citizens, and the attraction arising from China's open-door policy, more and more Hong Kong Catholics desire to show their concern for their brothers and sisters in the mainland Church.

In the early 1980's, when China's open-door policy was just getting under way, a sense of mystery was still prevalent regarding the mainland. The real situation of the Chinese Catholic Church was not very well understood by people outside of China. Members of the Holy Spirit Study Centre were frequently called upon by the parishes to introduce the situation of the Church in China to their pious societies or catechumenates, and to point out that the Hong Kong Church could learn from the experience of the Church in China. Catechists in many parishes made the experience of the Chinese Church part of their teaching curriculum. Such classes also aroused the interest of other parish members, and was welcomed by them.

As China's door opens wider, more and more Hong Kong Catholics go there for sightseeing or for doing business. Many of them have established friendships with mainland Catholics, and have maintained contact with them even after they have returned to Hong Kong. These Catholics have organized prayer groups in their parishes to pray for the Chinese Church and for the Chinese people. They have also organized tour groups to visit the famous churches and pilgrimage sites on the motherland. Back in Hong Kong, these Catholics have initiated and organized small groups of people who are concerned about the



Catholics in China. They maintain contact with them, help them with their spiritual and material needs, such as furnishing them with books and religious articles. In this way they have increased their mutual friendship. At the same time, groups concerned about China have often attracted Catholics who were suspicious of the Chinese Church. Many of these today have become instead Catholics concerned for the Church in China.

Father Aloysius B. Chang, a famous Jesuit theologian in Taiwan, talking about the present situation of the official and the unofficial Church in China, reminded the "bridge builders" what their fundamental attitude should be. He clearly pointed out there are many levels of communion existing within the Christian community: all Christians belong to the same Church of Jesus Christ, share the same Trinitarian life of grace, have received the same baptism and read the same scriptures. All are asked to avoid mutual antagonism and to promote greater cooperation. But our Catholic faith also requires hierarchical communion. It requires more than just accepting Jesus Christ as the Head of the Church; it also means accepting papal primacy. Thus those who have made efforts to preserve the orthodoxy of the Church are worthy of our heartfelt respect.<sup>9</sup> The Catholics in Hong Kong have gradually reached consensus on this fundamental attitude advocated by Father Chang, and are making their contributions by playing the bridge role.

Although the contact between Hong Kong parishioners and their brothers and sisters in China takes place through individuals or small groups, yet this does not diminish their importance. Because these concerned groups do not represent any official organizations, they are more free to contact different groups in China. There is no need for them to become involved in the quarrels between the official church and the underground church. Rather they can be silent listeners, and encourage both sides to increase their communications.

When the Hong Kong Catholics are visiting and exchanging with Catholics in China, they hear many stories of witness to the faith. These moving testimonies stimulate and confirm their own Catholic faith. Thus the faith experiences of the Chinese Catholics become material for evangelization. At the same time, observing the steadfastness of mainland Catholics in the midst of great difficulty, Hong Kong Catholics, treasuring the abundant resources of the Hong Kong Church, become even

more fervent and more actively involved the work of building up their own local church.

## Conclusion

The American author Emerson wrote: "If there is any period one would desire to be born in, is it not the age of revolution, when the old and the new stand side by side and admit of being compared, when the energies of all men are probed by fear and by hope, when the historic glories of the old can be compensated by the rich possibilities of the new era? This time, like all times, is a very good one, if we but know what to do with it." <sup>10</sup> I appreciate such a positive attitude. However, we Christians have a deeper and broader outlook because we firmly believe that 1997 is part of God's salvific plan. God's will will not only give us the reason for 1997, but it will also tell us how we are to face up to its reality. No matter what changes take place in the future, the Hong Kong church must always maintain its quality of being a faith community, bear witness to the Gospel, "be in close communion with God, and be a sign of an instrument for the unity of mankind."<sup>11</sup> The strength of the Hong Kong church comes from her trust in the providence of the Supreme Ruler of history, her moral rectitude, her attitude of respect for other faiths, and her firm belief in the ultimate victory of good over evil.

NB. *Footnotes for the above article will be found in the Chinese text in this issue.*

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