

Hong Kong Diocese Prepares for Handover of Sovereignty

(The following information has been gathered mostly from the Hong Kong Catholic Church Directory, 1997)

1984

- On May 14, Bishop John Baptist Wu writes to Cardinal Basil Hume in England asking him to use his influence on members of parliament to insure religious freedom in Hong Kong after 1997.
- On May 28, Bishop Wu writes a five-page “expression of concern” to British Foreign Secretary, Sir Geoffrey Howe, about the future of Hong Kong’s 270,000 Catholics, its schools and pupils, its medical works and its social services.
- On August 15, in view of the initialing of the “Sino-British Joint Declaration” on 26 September in Beijing, Bishop John B Wu issues a “Statement on the Catholic Church and the Future of Hong Kong” in which he underlines the right to religious freedom as a basic human right and expresses the wish that this right and its free exercise be explicitly expressed and effectively guaranteed in the “Joint Declaration” and in the “Basic Law” of the future Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. The Statement is sent to the Chinese Government through the Hong Kong branch of the Xinhua News Agency.
- On September 8, the Bishop issues a pastoral letter exhorting the faithful to show their concern for public affairs and to further the common good by registering themselves as voters and taking an active part in the District Board elections in 1985 and the Urban and Regional Council elections in 1986.
- On September 18, more than 30 Catholic organizations submit a joint proposal to the Hong Kong Government on the reform of Hong Kong’s political structure in the transition period leading to 1997, with particular reference to democratization and direct elections to the Legislature.

1985

- On March 25, at the invitation of the Religious Affairs Bureau, Bishop Wu leads a 5 member delegation to Beijing and Shanghai. He is the first Chinese bishop from the Diocese of Hong Kong to visit Mainland China officially since 1949.

*Statement on The Catholic Church and the Future of Hong Kong
by The Most Reverend John Baptist Cheng-Chung Wu, Catholic Bishop
of Hong Kong*

1. In 1997 China will resume sovereignty over Hong Kong and make it a special administrative zone. Facing this historical change, I, as Catholic Bishop of Hong Kong, have consulted separately with my Diocesan Board of Consultors, the Council of Priests, Pastoral Council, Executive Committee of the Central Council of Catholic Laity, Chinese Priests' Association, and the Association of Men and Women Religious Superiors. We reflected on and discussed this matter together in the light of faith and in the spirit of the Gospel, and now I make the following statement and express our sincere desire to continue to work with and for the people in freedom and in harmony.

2. As Chinese, we are proud of our heritage--of our long history and our rich culture, which we treasure. Its high moral values and noble ideals have been repeatedly admired and praised by the Catholic Church which respects and embraces all the positive elements present in every culture.

3. As people of Hong Kong we want to work, in solidarity with all fellow members of the community, for the good of Hong Kong and for the well-being of society. Our special concern and love go out to the weak, the poor, the sick, the elderly and the lonely, and those in any way deprived or disabled. We are particularly committed to improving the quality of life--a quality of life which promotes the total development of the human person --body, mind and spirit. In short, we will continue to strive to make Hong Kong a better and more humane place in which to live.

4. As Catholics we worship God and love our fellowmen. We believe in Christ who is the Mediator between God and man, the Redeemer of mankind. He preached and suffered, died and rose again. He founded the Church on Peter to teach all nations and bring good tidings to the world. We are called to continue this mission of preaching Christ and proclaiming the Gospel by loving service to all people.

5. As the Catholic Bishop of Hong Kong, I assert unshakably the right to religious freedom. This is a basic human right, given by God, and is now enjoyed by all people in Hong Kong. This right is demanded by man's dignity and is inherent in the very nature of man. It is essential that this basic right, and the free exercise of that right, which has been solemnly declared by the United Nations, be clearly enshrined, explicitly expressed and effectively guaranteed in the Sino-British Joint Declaration and in the Basic Laws of Hong Kong. This will help to strengthen the confidence of the people.

6. Religious freedom as we enjoy it in Hong Kong includes the following rights:

- a. The right to have or to adopt a religion or belief of one's choice, and to manifest it in worship, observance, practice and teaching.
- b. The right of the individual to worship in private and public, alone and with fellow believers.
- c. The right to make one's religion known to others, and to instruct those who are interested in this religion by the spoken and written word.
- d. The right of parents to provide religious instruction in bringing up their children.
- e. The right of religious communities and associations to hold meetings and to promote educational, cultural, charitable and social activities.
- f. The right to appoint personnel, to train them and to send them abroad for specialized studies and at the same time the right to utilize, if and when necessary, the services of personnel from abroad.
- g. The right to erect and/or use buildings for religious purposes and to acquire such property if necessary.
- h. For the Catholics, in particular, the right to maintain their existing links and their existing unity with the universal Church, through union with the Pope and also with the Bishops and Catholic communities in other parts of the world. This unity is basic to the Catholic Church's belief.

7. The Catholic Church has been established in Hong Kong for over 140 years. Inspired by God's love for the world and for mankind, we have tried to fulfill Christ's Mission of evangelization and to follow His example -- to serve and not be served. Throughout those years we have been working with and for the people of Hong Kong, doing our utmost to contribute in the fields of education, medical care and social welfare, without discrimination of sex, race, or creed. This is evidenced by the fact that over 95% of those who have availed themselves of the services provided by the Catholic Church are non-Catholics. Now and in the future we will continue to contribute actively to the all-round well-being of the community in the same spirit of love and service within the limits of our competence and our resources. We will keep on striving to help in building up Hong Kong into an even more dynamic and even more highly developed and just society of which we shall always be proud to be members. We believe that a genuine and faithful Catholic is also a genuine and good citizen.

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
15th August, 1984

- On July 15, Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian with an eight member delegation, which includes clergy and laity from the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association in Shanghai, visit Hong Kong for the first time since 1949. They were invited by the Holy Spirit Study Centre.

1986

- From January 21-31, at the invitation of the Director of the Religious Affairs Bureau of Guangdong Province, Bishop Wu leads a 7-member delegation to Guangzhou and the eastern part of Guangdong Province.
- In a letter dated July 11, Bishop John B. Wu urges the Bishops of the world to appeal for justice, order and democracy in China, and asks for their solidarity in the “future of Hong Kong” issue and the “Vietnamese Refugees” issue.

1988

- Bishop Wu is made a cardinal on June 28, 1988.

1989

- On Pentecost Sunday, May 14, Cardinal Wu issues a Pastoral Exhortation, “March into the Bright Decade: on the Pastoral Commitment of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong.”

1990

- Cardinal Wu undertakes the task of reorganizing the diocese in consultation with the Council of Priests and a group of clergy, religious and lay people.
- On October 7, the Cardinal issues a pastoral letter exhorting the faithful to take an active part in the direct elections to the District Boards, the Urban/Regional Council and the Legislative Council in 1991; pertinent diocesan guidelines are published on October 12.

1991

- During 1991 Cardinal Wu continues the reorganization of the diocese through consultations at various levels.
- On August 18, an Open Forum on “Elections 1991” is jointly organized by the Council of Priests, the Justice and Peace Commission, the Central Council of Catholic Laity and the Catholic Institute for Religion and Society. The open forums are held in the nine constituencies of Hong Kong, Kowloon and the New Territories in order to encourage the faithful to take an active part in the direct elections to the Legislative Council on 15 September. Church

organizations also make a similar appeal through publications, questionnaires and advertisements in newspapers

- On September 1, Cardinal John B Wu issues a pastoral letter exhorting the faithful to give full support to the direct elections to the Legislative Council - the first time in the history of Hong Kong - on September 15.

1992

Measures are taken to further implement the Cardinal's recommendations in his Pastoral Exhortation "March into the Bright Decade" (14 May 1989) and the "Plan for the Reorganization of the Diocese" (7 June 1992). The following steps are taken:

- Diocese divided into nine deaneries,
- Council of Priests reorganized
- Diocesan Pastoral Council reorganized.
- The diocese holds its first annual review and planning camp at the Holy Spirit Seminary. Main themes: 1) promotion of "small communities of faith (basic ecclesial communities)" and 2) "Mission of a Catholic in the Family".

1994

- Mid-term evaluation of the ten-year pastoral plan outlined in Cardinal Wu's Pastoral Exhortation: "March into the Bright Decade". Eight major areas under review: education, social services, social communications, relations between the Diocese and China and the Church in China, ongoing formation of the clergy and religious, formation of the laity, promotion of small faith communities and pastoral care of various ethnic groups. Evaluation to be concluded in March 1995.
- Cardinal Wu promulgates Pastoral Guidelines for the 1997 transition.
- From November 10-17 at the invitation of the Religious Affairs Bureau, Cardinal Wu leads a seven-member delegation on a visit to Beijing, Wuhan and Xian in order to promote friendship and dialogue with the Chinese Government and to facilitate future cooperation through a better understanding of the actual situation of China.

1995

- On June 4 (Pentecost), the Cardinal issues an Interim Report (with Proposals) on the evaluation of the ten-year pastoral plan outlined in his Pastoral Exhortation "March into the Bright Decade". For the

coming five years the thrust of the Diocese would be “Proclaim the Gospel of the Lord, Spread the Kingdom of God.”

- September 17, marks the last elections to the Legislative Council before the 1997 transition. Through election forums, seminars, etc. and related publications, the faithful are encouraged to take an active part.

1996

- The Diocese sets up a series of lectures for religious personnel to provide them with information on various issues related to the change of sovereignty. These focus on their status, work and their situation in the future
- On Mission Sunday, October 20, Joseph Zen is appointed Coadjutor Bishop of the Diocese of Hong Kong and John Tong is named Auxiliary Bishop.
- They are consecrated in Hong Kong on December 9.
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