

Religious Freedom and the Rise of China

The following is the text of the seminar, "Religious Freedom and the Rise of China," held on December 16, 2007, on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong. The speakers were: Dr. Chan Shun-hing, Associate Professor of Religion, Hong Kong Baptist University; Dr. Anthony Lam Sui-ki, Senior Researcher at the Holy Spirit Study Centre; Dr. Ying Fuk-tsang, Associate Professor of Religion, Chinese University of Hong Kong; and Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun, SDB, Catholic Bishop of Hong Kong. The text has been partially revised by the speakers. Asian Christian Review is grateful for the permission of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong for its translation and publication.

Chan: The rise and modernization of China have impacted the Catholic Church in China in various ways. Firstly, it is apparent that more and more Catholics are not attending mass regularly. According to the studies of Chen Cunfu¹, an increasing number of Catholics think that going to mass is not mandatory. Some think, for example, that it is sufficient to study the bible at home. Some do not attend mass because of work and business travels. Some prefer to go just on festivities or major feast days. Secondly, the attitude of Catholics towards running a business has also changed. In a similar research conducted in the 80s, 40% of the interviewees stated that Catholics should not be running a business as it is a worldly engagement. However, in the research of 2000, the number who found it acceptable has increased enormously. Many were of the opinion that there was no conflict between owning a business and practising their faith. This change in attitude towards business and profit-making shows the vast impact of the market economy.

It is important to note that other than this change in opinion, the well-off merchant class is also emerging within the Catholic Church itself. This can be seen from the construction costs of recent churches and the profile of lay leaders. For example, a new church, whose architecture was a synthesis of both Gothic and Roman styles, was erected a few years ago in the Longgang Town of Wenzhou. The construction cost was over 18,000,000 RMB. But amazingly, the Wenzhou Cathedral only had to fund 3,000,000 RMB. The remaining 15,000,000 RMB came from the parishioners. In my field work, I became acquainted with a few emerging influential lay leaders in Wenzhou. One of them, trained as an anesthetist and used to work in a hospital, became a businessman afterwards in manufacturing and real estate. He has been traveling all over China and is now temporarily residing in Shandong. Another leader, a civil servant, not only has his own residential property, but also owns a hotel for business. More important still, these lay believers, with their knowledge, capability, political

¹ Chen Cunfu is the Director of the Institute of Christianity and Cross-Cultural Studies at Zhejiang University in Hangzhou.

finesse, and also a fervent faith which enables them to assess reality from the perspective of the Church, are subtly shaping the state of religious freedom on the mainland.

I now wish to turn to the means being employed nowadays by the government in monitoring religious activities. Firstly, local authorities are becoming more pragmatic and highly flexible in handling matters relating to religions. Although there are regulations and policies, they can be circumvented. Therefore, assessing the situation of the mainland based on just regulations and policies is not viable. Secondly, the government is snobbish and is willing to negotiate with churches with power, i.e. those with stronger standing in terms of the number of believers and financial resources. In other words, if religious or lay have “chips” on hand, they can bargain with government officials. I shall tell some stories here to show how agreement could be made with concessions from both sides. There is a spectacular underground Catholic church in rural Fuan. How did the underground church manage to erect a parish publicly? Our understanding so far has been that the underground church is illegal, that underground worship activities are forbidden and that their members are sought after. Through my fieldwork, I discover that the church buildings are actually legal despite that the people are not. This means that when local authorities “allow” the church to be built, they also “let” clerics perform sacraments there. When I first arrived at Fuan, my original intention was to visit the official church. But the taxi driver brought me to this underground church because the official one was shabby and thus not known by many. This underground parish, because of its grand appearance, is taken by Fuan people to be the symbol of Catholicism. Only very few people are aware that this actually belongs to the underground church. These stories show how compromise and concessions are possible for the government when they deal with religious groups. Very often, the so-called policies and regulations exist only on paper.

Lam: I think I have to, first of all, make an honest comment on today’s theme. To me, talking about religious freedom in China amid its rise means talking about something that will only come about, in the most optimistic case, 30 years later. In my opinion, China has not mounted on the rise to be a power. Rather, it is going through a course of social transformation. There is a huge difference between rising and transformation.

Human history has witnessed the rise of a few world powers. An essential condition for the rise of a nation is the presence of an explosive creative force, like some inventions or discoveries, which significantly raises the productive capacity of the nation, so much so that many social problems of its own, of neighbouring societies or even those of the entire continent come to be resolved.

A good example is Holland, the rise of which has left a lasting impact on

the whole world. Taking advantage of the productivity sparked off by marine discoveries in 14th-16th centuries, Holland has emerged as a leader in hydraulic engineering technologies. Its excellence in marine transportation has in turn helped it to become one of the chief cheese producing countries in the world. From this example, we can see that when a nation rises, its commercialization and industrialization processes do not expand at the expense of the agricultural sector. On the contrary, they foster a booming of the rural economy.

Karl Marx has once lamented on the backwardness of his native country, the Germany before 1848. But the nation had been bracing itself for a long time and finally, with the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, arose with its flourishing coal and steel industries. In the process, Germany has not let its agricultural industries waste away. The surge of technologies and the subsequent development of the best railway system actually brought about a simultaneous prospering of the rural economy. These are examples of nations rising.

Then what is social transformation? This denotes the process of transformation from one social system to another. In the process of rising, there is an outburst of a productive force which resolves social problems. In the course of social transformation, social problems are shifted from one area to another. When the social structure or state of affairs changes, some will benefit from it while others will suffer. This is not necessarily unfavourable as it may represent a transitional period before a true rise.

I will cite an example to illustrate why I think this is where China stands now. Rapid industrialization in China often takes place at the detriment of surrounding ecology and livelihood. The blue-green algae outbreaks in Taihu and Dianchi Lake testify to the water pollution crisis that results from the development of manufacturing industries in the vicinity.

If we affirm that China is undergoing social transformation rather than rising, then the issue of religious freedom has to be framed under the former. The problem with transformation is that there exists always a conflict of interest. Some gain, some lose. Moreover, this loss may not be compensated. Many economists argue that prices of agricultural products in China should increase. Otherwise, the entire rural economy will collapse. But to maintain the stability of cities, the government has to keep prices under control. The result is a somewhat atypical bankruptcy, in the sense that the rural sector has to shoulder a huge social burden without corresponding compensation. This problem is reflected in the on-going rural-urban migration process.

Rural-urban migration signifies an abnormal pattern of population growth. For example, given the alarming disparity in sex ratio in the Chinese population as a result of the long-standing tradition favouring boys, girls should be regarded as more precious according to the laws of the market system. But the fact is, huge numbers of rural girls migrate to cities and take low jobs like masseuses. These jobs do not offer a career and many suffer from swollen fingers and skin

diseases; and worse still, they may lose self-esteem and end up taking drugs or engaging in other illegal activities. This reflects an anomalous path of social development.

Given the achievements of China today, I still do not consider it rising because of the absence of concrete, substantial scientific or technological discoveries behind its development. Yes, China has its own satellites but this is just catching up. Imitating is not difficult when the first moon landing already took place some 40 years ago. China could have done this much earlier. Of course it is excellent that Chinese scientists are on par, but this is absolutely not a criterion for a nation on the rise. We are often squared in by official propaganda, a product of an obscurantist policy, which is very good at denigrating the previous era in order to extol the present one.

Granting that in the course of social transformation, there are people with vested interests and those who are victimized in the process, the question is where does the church stand? Can the church ignore the victimized ones? The older generation of church leaders are content with not getting involved, especially when the government is not interfering with the church. I am concerned but I do respect their decision. However, it is very different if you ask an individual bishop what concrete actions he would take and if you ask the whole church the same question. I hope everyone will seriously think about this.

Say the church has only two options. The first one is to stay away and not get involved. The church has enough resources to do so. However, a segregated church divides the society. There is no need to worry about the issue of freedom as the government will only be too happy about it and will definitely not interfere. Freedom then becomes meaningless to a church-behind-closed-door. The second option is to be vocal about social injustice. Is there room and freedom for such expression? In China, the answer is yes and no. Examples are not hard to find. Dr Jiang Yanyong was detained and imprisoned for exposing China's cover-up of the extent of the SARS outbreak in Beijing. Another doctor, Dr Gao Yaojie, the outspoken fighter against AIDS who is now spared by the government because of international pressure, has been under constant harassment of officials for over 10 years. If the church chooses to stand by the ones suffering, freedom will certainly be taken away.

This brings us to the question of freedom. What does it mean by freedom and do we have to fight for freedom? The notion of freedom, including religious freedom, can be understood on three levels. The first is freedom on the bureaucratic level, ie. in relation to the legal or public administration system. In China, freedom in this sense is under strict control. The second is freedom on the social level, ie. the degree of tolerance of the freedom of expression. Usually, there is room for dissenting voices and multi-culturalism in the process of social transformation. The third, also the most important, is

internal freedom. Really admirable are many of the senior religious in China, who do not fear anything at heart. They are prepared for imprisonment, or even death. With them, there is nothing the government can threaten with regarding their freedom. However, martyrdom does not come just by willing it. Ironically, what Jesus said is very true: "... those who lose their life for my sake will find it." (Mt 16:25) In this sense, the church should seriously ponder on its social responsibility first before thinking about its freedom. Christ said we should "strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these [other] things will be given to [us] as well." (Mt 6:33)

Is it going to be a difficult task for the church to fight for social justice in China? Yes and no. The biggest advantage is its social teaching. This whole set of teachings is very comprehensive and is thus very easy to apply. There is a downside too. As I have mentioned in my paper² on the impact of Catholic social teaching on China, if the mainland church introduces and vigorously promotes Catholic social teaching, the first and foremost hurdle is not the government, but the church itself.

I have many good friends on the mainland and I understand that sometimes they have to make very difficult decisions under the circumstances there. But it does not mean that I necessarily approve with what is going on there because understanding and approving belong to different realms. The church there gets entangled with the government and its bureaucracy. There is a lot of corruption going on: in the election of bishops, in the bribery of government officials, in taking bribes from officials, in mutual bribery among churches, in face-saving settlements, in pocketing public-property, in edge-out games etc. These are all unacceptable according to Catholic social teaching. Like any other human organization, the church cannot be free of flaws. But there exists a problem. Any human organization can, through their own choice, engage in corruption or even immoral dealings for the sake of operations or survival. But the church cannot. The Church cannot act against conscience if it is to live out the Gospel. The Church cannot ignore what is going on around if it is to implement its social teaching. How to put this into action remains a challenge, even with the existing technological, informational or personnel resources of the church. But the Church must undergo these birth-pangs if it is to renew itself. There are already many NGOs striving to speak out for the victimized ones. If the church does not join force with them and stand up for the ones suffering, it will end up being cut off from society. This would be a sorrow for the church. Therefore, I think it is high time that we encourage our mainland brothers and sisters to make a calm and enduring decision between closing themselves up or becoming a voice for the afflicted. This is what I would like to share with all of you today.

² "The Prospect for Catholic Social Justice and Peace Action in China" (1998) in Chinese.

Ying: Since the notion of rising has already been discussed, I will not go into it here. I will talk about the opportunities and obstacles regarding religious freedom within Protestantism.

What is the relationship between the rise of China and religion? Perhaps we should begin with an overview of the drastic changes that China has gone through since the Cultural Revolution and the epoch of economic reform, and the effect of these changes on religion in China.

First of all, 2008 marks the 30th anniversary of the launching of Chinese economic reform, through which China has astoundingly transformed from a planned economy to a socialist market economy. Although the Chinese economic system is still strongly emphasized as socialist in its Constitution, it is in reality very difficult to find aspects of “socialism” in the economic sphere. The most obvious example is the near-extinction of state-owned enterprises under the economic reform. The major part of China’s GDP now comes from the private sector.

How is this transformation related to the growth of religion? If we say that state-owned enterprises constituted the main frame of the planned economy in the past 50 years, then their counterpart in the domain of religion can be said as “state-owned religion” or “planned religion.” With the establishment of the new China, all religions are put under official “supervision” and this gradually develops into the operational model of planned religion. Under this so-called planned religion, the government bans “feudal superstition,” “reactionary religious sects” and recognizes only the so-called “five official religions” (Protestantism, Catholicism, Islam, Buddhism and Taoism). At the same time, the government also encourages the establishment of patriotic religious associations and sanctions them to be the sole representing bodies in the religious sphere. Furthermore, these patriotic religious associations are supervised by the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA). In this way, a framework that enables tight control over religions is formed. However, in face of a rapid growth in religions over the last 30 years, this state-owned, planned type of regulatory system has begun to look unbecomingly.

Secondly, going hand-in-hand with the economic reform is China’s gradual opening to the world and its further integration into the international community. Now China is exerting an increasing influence on the international level: basically, everything is “made in China;” world markets fell after the plunge in China; and the issue of fake products too has recently become a concern.

In this process of opening and integration, the Chinese government has also learnt some rules of the game, especially that international dialogue on religion bears enormous significance on foreign relations or “united front” work. For example, the hosting of the World Buddhist Forum³ or the

³ The World Buddhist Forum, the first major international Buddhist conference since 1949, was

International Forum on the Daodejing⁴ reflects that China is keen on building its international image in the area of religion. The Chinese government has been facing immense pressure from the West, especially from the United States, regarding the issues of human rights and religious freedom in China. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), set up 10 years ago, keeps criticizing China extensively on these issues in their annual reports. Though China's response to these reports has been overall defensive, the government cannot be unaware of how its international image is affected. At the same time, it should be noted that the Chinese government is willing to dialogue with international community on religious matters. For example, there have been visits, exchanges and dialogue between the SARA and the USCIRF.

Thirdly, China is becoming increasingly depoliticized over the last three decades. In the past, the Party had complete control over the whole society. Under this kind of totalistic politics, everything falls under the Party's umbrella. With the economic reform, this is no longer viable and as a result, the government is switching from totalism to some form of circumscribed authoritarianism. Before, loyalty to the Party constitutes the entire mission and responsibility of social organizations. With the reform, the legitimacy of social organizations depends not only on its political stance, but also its expertise. To religious organizations, this change means that they have to solidify their function as a social body. The state-sanctioned religious organizations can no longer survive just by following directives, but have to prove themselves to be capable also in church-related work like theological education and personnel training. For example, a minister who is an "underground Party member" has to prove his/her expertise in ministry work because a lack of popularity among believers would render it impossible for him/her to fulfill the duties given by the Party. Needless to say, on top of state-sanctioned religious organizations, there are quite a number of house or underground churches. This involves the issue of freedom of assembly and association, which is still tightly controlled by the government.

The fourth point is about the intellectual realm. The Party used to seek to control, unify and manipulate thinking. But during these three decades, the Chinese society has been going through a process of de-ideologization: "Chinese characteristics" have to be appended to socialism; even Marxism has to be adapted to the new era. Hence, the Chinese understanding of religion has also seen some new breakthroughs. For example, instead of maintaining that "religion is the opium of the people," the government is now proposing "the mutual accommodation of religion and Chinese socialist society" and "religion and harmonious society." The Cultural Revolution had tried to wipe

held in Hangzhou and Zhoushan in April 2006.

⁴ The International Forum on the Daodejing was held in Xian and Hong Kong in April 2007.

out religion but failed. Since the economic reform, religion has grown rapidly. Having had to accept the reality that religion cannot be eliminated or will not even be on the decline, the Chinese government has been learning how to deal with its existence. Jiang Zemin [the then President] said in 2000 that even when there were no class, no state in China, there would still be religion. Thus how to steer the development of religion to the advantage of administration and the maintenance of social stability has become one of the main subjects for discussion in recent years.

Fifthly, in the last decade, increasing efforts have been made on the building of the Chinese legal system. Phrases like “governing the nation in accordance with law” or “building a rule by law government” are commonly used. Certainly, there are a lot of obstacles in implementation, but at least it is one of the present priorities of the central government. Under these circumstances, religious legislation has recently become one of the prevalent topics. The question is whether the government wishes to, through religious legislation, control religion or protect religious freedom. This is something that we should be concerned about.

The sixth point that we should note is that the era of rapid growth of religion coincides with that of economic reform. That religion not only survives but manages to flourish after the Cultural Revolution is an undeniable fact. This “religion fever” in China spills over the five recognized religions into folk religions and new, rising religions. Although China officially admits there are only 100 million believers in the country, a lot of commentaries point out that this is not a realistic figure. Somebody has argued this way. If the world population is about 6 billion, out of which 4 to 5 billion have religious beliefs, then there are 1 to 2 billion non-believers. If the population in China is 1.3 billion and believers make up 100 million, then there are 1.2 billion of non-believers in China. This implies that most of the non-believers in the world are Chinese, which is somewhat unreasonable. Some scholars suggest that the religious market in China is taking many forms: red, black, gray, legal and illegal. With this background in mind, I will turn to the specific case of Protestantism.

In the past three decades, rebuilding its community remained the primary task of Protestantism in China. The blueprint used by Protestants in this respect differs from that of Catholicism. There are three reference years: 1949, 1954 and 1958. The model of 1949 consists of missionary societies and denominations. With the reluctant exodus of the foreign missionaries under Communist rule, the 1954 model comprises only denominations and churches as well as patriotic organization established under the Three-Self (self-governance, self-support, self-propagation) Patriotic Movement (TSPM). By 1958, even denominations were banned, unified worship was introduced and all activities came under the direct leadership of the TSPM. All three constitute important turning points

in the contemporary history of Chinese Protestantism. Then which model should be used as the basis for rebuilding the Chinese church after the Cultural Revolution? Since the restoration of both missionary societies (which bring on western influence) and denominations (which may obstruct the work of the TSPM) was undesirable to the Chinese government, the 1949 and 1954 models could not be used. The Chinese Protestant church was thus rebuilt on the basis of the 1958 model. From this, an interesting phenomenon has arisen. On one hand, the church is led by the TSPM, hence the so-called “Three Self Church.” Since the TSPM is not a church in itself, but only a patriotic movement of Christians with the objective of promoting patriotism among the believers, thus in theory, the TSPM should not replace the church. However, in practice, TSPM has become the unitary regulatory system for religion. On the other, with the denominational orders being defunct, how can the church be built? Consequently, the China Christian Council (CCC) was established in 1980 to handle church-related or ecclesiastical work like theological education and personnel training. TSPM and CCC then came to be known as the “two associations” of Protestantism. Since then, the Chinese Protestant Church became officially “post-denominational.” As mentioned before, since expertise counts in the era of economic reform, the two associations, albeit state-sanctioned, have to be able to truly function as religious organizations and minister to the spiritual needs of the believers. Therefore, both associations have official and unofficial nature at the same time.

I will now turn to the challenges the Chinese Protestant church is facing in the epoch of economic reform. The first one is the problem of house churches. These are Christian communities that are not officially registered and operate outside the TSPM. These house churches arose because of many reasons, one of them being the unreasonable distribution of the [official] church. For example in Beijing, there were 65 churches in 1949. But by 1958, when unified worship was introduced, there were only 4. So when churches began to reopen in 1978 according to the basis of 1958, only 4 were reopened. At present, there are about 7 to 8 churches in Beijing (not including the rural and country churches and meeting points). In Guangzhou, the number of churches was reduced to 4 since 1966. It increased to 9 by 1978 and a few more have been added since then. The original number of churches in Shanghai was some 200. By 1958, there were only 10. Whether in urban or rural areas, a disproportionate distribution of churches resulted when the extreme “leftist” framework of 1958 was followed. Moreover, it is very difficult to build new churches now, especially in the cities. When existing churches are not able to cope with the increasing numbers of believers, house churches spring up. Certainly, there are house churches among which a strong anti-TSPM mentality remains prevalent.

The Chinese government has been trying to incorporate these house churches into the TSPM over the last three decades. Since most of them prefer

to remain underground, their legalization is deemed impossible. The existence of these illegal house churches has become an unalterable objective reality. Methods from the past employed by the government to incorporate these house churches into the TSPM often proved unavailing. This will continue to become one of the headaches for the government in the future.

The second challenge is the issue of denomination in this post-denominational era. The post-denominational situation in China was a direct result of political intervention. The government feared that the existence of denominations would cripple the authority of the TSPM and open up a vent for foreign influence to penetrate China when these denominational groups established contact with related groups abroad. There was a lot of tension when denominations like the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, the True Jesus Church and Christian Assembly tried to resume activities but were banned. Saying that if China permitted the existence of denominations, many would reappear within 24 hours is not exaggerating. In other words, the current post-denominational state is a government-regulated market. Not only denominations that previously existed, but newly emerged ones are also being oppressed. The question of denomination reflects once again the disharmony between this out-dated religious regulatory system and the present reality.

The third challenge lies in the relationship between the church and society. After 1949, Protestantism was expelled from the Chinese public sphere. It was not permitted to run schools or provide medical and other social services. In other words, it has become a pure faith community. However in the last decade, in face of the needs of society and social problems like the gap between the rich and the poor and education, the Chinese government has begun to welcome contribution from social organizations, including religious ones. This brings us to the role of NGO in China. Some scholars pointed out that strictly speaking, there were only GONGO (ie. government-owned NGO) in China, implying that all NGOs are under government control, including those with religious affiliations or faith-based organizations.

What we should pay attention to is whether Chinese Protestants are able to operate NGOs well in the area of social services. Even though the government has granted some leeway to the church in this area, is the church, given its own limitations, ready to take up this role? What is the role of the church in face of escalating social problems other than financially-related ones like poverty and education, and how should it deal with such problems?

The above discussion was based on the changes in Chinese society and religion over the past 30 years since the beginning of the economic reform. We have seen from various angles that there is a disharmony between the present, new state of affairs and the old religious regulatory system. Most notably, the resolute determination of the Chinese government in implementing economic reform, which has impacted as far as state-owned enterprises, strongly contrasts

with the backwardness in its religious regulatory system. Reform in the latter is lagging far behind its economic counterpart. However, regardless of China's willingness to open its religious market, that this market is already rapidly expanding is an objective fact. When the Chinese government is finally willing to acknowledge this reality and begin to reform also the religious market, then patriotic associations will have to compete with the rest and establish their legitimacy in this open market. The government is concerned that chaos will erupt once the bar on religion is lifted. But keeping thinking that the out-dated system is still functional in face of the reality, the government is only deceiving itself and others.

Religious freedom and the freedom of association are closely related. Thus, opening the religious market implies the sanctioning of the freedom of association. We should not only be concerned about religious freedom, but also the legalization of social organizations. Religious freedom in the Constitution refers to the freedom of religious belief, that is, citizens have the freedom to believe in religions as a private matter. But it is the communities formed in the process of acting out this faith that are oppressed. Therefore, freedom or religious belief and religious freedom are not the same, as the latter assumes the freedom to associate for the practice of one's faith.

Furthermore, if the government opens the religious market and sanction the freedom of association, is Protestantism ready? The outcry against opening the religious market actually comes from the TSPM because they know that they will be edged-out once the market is open. Therefore, they are emphasizing the need of anti-infiltration so as to secure the support of the government. At the same time, are house churches ready? The fact that house churches are very loose and disorganized is another concern.

To close, I would like to use the example of the new and old wineskins in the Gospel of Matthew. If "new wine" represents the new developments of the Chinese religious market, while "old wineskin" represents the old regulatory system for religions, then the "new wine" put into an "old wineskin" will eventually burst the skins. What China needs to handle religion now is a new wineskin, new thinking, a new system and a new model. This is what I would like to share with you all today. Thank you.

Cardinal Zen: After these enlightening analyses, my response is partly to reply and partly to supplement to what has already been said. This theme needs a much more in-depth exploration. No matter how it is expressed, the situation between China and the world has changed a great deal. Before, China was a secluded country. Now with its open policy, China is developing all kinds of networks with the rest of the world. But what is happening to our religious freedom? Has it benefited amidst these changing circumstances? This is something we should be concerned with. Unfortunately, the most straightforward answer

is a 'no': although some progress has been made, religious freedom has not received its due liberation.

That we are now allowed to give lectures in the mainland is a huge step forward. However, basically the system has not changed. A lot of bishops and priests are still being imprisoned. The fact that people are still, in this 21st century, held under long-term custody because of their religious belief is really a seriously immoral matter. We should not let this reality slip out of our minds. Moreover, not only those who are physically held in custody, but the ones that are not are also being abused. There is no respect whatsoever. Even bishops of the open Church are being closely watched and monitored. They are not ill-treated like their underground counterparts and may even obtain privileges of all kinds (e.g. a bishop who attends an illicit episcopal ordination will receive RMB200,000), but the point is, this is an insult.

The Pope has made it very clear in his letter⁵ that the Patriotic Association is not to be recognized. When bishops were compelled to attend the 50th anniversary celebration of the Patriotic Association, a few managed not to show up. But most of them were forced to attend. Some kept their heads stooped all the way but Beijing was already pleased: external compliance at least. Bishops being forced to do something against their conscience - this is an insult to human integrity. Another example. Bishop Han⁶ was cremated only 5 to 6 hours after his death and nobody was allowed to attend his funeral. Some time ago, I had a phone conversation with the bishop of Shijiazhuang and he told me he was ready for jail. We were joking how far off the beam this was: a bishop arrested and imprisoned arbitrarily at any time?

Official monitoring is extremely tight now. For example, the letter of the Pope could be found on the internet the first day after its release, but not on the following day, not now. That such measures are being employed is widely known but we seem to just plainly accept them. My appointment as cardinal was not covered by any mainland Catholic newspaper. The best-selling one reported that the Pope appointed 15 new cardinals. Period. No nationalities, no names. They even forbade priests and nuns to congratulate me. This is how ridiculous and backward it can be!

Now special permission is still required for priests and nuns to travel out of the country while others can leave the country very easily as "Free Independent Travellers."⁷ For priests and nuns, leaving the country without getting this

⁵ The letter of the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI to the Bishops, Priests, Consecrated Persons and Lay Faithful of the Catholic Church in the People's Republic of China released on June 30, 2007.

⁶ Bishop Han Dingxiang became the underground bishop of Hebei's Yongnian diocese in December 1989. He had spent 35 years of his life in different forms of official custody because of his loyalty to the Holy See. His last arrest was in late 1999 and he died of unknown causes during his imprisonment in 2007 at the age of 71.

⁷ Under the Individual travel Scheme which was first introduced in 2003, mainlanders were allowed to travel to Hong Kong and Macau SARs on an individual basis under simplified visa proce-

special permit is considered illegal and they can be arrested for this reason. Recently, a nun studying here who returned to the mainland just for a few days was not allowed to leave the country again for having failed to declare to customs that she was a religious. Another example. A priest who visited the mainland was taken around to visit some underground priests and lay. Soon he was arrested, (he was sent back to the hotel for the nights) and interrogated for a few days. There is really no law and order. How can a person be arrested just for visiting some other, also innocent, people? This is not something a respectable country would do. I am not so sure if we should just keep putting up with this.

At the time of the June Fourth Incident⁸, a lot of priests in Hong Kong were not pleased with the fact that bishops of the Patriotic Church had remained silent. I went to Shanghai in September 1989 to teach at the seminary. Once there, I began to understand that they could not be blamed totally for their silence. Protesting would appeal to some as a heroic act but to most people it is stupid and plain useless. In the end, perhaps their silence was not totally futile. According to the law, one has to be eighteen years old before one can be prepared for baptism. However, from 1989, the baptism of children is allowed and seminaries can invite professors from abroad to give lectures. Looked at this way, compromise is not an absolute evil. It is of course easy for outsiders to insist, but for our brothers and sisters there, it is sometimes necessary to compromise.

At the same time, however, we cannot keep on compromising. When the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom was planning to visit Beijing, permission was finally granted after a long process of enquiry on the condition that they would not fly via Hong Kong. The Commission retaliated by threatening to cancel the trip. Then Beijing allowed them to go via Hong Kong on the condition that they would not arrange interview here. The Commission did not want to compromise, changed their plan and did interviews in Hong Kong instead.

In fact, even mainlanders have to remain firm at times. Over the last few years, on the issue of illicit episcopal ordination, not only the Catholic Church has made concessions, but Beijing also has to give in sometimes. Some older bishops who were illicitly ordained under exceptional circumstances were later recognized by the Pope without having to declare nonconformity to Beijing. They are known to have already reconciled with the Vatican. Even the government knew about it but they did not interfere. In this sense, both sides have made concessions. This is a successful first step of persistence.

The second step is election, a means used among younger bishops. The ones elected would ask for official approval from the Vatican before they would

dures. Prior to the scheme, they were only allowed to travel on business visas or in group tours.

⁸ Widely known as the Tiananmen Square Massacre or the Tiananmen Square Protests of 1989.

accept to become bishops. Although there was dispute on whether to read the papal letter of appointment or the Beijing one, the fact that Beijing allowed the ordination of these bishops showed that they already compromised. In some places, elections were put on by some older bishops and priests for bishops already appointed by the Pope. The elected were then presented to the government, which then could not but approve them. Therefore I feel that there is always persistence amidst compromise. If this path had been pursued, then there would have been much room for negotiations and agreements. But unfortunately, this did not work out in the end.

The Holy See stood very firm on two occasions. The first one was the strong statement that the Holy See issued in 2007 condemning the two illicit ordinations in April and May of the same year as violating religious freedom, spoiling the process of negotiations etc. To everybody's surprise, it turned out Beijing was not resentful. Instead, they expressed their readiness to discuss the matter with the Holy See and even invited representatives of the Holy See to visit Beijing. This was certainly not meant to be a real negotiation, but at least the tone was mild and friendly. To me, it was an apology in a different form. Unfortunately, this was not followed up and another illicit ordination took place in November.

The other occasion was this letter of the Pope. The stance of the Holy See and certain principles were stated very clearly in the letter in a rather unyielding tone. What was the reaction of Beijing then? The public response to the letter was very mild but the real reaction was an intense opposition.

Now that China has a network of relations with the rest of the world, it is high time that we balance the principles of compromise and persistence. I think we should not wait passively for Beijing to give us more freedom, but should actively strive for it. The main part of the work would still have to come from mainlanders as they are the only ones who can really change the course of things. We as outsiders can only offer help. If mainlanders do not support the stance of the Pope, the government is not going to yield. But outsiders should also encourage them to stand up for themselves and stick to the principles, to grapple with the issue of vested interests and to strive for religious freedom and the normalization of the life of the Church.

In other words, we have to be adamant on our principles. It is the only way through which China can become integrated into the rest of the world. It is the way that would ultimately benefit China. Extreme compromise renders China-Vatican diplomatic relations futile. While the whole world sees our country as backward, we should help it to gain respect and status, to establish a recognized standard of democracy and freedom, and to accept Catholicism. The Pope has made it very clear in this letter that the Church does not interfere with politics. So I earnestly hope that the church in China is not controlled by those with vested interests, that our political leaders be more concerned

about the issue of religious freedom and understand that religious freedom is ultimately beneficial to the country.

Q: I would like to ask Prof. Chan about the slide showing the data of administrative units and sole traders. The figures don't seem to match. Can you explain a little further?

Chan: These figures show the trend of how occupations and social classes have been changing over the last two decades. They were taken from the studies conducted by Chan Cunfu and published in his *Zhuan Xing Qi De Zhongguo Jidu Jiao: Zhejiang Jidu Jiao Ge an Yan Jiu* (Beijing: Dong Fang Publishing House, 2005). What I find the most significant is what these figures reveal about the social development trend. During the last 15 years, entrepreneurs and management levels have been on the rise in China. I think the Catholics in this social class will play a very crucial role. They have knowledge, connections, political finesse, a fervent faith and a standpoint that protects the interests of the Church. They have the potential to negotiate with the government.

Q: I would like to ask Card. Zen about the issue of helping the mainland church. For example, from Hong Kong's standpoint, how do we go about to help them in the long run?

Cardinal Zen: I raised the question a while ago about when to concede and when to stand firm. We have to see, according to the circumstances concerned, when to let go and when to encourage them to be valiant in expressing their stances and fighting for opportunities to negotiate with the leaders. There are instances where concessions are necessary, but there are also moments that we have to be firm on our grounds. Compromise is of course necessary if you want to contact the mainland church to organize certain activities. For example, teaching. We have to abide by certain rules. We should just do our job and don't criticize the official Church. However, we can definitely try to avoid contacts with it as we know that this is not acceptable to the Holy See. Another example, if we are on an official visit to Beijing and they made arrangements for us to meet certain bishops and leaders of the official Church, etc., of course you cannot turn them down. But at least we can make some requests, e.g. of meeting them at some seminary and not at the office of the CCPA, and they would usually accept.

Say you want to organize a seminar outside China for certain mainland bishops and priests and have proposed a list of participants to the sole

authority, Mr Liu Bainian⁹. If he suggests changing half of the bishops on the list to illicit ones, what would you do? Perhaps you may think that it is not too bad to accept just this one time. However, what happens if this continues for twice, ten times or even more? There are horrendous side-effects. Mr Liu will look very impressive before the government and privileges become attached to obedience. It cannot go on like this. We have to compromise at times but at other, it is not necessary. This is a tough call. It is hard to let go sometimes but to everything there is a season and to every purpose, a specific time.

Chan: Further to what Cardinal Zen has just said, regarding how to promote religious freedom in China, I think the churches in China and in Hong Kong are playing different roles. On the part of China, the mainland churches, whether Catholic or of other denominations, should build up their own power to contend with the government. Secondly, churches should take the local authorities as negotiation adversaries. In the process of interaction with local authorities, they should try to change the concepts and practice of the latter. It is only through their conceding that churches can acquire room for development. Thirdly, religious and lay alike should continue to sharpen their negotiating skills. On the part of Hong Kong, the Catholic Church should create opportunities and conditions for the mainland counterpart. For example, the Cangzhou Diocese in Hebei is now providing social services, especially medical care, to the peasants there. Through this, many have come to embrace Catholicism, thus building up the Catholic Church. However, because of a lack of resources, the Diocese was able only to establish poorly equipped clinics in some areas. No doubt, this is an obstacle to the growth of the church. If the Hong Kong Diocese can supply resources to help expand the scope of medical care being provided there, this will gradually transform these social service units into footholds for the growth of the church. Needless to say, the Hong Kong Diocese would have to research into the different needs of different places before supplying any aid.

Q: I have two questions. The first is for Prof. Chan regarding those magnificent churches in the slides. You have mentioned that the local authorities had acquiesced to their construction, but I would like to ask why they did this? Did they receive any recompense in the process? The second is to all speakers about the Beijing Olympics. How would the hosting of the Olympics affect the issue of religious freedom?

Q: We have heard about the circumstances of Protestantism and Catholicism in the mainland. We also understand, as Card. Zen has pointed out, that

⁹ Liu Bianian is the vice-chairman of the Catholic Patriotic Association in China.

religious freedom in the mainland is different from that in Hong Kong or the standard of the rest of the world. But I would like to ask if there is any chance for mainland Protestant churches and Catholic church to join force in fighting for more religious freedom?

Q: I have a question regarding the difference between the official and the underground churches. How do they regard one another? What are their mindsets like?

Q: We have been talking about the negotiating power or potential of the Catholic Church. I would like to ask Prof. Ying, do Protestant churches have this kind of power as well? Or are we seeing some features of civil society emerging?

Chan: I don't think there have been any incentives involved in the negotiation between the church and local authorities. It is more a result of the increasing power of the Church and the internal discord among the different government institutions. The former has been discussed already, so I would just briefly talk about the latter. The underground church of Fujian Mindong tells a very successful story over the last two decades. Most of the Catholics there belong to the underground church. There are very few patriotic church members. Even the local government finds the situation very tricky. Moreover, the local government has to face its own internal conflict. Different departments have different views regarding the underground church. The main concern of the local government, the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau (ERAB) and the Public Security Bureau is social stability. What is important is good regulation that maintains public order. To them, the rest is relatively not very critical. What then is meant by good regulation? The key to it lies in negotiation. In the process of negotiation, the authorities want to find out if the church community in question has any hidden political agenda. When the authorities are ensured that the community comes together only for faith, has no political motives and are willing to cooperate as long as government policies does not conflict with their faith, they would be willing to bend the rules and create leeways to allow the church building be erected. The juridical person of the parish is the faith community. So when the church comes to be owned by the parish council, it becomes a legal entity. However, since it still belongs to the underground church, the clerics remain illegal. They can celebrate mass there only because the authority pretends they know nothing about it. From this example, we can see that local government officials are willing to compromise in order to achieve effective regulation. On the other hand, the job of the United Front Department is to control the expansion of the church. Therefore, how the Public Security Bureau handles things can be different from the ERAB and how the United Front Department handles things may yet be different again.

Furthermore, their practices may even contradict one another.

Lam: I have always been pessimistic on the impact of the Olympics on religious freedom in China. If you wish to fight for religious freedom, you don't wait till the Olympics. And of course you will continue to fight after the Olympics is over. Therefore, even if the Olympics has an impact on the overall religious atmosphere, it will not be significant. Then regarding the difference between the official and the underground churches, the more traditional way of describing it is whether it is sanctioned by the government or not. Roughly speaking, the government-sanctioned one can be called aboveground and the one not sanctioned or the one that does not even seek government approval can be called underground. However, a government-sanctioned one can still be underground. Perhaps it is easier to understand if we use another criterion: whether it has been registered with the Patriotic Association or the Bishops' Conference. If yes, then it is public. If not, then it is underground. Thus, for a church that is open to the public and say, as many as 3000 gather there to celebrate mass, if it does not have any tie with these two state-wide Catholic associations, then it is still regarded as underground. Having said this, aboveground and underground is a relative concept. For example there can be different layers to the underground church. Some are considered more "underground" than the others.

Ying: I'd like to say a bit more regarding the Olympics. Actually the Chinese government is aware that many foreign religious organizations want to take advantage of the Olympics to do something in China. In reaction to the high-sounding claims of certain religious groups to take advantage of the Olympics and start missionary work in China, the government, for fear that this will uproot its authority and social stability, strikes back with the so-called "Typhoon 5 campaign" to ward off any religious penetrative activities.

There is another question from the audience regarding the relationship of Catholic and Protestant churches with local governments, whether there are negotiations and concessions going on, and whether some kind of civil society is emerging. Although the government has granted more freedom and space in society, it still well remains under its control. Therefore the kind of civil society that is emerging is far from a sophisticated one. The key lies in the quality of Chinese believers. In the cities, some house churches have a lot of university professors and university students as members. A friend who belongs to a house church in Beijing told me that their members' directory was once discovered by the Public Security Bureau officials. On finding out that members were mostly university professors and students, the official joked that he would not be qualified to join.

At the same time, there is a difference between Protestant house churches

and the Catholic Church. The underground Catholic Church is more unified. But Protestant house churches are very loose and independent. They also have different opinions as to how to deal with the government. Some are very firm and some are willing to concede.

Cardinal Zen: I think for the Catholic Church, the biggest problem is the Patriotic Association. It has separated the Church from its leadership. This is the difference between the church in China and that in Vietnam. There is no Patriotic Association in Vietnam. They tried but did not succeed and the Bishops' Conference has always been there, albeit its power is limited. But at least this is a matter between them and the government. In China, however, the Patriotic Association, or strictly speaking, Mr Liu, controls every layer. Thus the Patriotic Association and Bishops' Conference are only titles. The Bishops' Conference does not truly exist; there has never been any meeting. Even bishops of the official Church, who technically speaking also belong to the Bishops' Conference, do not have the authority to convene a meeting. Only the government can convene meetings. Since bishops have no freedom and opportunity to meet, discuss and build trust among themselves, it is impossible for them to unite themselves and act together by the own means. Perhaps there is need for the Holy See to help mobilize them. If there is no liaison and unity among bishops, we cannot hope that they can negotiate with the government. Furthermore, if the Catholic Church is not united itself, unity with other Christian churches is even more unattainable. Any attempt of meeting between Catholics and Protestants would only arouse the government's suspicion. Real cooperation is totally impossible under government control.

Regarding the Olympics, I am rather pessimistic. I don't think the government would do something because of the Olympics. Perhaps we can take initiative and fight for something. Finally, I really hope that the June Fourth Incident can be vindicated. We should not give up as this has very symbolic meaning – the vindication of the June Fourth Incident will show that our government has the real will to change.

[Translated from Chinese by *Asian Christian Review*]