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香港宗座署理



Cardinal John Tong  
Apostolic Administrator of Hong Kong

## PASTORAL LETTER *In Communion with the Church*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

With pastoral solicitude, I wish to share with you some grave concerns of mine about our Local Church in the light of the “signs of the times”.

There is no denying that the social turmoil that rocked Hong Kong last year has brought home to us some of its deep-rooted problems which have long remained unresolved. The public are fully justified in expecting the local government to take action promptly to address their aspirations for justice, democracy and a more decent quality of life.

Nevertheless, looking back at that social turmoil, we cannot but acknowledge that it has also brought along some serious consequences. One of these is the “hatred” of some sectors of the public towards those who do not share their stances or endorse their actions in regard to socio-political reforms. Moreover, there is a growing conviction among our local people that there will be no hope nor prospect for Hong Kong society in the future. Regrettably these negative attitudes have also found their way into Church circles.

Concurring with the mentality of some groups which either supported or opposed the public protests last year, not a few Catholics have adopted, in whole or in part, the following stances: (i) In striving for the well-being of society, the end justifies the means, and so violence may be justified. (ii) An action is either entirely right or entirely wrong, and there could not be any “in between”. (iii) Those who do not share their stance or endorse their actions in regard to social or political issues are to be openly condemned, smeared and rejected, without any possibility of dialogue or reconciliation with them.

Holding on to the above stances with tenacity, those Catholics have created a division in our Diocese. Furthermore, just as it is commonplace now for people to use abusive and slanderous languages on social media against those from the opposing camps, we find some Catholics behaving in the same way in dealing with those who do not share their stance or approve their actions, be they Church leaders, priests, deacons, or other Church members.

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In examining the rather wide-spread mentality among the faithful as mentioned above, it is fitting to reiterate that the Church gives support to “democracy” as a system of governance. This is stated explicitly in Pope St. John Paul II’s Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*: “The Church values the democratic system inasmuch as it ensures the participation of citizens in making political choices, guarantees to the governed the possibility both of electing and holding accountable those who govern them, and of replacing them through peaceful means when appropriate.” (46) As for Pope Francis, he has pointed out, in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (cf. 220-223), that the progress in building a people in peace, justice and fraternity can be achieved by committed and responsible citizens. However, such a progress is an “ongoing process” which demands that people work slowly but surely, without being obsessed with immediate results.

In contributing to building a society of peace, justice and fraternity, we have a twofold role to play as “prophet” and “servant”: we have to discern the “signs of the times”, and we have to act like the salt of the earth, the light of the world and the yeast of human society. In our endeavours for socio-political reforms and the well-being of society, we should be guided by the social teaching of the Church. We must, above all, put into practice what Jesus teaches in the *Beatitudes* and in the *Sermon on the Mount*. Thus we must realize that treating others as “enemies” to be hated and fought against is inconsistent with the Christian faith. The social teaching of the Church has never endorsed hatred and violence as the means to achieve justice. Christ crucified has set an example for all Christians to follow: whatever might be the conflicts that have to be resolved, love, forgiveness and reconciliation must always prevail, if justice and peace are to be achieved. “The end does not justify the means”.

As pastors, priests should enlighten the faithful and form their consciences with the social teaching of the Church, so that they can adopt a balanced approach and take the right course of action while engaging themselves in social concern activities. Priests, however, should not exert their influence in those areas. Every member of the faithful is free to adopt a stance in regard to social or political issues by following the dictates of his/her conscience and in the light of the Gospel and the social teaching of the Church. Naturally, as among common people, there will be different views even among the faithful, granted that social and political issues are often complex and do not admit of simple or ready answers. Nevertheless, differences in viewpoints must not give way to a division in the Church. We must bear in mind the teaching of Vatican II that all the faithful are to strive to preserve Church communion, and they are to take account of the common good of the Church even when exercising their own rights.

Today there are Catholics who claim they have the “right” to openly challenge their pastors and the Church. In fact, these Catholics have a misconception of their “right” as lay people. Vatican II indeed exhorts pastors to be open-minded and ready to listen to the views of the lay people. Moreover, pastors should encourage the lay people to take an active part in the Church and in society. On the other hand, the same Council equally emphasizes that lay people are to obey and duly respect their pastors who, by reason of their sacred offices, represent the person of Christ (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 37 ). Catholics who arrogantly challenge or criticize the Church, or even slander Church leaders, are simply setting a bad example and creating a split in the Church. Only by preserving their communion with the Hierarchy can Catholics



truly manifest the “sense of faith” (“sensus fidelium”) as advocated by Vatican II (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 12).

Let us now turn our attention to those Catholics who, like many local people, bear a gloomy outlook about the future of Hong Kong. They have based their views on the uncertainties about the rule of law and the political reform, and the almost unbearable impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on our local economy and livelihood. I earnestly call on these Catholics to place an unwavering hope in Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of human history (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 10) and our close companion on our earthly pilgrimage.

Last but not least, there are those Catholics who are suffering from stress or psychological depression as repercussions of the recent social turmoil and the current pandemic. Often the condition of these Catholics may result from a weak and vacillating faith. We should help them to realize that, apart from counselling service and other therapies, healing for them calls for a rekindling of their faith in God.

My dear Brothers and Sisters, I would like to conclude my sharing with a few words of encouragement for you: The present time, stressful and burdensome as it may appear, could, after all, turn out to be a blessing for us, since it can make us more deeply aware of God as the key to our human destiny, of the need for a stronger sense of solidarity among members of the human family, and of the significance of maintaining Church communion, though allowing for a “diversity” in Church life.

The social turmoil last year and the current pandemic have made great impacts on Hong Kong, and we can foresee new challenges to our evangelising mission in the years to come. Therefore, entrusting ourselves to our Lord’s fatherly care and with one mind and one heart, let us equip ourselves for the mission ahead.

In union of prayer,

+ Cardinal John Tong

Apostolic Administrator of Hong Kong  
21 September 2020, Feast of St. Matthew the Apostle

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## ***Commentary on the Theme of the Pastoral Letter: What is meant by Communion?***

According to the New Testament, especially the Letters of St. Paul, the Church on the People of God has three distinctive marks, namely, Witnessing (Martyrion), Ministry (Diakonia) and Communion or Fellowship (Koinōnia). **Communion** is a very important concept in the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). On the basis of the Conciliar documents [the respective Constitutions or Decrees on: the Church (LG), Revelation (DV), the Church Today (GS), Bishops (CD), Priests (PO), Missions (AG), Laity (AA), Ecumenism (UR) and Eastern Churches (OE)], the term **Communion** has the following threefold meaning:

- (1) Spiritual Communion or Ecclesial Communion (cf. LG4, 7b, 9b, 13a, 13c; DV10a; GS32d, 38b; PO15a; AG4, 37d, 39a; AA18a; UR2b, 7c, 14a, 15a; OE2)

At this level, Communion is directly and particularly related to the Holy Spirit. Through and in the Holy Spirit, individual members of the faithful maintain an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ our Saviour and with the Holy Trinity, sharing the divine life and maintaining a close relationship with the whole People of God, like the cells of a living body among themselves. This spiritual Communion or Fellowship finds expression in the profession of the same Faith, the participation in the same Sacraments (especially the Eucharist) and the close link between members of the faithful in everyday life (through a bond of charity between them, the sharing of spiritual benefits, the sharing of charisms in jointly building up the Church and contributing to the well-being of society).

- (2) Catholic Communion or Ecclesiastical Community (cf. LG8, 13-15; GS92c; AG22b; UR3a, 3e, 4c, 4d, 7c, 13b, 14d, 17b, 18, 19a, 20; OE4a)

At this level, Communion consists in a close union between the Dioceses or Particular Churches (Local Churches) in different parts of the world with the Diocese or Church of Rome. This close union is fully realized in the case of members of the Catholic faithful who are considered to be fully incorporated into the unique Church of Christ. The same union is considered to be partially realized to different extents in the other Christian Churches or Ecclesial Communities, depending on the actual condition of their doctrines, sacramental life and Church governance.

- (3) Hierarchical Communion (cf. LG18b, 22a, 22b, 23a, 29a, Prefatory Note of Explanation; CD4a, 5, 15a; PO7a, 15b; AG38a)

Communion at this level is like the intimate relationship between a living body and its various parts or organs. This entails the intimate link between individual members of the Catholic faithful or individual Church communities with the “College of Bishops”. This “College” refers to the body presided over by the

Pope as the successor of St. Peter and joined by all the Bishops worldwide as successors of the other Apostles. In carrying out His salvific plan through His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, God has entrusted the "College of Bishops" with the task of governing the whole Church, in a collegial and co-responsible manner, with the Pope as the visible sign of the unity of the Church in professing her faith and in her mission. Attaining Hierarchical Communion with Rome is a prerequisite for attaining "full" Ecclesiastical Communion.

Hierarchical Communion also entails the close relationship between priests and the bishop, between deacons and the bishops, and between deacons and priests.

### **Scripture passages related to the spirit of Communion**

The Apostles, with Mary the mother of Jesus and a group of the faithful stayed together in Jerusalem and prayed with one accord in expectation of the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1: 12-14); the witness given by the early Christians through their community life in Jerusalem (Acts 2:42-47); the Apostle and elders held a meeting in Jerusalem to resolve the problems relating to the conversion of the Gentiles to the Christian faith (Acts 15:1-33); the Local Churches in Asia Minor took up collections in support of the Church in Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:1-3); the fellowship of the faithful with one another (2 Cor 13:14); the fellowship of the faithful with one another and with God the Father and Jesus Christ.

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## ***Summary of the Pastoral Letter***

Cardinal John Tong, our Apostolic Administrator, made public a Pastoral Letter, entitled *In Communion with the Church*, on 21 September.

In the Pastoral Letter, the Cardinal encourages the faithful to hold firm to their faith in these times of trials and hardships, recognizing that God, the Lord of human history, will ultimately turn their sufferings into a blessing.

The Cardinal acknowledges that the social unrest last year and the Covid-19 pandemic this year will pose new challenges to our evangelizing mission, and for this reason the faithful should entrust themselves to God and be well prepared.

The Cardinal considers the protesters last year as justified in demanding the government to address some key issues related to justice, democracy and the quality of life. Regrettably, the protests later gave rise to mutual hatred, smearing and animosity among opposing camps.

The Cardinal exhorts the faithful to follow the social teaching of the Church attaining the reforms and well-being of society. Treating others as “enemies” to be fought against is inconsistent with the Christian faith. The faithful can have different stances on social and political issues, but they must avoid causing a division in the Church because of those differences. Even in exercising their rights, the faithful are to take into account the communion and common good of the Church.

The Cardinal reiterates the support of the Church for democracy as a form of governance, but he emphasizes that the attainment of democracy is an “ongoing process” which calls for perseverance and sustained efforts.

As for priests, they should enlighten the faithful with the social teaching of the Church and form their consciences, refraining, however, from exerting their influence in the social concern activities of the faithful.

The Church treasures the supernatural “sense of faith” on the part of the faithful. Accordingly, priests should be ready to listen to the faithful. Nevertheless, when the faithful challenge the Church or even slander Church leaders, they are setting a bad example and causing a division in the Church.

Lastly, the Cardinal calls on the faithful “to put an unwavering hope in Jesus Christ” and to turn to God for His unfailing help. While there is room for a “diversity” in Church life, the faithful must maintain the communion of the Church.

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## **Prayer for Hong Kong Society and the Church**

Heavenly Father, you are the Creator of everything that exists and Father of the human family. We implore you to bless the people of Hong Kong, that they may treat one another as brothers and sisters, with open-mindedness, forbearance and a sense of solidarity. May they work together to promote the common good.

Lord Jesus Christ, you are the Incarnate Word of God and Image of the Father as the God of Mercy. You are also the Lord of human history who unfailingly care for mankind under all circumstances. We implore you to bless the People of God in Hong Kong, so that, through love of God and neighbours, they may bear witness to the Gospel. Help them to see your self-sacrifice on the Cross and your love and forgiveness of enemies as their supreme model. May they contribute their talents and charisms to building up a Church that is united and yet allows for diversity. May our faithful become the salt of the earth and the light of the world, with a preferential option for the poor and the needy. While striving for the well-being of our earthly society, may they not lose sight of the Kingdom of Heaven as their ultimate goal.

Holy Spirit, you are the source of truth, life, charity and grace. We implore you to enlighten Church leaders, that they may attend to the People of God like the Good Shepherd. Inspire and guide those who hold public offices, so that, in implementing sound policies, they may promote justice and uphold human dignity.

O Most Holy Trinity, our beloved city, Hong Kong, is in the midst of a global viral pandemic, a severe economic recession and social instability. May the faithful, in communion with one another and in solidarity with the people of Hong Kong, be sustained by your grace and face the current challenge with faith and hope. Amen. (The *Our Father* and *Hail Mary* may be said.)

Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong  
September 2020

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