

PRACTICING DEMOCRACY: UPHOLDING HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE RIGHT TO SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN HONG KONG

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Abstract

This article examines the key elements of practicing democracy by people and rulers from the perspective of the Catholic tradition, with Hong Kong's recent social movement as an example. It demonstrates how Hong Kong people practice democracy through political participation in a diversity of ways, through public rallies, art, singing, expression through their professions and affinity groups, and so on. However, the government failed to uphold the rule of law and the basic human rights of people, especially freedom of expression and protecting personal safety of people. This article also shows, during the social movement, how Catholic Church leaders, pastors, church organizations and individual Christians exercised their rights and responsibilities of political participation through a variety of means. At the end, the article points out that in the present situation, with a new national security law, the prospect of setting up authentic democratic structures of participation in Hong Kong is dimmed. However, Christians should not give up hope. Christians need to deepen their understanding of democratic values rationally, to feel the suffering of people with compassion affectively, and to keep practicing

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participation and solidarity in their daily lives. Strengthening the inner self through the practice of contemplation and joining faith and/or civic communities are important.

Keywords: Catholic Church in Hong Kong; Democracy; Democratic Movement; Ethics of Governance; Hong Kong Protest; Political Participation

Introduction

“Politics, according to the social teaching of the Church, is one of the highest forms of charity, because it serves the common good,” Pope Francis said. He points out that a good Catholic meddles in politics, offering the best of oneself, so that those who govern can govern. Citizens are responsible for participating in politics and leadership according to their ability.¹

In the past two years, there were numerous mass movements all over the world, from Hong Kong to Barcelona to Belarus to Thailand... Very often, these mass movements originated from the dissatisfaction of people towards their governments. People saw the authoritarian tendencies of the regime and the problems in governance and political leadership, hoping to promote change and transformation of the society through collective actions.

In Hong Kong, in the past, no matter under British colonial rule or Chinese sovereignty, although there was no full democratic structure and universal suffrage in voting the political leaders, people could still enjoy various kinds of freedom and the rule of law to quite a large extent. However, in recent years, especially since last year, at the later stage of the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement, more and more people feel that their freedom of expression and the rule of law in Hong Kong are threatened, and the road to democracy has become more tortuous than ever.

In this background, in this article, I would like to examine, from the perspective of the Catholic tradition, the key elements of practicing democracy by people and rulers, with Hong Kong as an example. How did Hong Kong people, including the Christian community practice democracy through participation? What challenges and obstacles people face on the road to democracy? How did we evaluate the performance of the government with the ethics of governance in the social teachings of the Church? What is the prospect of democracy under an authoritarian rule?

¹Pope Francis' daily homily at Santa Marta, September 16, 2013. See “Pope Calls Faithful to Pray, Participate Actively in Politics,” *Catholic News Agency*, 16 September 2013, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/pope-calls-faithful-to-pray-participate-actively-in-politics>

Practicing Democracy: Participation and Freedom of Expression

In the Catholic social tradition, the human person, with a sacred and rational nature, open both to the Transcendent and to others, and able to make choices and pursue a meaningful life, is the foundation and purpose of political life.² The political community or the government should in practice be the organic and organizing unity of a real people. The term “a people” does not mean a shapeless multitude but a group of people able to form their own opinion on public matters and has the freedom to express its own political sentiments and to bring them to bear positively on the common good. They have their own responsibilities and convictions.³

There are different kinds of political participation, from voting in elections, serving in jury, joining political party, participating in public protest, expressing opinions through media and various channels, and so on. They are a critical part of democracy, making one’s opinion known and hoping to influence the outcome of a socio-political issue.

Mass Movements in Hong Kong

In the past few years, people in Hong Kong engaged in a few large-scale mass movements to express their opinions and political sentiments, from the pro-democratic Umbrella Movement in 2014⁴ to the Anti-extradition Bill Movement in the second half of 2019. The former aims at advocating for an authentic democratic system which is promised in the Basic Law, the mini-constitution of Hong Kong, whereas the latter focuses on upholding freedom and human rights. In between these two movements, there was a quiet time of large-scale rally because some participants who felt depressed withdrew from social involvement, whereas others worked assiduously in community organization and conscientization or involved in District Council election which are other forms of political participation.⁵ It

²Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 25; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1881.

³Pius XII, “Christmas Radio Message of 24 December 1944,” AAS 37 (1945), 13. Cited in Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004, 385.

⁴For analysis of the Umbrella Movement, please refer to Mary Mee-Yin Yuen, “Cross-cultural Solidarity in the Pro-democratic Umbrella Movement of Hong Kong,” in Yiu Sing Lucas Chan, James Keenan and Shaji George Kochuthara, ed. *Doing Catholic Theological Ethics in a Cross-Cultural and Interreligious Asian Context*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, 2016, 97-110.

⁵For a general view of the political situation from 2014 to 2018, see Mary Mee-Yin Yuen, “Political Crisis in Hong Kong and Ethical Response,” in Kristin Heyer, James Keenan and Andrea Vicini, ed., *Building Bridges in Sarajevo: Plenary Papers of CTEWC 2018*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2019, 128-134.

was until June 2019 that hundreds and thousands people gathered on the street to express their concern and objection to the Extradition Bill in the form of a mass movement.

People protested not because of opposing the general principle of the bill.⁶ Rather, people distrust the legal and judicial system in China based on the different systems between the two places and the many cases of unfair trial or even jail without a proper trial in mainland China. Without going through the normal procedure of public consultation, the Hong Kong government tried to pass the bill quickly under the clear voice of objection. The 2019 movement demonstrated the strong will of people in gaining back their political rights, freedom and human rights. It transited from a protest against the Extradition Bill to a pro-democratic movement. It also reflects the tense and distrustful relationship between China and Hong Kong and the dissatisfaction towards the autocratic rule of both the Hong Kong and Beijing governments.

Diversified Ways of Expression

In *Pacem in Terris*, Pope John XXIII points out that participation in community life is not only one of the greatest aspirations of the citizen, called to exercise freely and responsibly his/her civic role with and for others, but is also one of the pillars of all democratic orders and one of the major guarantees of the permanence of the democratic system.⁷ It is expressed in a series of activities by means of the citizen as an individual or in association with others in various areas of the civil society.⁸

In the 6-month long protest in 2019, we can see the persistent and consistent political participation of Hong Kong people in a diversity of ways. In the early stage of the Anti-extradition Bill movement, there were a few large scale peaceful marches which climbed to a million people, hoping to employ a rational and moderate way to voice out their opinions and bring changes. The principle of non-violence was stressed. Many legal professionals also expressed their concerns on the bill, explaining all the problematic issues of the bill.⁹ However, people's strong demands of "withdrawing the bill" were

⁶The extradition bill allows the Hong Kong government to transfer fugitives to jurisdictions that Hong Kong does not have an extradition agreement with, and mainland China is one of them.

⁷John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 26-27.

⁸Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 75.

⁹Alvin Lum and Jeffie Lam, "Hong Kong Bar Association Calls Government's Extradition Proposal a 'Step Backward', While Extradition Lawyer Says it Does Not Offer Sufficient Protections," *South China Morning Post*, 2 April 2019.

ignored by the government and the government even claimed one of the protest actions a riot. Many people regarded Carrie Lam the chief executive and her administration arrogant, refusing to hear people's voices and care about people's worries on the different systems between China and Hong Kong. Thus, various kinds of protest, both peaceful and more radical ones, sprang up all over Hong Kong. These include assemblies and processions in different districts of various scale, putting up memo pads or posters on the neighbourhood "Lennon walls," chanting protest song "Glory be to Hong Kong" in shopping malls and other places, forming human chains, flash-mob like protest actions, and so on.¹⁰ Most protest actions were quite peaceful except some aimed at destroying facilities. Moreover, medical staff also held public rally and sit-in silent protest in hospitals condemning police brutality a number of times as they witnessed many injury cases of protesters and the first-aiders were not respected by the police.¹¹ Citizens of various categories such as old age people, women, civil servants, teachers and other professions also organized public assemblies in support of the movement. A slogan in the movement was often cited: Brothers and sisters climb the mountain in our own ways. Since the Lion Rock Mountain is a symbol of Hong Kong, climbing mountain is a symbol often employed by the protesters.

Employing Radical Means in Protest

As the protest developed, apart from against the bill, other demands were proposed, including an independent inquiry into the use of force by police; amnesty for arrested protesters; a halt to categorize the protests as riots; and the implementation of universal suffrage.¹² Ignored by the government, some young protesters tended to employ more radical means, such as firing gasoline bombs, destroying traffic lights and facilities of mass transit railway, attacking some so-called pro-establishment shops, and blocked some main roads and public transport. There were also some extreme cases of fighting with and attacking those who held different opinions. They claimed that they

¹⁰The flash mob strategy is an expression of the "Be Water" strategy of the movement at the early stage. For the protesters, "Be Water" means being anonymous, spontaneous, flexible and also evasive—just like the flow of water, in order to avoid arrest by the police. The term is originated from the philosophy of martial art actor Bruce Lee.

¹¹Jeff Pao, "HK Medical Staff Rally Against Police Action," *Asia Times*, 27 October 2019; "Hundreds of Medical Staff Participate in Silent Sit-in Protest This Afternoon," *Dimsum Daily*, 2 September 2019.

¹²Jeffie Lam, "Five Key Demands, Not One Less," *South China Morning Post*, 4 September 2019.

were forced to employ radical ways because peaceful means were useless, being ignored by the government. However, resistance based on hatred and violence may cause irreparable harm to society in the long run.

On the other side, the government claimed the protest movement as a riot because violent means were employed. Hundreds and thousands of protesters were arrested. Not infrequently, police employed abusive means to arrest protesters and they arrested people arbitrarily, including the passers-by. Through radical means, the protesters wanted to give signals to the government and the pro-establishment camp that they have to pay a price for supporting the bill, bad governance and destroying the rule of law of Hong Kong. In the series of social conflicts, the mainstream Hong Kong opinion may not fully support the radical violent behaviour but many people still sympathized with the radical protesters as they encountered or witnessed police violence. However, there were other anti-violent citizens who were frightened by the violent behaviour, angry at the destruction of Hong Kong, and feeling confused and disgusted towards the peaceful protesters and activists who supported the radical protesters. As a result, there is a serious split and division among Hong Kong people. Whether the protesters are justified to employ violent means became controversial.

Ethics of Governance

In practicing democracy, apart from people's participation, the role of rulers is also very important. In the Catholic tradition, willing to serve people, caring for the needs of people and respecting their basic rights, and listening to people's voices are important factors of good governance in a democratic society.

Those who exercise authority should do so as a service. Jesus tells us that, "if anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all" (Mk 9:35). In the words of Pope Paul VI, "to take politics seriously at its different levels—local, regional, national and worldwide—is to affirm the duty of each individual to acknowledge the reality and value of the freedom offered him to work at one and the same time for the good of the city, the nation and all mankind."¹³ Political leaders have the responsibility to serve people and attain the common good of the society.

In the Chinese Confucian tradition, Mencius the best-known disciple of Confucius also shares similar values. When asked about

¹³Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, 46.

the role of a benevolent ruler, Mencius pointed out that “people come first, the altars of the earth and grain [signifying political authority or the state] come afterwards, the ruler comes last.”¹⁴ Mencius further said that, if a ruler really put benevolence into practice, treated the common people with sincerity and respect what a ruler should do, then, people would also respect and obey the ruler and dare to express their opinions. If a ruler is benevolent, righteous and correct, the people will follow, and the state will be settled.¹⁵ Otherwise, the state will decay and perish.

Respecting People’s Rights

Put it more concretely, political authorities are obliged to respect the dignity and fundamental rights of the human person. Attainment of the common good is always the purpose of the public authority. Common good touches the whole person, the needs both of her body and of her soul. Thus they should promote both the material and the spiritual welfare of the citizens.¹⁶ The political rights attached to citizenship can and should be granted according to the requirements of the common good. As Vatican II document *Gaudium et spes* points out, “political authority, both in the community as such and in the representative bodies of the state, must always be exercised within the limits of the moral order and directed toward the common good, according to the juridical order legitimately established or due to be established...the responsibility, dignity and importance of leaders are indeed clear.”¹⁷

However, during the protest movement in Hong Kong, the basic human rights such as personal safety and freedom of expression as stipulated in the basic law and the Hong Kong Bill of Rights, the rule of law and the common good were not fully respected. In the eyes of many people, not only did the government refuse to listen to people’s voices, but it also allowed the police force to arrest arbitrarily and to employ violent and inhumane means against the protesters by using lethal weapons and out of proportion force during arrest and investigation. For example, during the first 6 months of protest, Hong Kong police used crowd control weapons 30,000 times.¹⁸ Among the

¹⁴Mencius, *The Book of Mencius*, 7B:14.

¹⁵Mencius, *The Book of Mencius*, 4A:20.

¹⁶John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 53-54, 57.

¹⁷Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 74.

¹⁸Among the weapons, the police said, around 16,000 tear gas rounds, 10,000 rubber bullets, 2,000 bean bag rounds, as well as 1,850 sponge grenades were used since last June. The police force also started to issue extendable batons to off-duty officers in September 2019. See Kris Cheng, “Hong Kong Police used Crowd Control Weapons

numerous conflicts, the June 12 incident which fired hundreds of rounds of tear gas towards unarmed citizens, the inaction of the police in the July 21 Yuen Long station which allowed gangsters attacking passengers, the August 31 attack of passengers in the Prince Edward subway station by the police, and the siege of the two universities in November were the more serious clashes during the social movement.¹⁹ Moreover, Hong Kong police made 8,981 arrests between June 9, 2019, and May 29, 2020, in connection with the protests. Among those arrested, 1,707 were under 18 years of age, including 1,602 secondary students and eight primary school pupils. Another 5,640 arrestees were aged between 18 and 30 years old. The oldest person arrested was 84 years old and the youngest 11 years old. As of May 29, 2020, 1,749 people have been charged with taking part in a riot, unlawful assembly, wounding, assault occasioning actual bodily harm or other offences.²⁰

During the movement, there was injury on both sides. Because of the lethal weapons of the police, thousands of protesters were hurt and some seriously injured. These were witnessed by many medical staff, lawyers, news reporters, and ordinary people who queried the excessive, insulting and abusive power employed by the police. When journalists raised questions and legitimacy of employing excessive force in the police press conference, the police officers simply said they needed to stop riot and suppress violence but refused to conduct a thorough and in-depth investigation. Many people suggested that the police did not treat the young protesters as human persons as protesters were called by the police as “cockroaches.” Many people argue that even if the protesters violated laws, they should be put under trial properly, but not to be punished privately by the police. Meanwhile, there was no punishment or even investigation if police were complained for employing excessive force. People felt outrageous and angry. This is one of the main reasons for the escalation of violence during the protest.

Respecting the Rule of Law

The rule of law is the cornerstone of a good and well-governed society, in which guilt and innocence are determined by an

30,000 Times since June; Over 6,000 Arrested,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, 10 December 2019.

¹⁹For a detailed account of various incidents during the movement, please refer to the work of Hong Kong political scientist Ngok Ma, *A Community of Protest*, Taipei: Zuo An Culture, 2020.

²⁰Adolfo Arranz, “Arrested Hong Kong Protesters: How the Numbers Look One Year On,” *South China Morning Post*, 11 June 2020.

independent judiciary in independent courts.²¹ This is affirmed in the social teaching of the Church. It is also the most important guarantee of Hong Kong's freedom, stability and well-being.

During the social movement, many protesters were arrested arbitrarily but, so far, no police officer was charged because of their offensive and illegal action. While the government often emphasizes the importance of obeying laws, the law-enforcement force seems to be out of control apparently. Police officers could not be identified as their face and staff numbers were covered, not to mention they have to be responsible for their action. The internal Complaints Against Police Office (CAPO) had received more than 1,300 complaints in connection with the protests as of early December 2019. But all cases of investigation of CAPO are conducted by police themselves, with overseeing by the Independent Police Complaints Council (IPCC). Many challenged the impartiality of CAPO, the only mechanism to file complaints against police. On 19 November 2020, Hong Kong's High Court ruled that the system for dealing with complaints against police is inadequate, noting that the CAPO operated under the force itself, while the IPCC lacked the necessary investigative powers. Judge Chow also points out police officers' failure to display their identification numbers during last year's anti-government protests contravened Hong Kong's Bill of Rights.²² It was in this context that, as early as June 2019 the government was urged to set up an independent commission of inquiry by many renowned people, including the church leaders, but was refused.

As a result, the main focus of the protest also changed from anti-extradition bill to anti-police brutality and other demands. These demands include stopping to call the protest movement a "riot," releasing of all the arrested protesters, and universal suffrage.²³ More and more young people joined the protest—as young as 11 years old. The level of violence escalated on both sides. Young protesters felt that they have a responsibility to succeed those protesters who

²¹John Paul II, *Social Encyclical Centesimus Annus*, 46.

²²Article 3 of the Bill of Rights states that no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. It imposed a "positive obligation" on the government to maintain an independent mechanism capable of conducting "effective investigation" into complaints of suspected ill-treatment by police officers. Also see Chris Lau, "Government Loses Legal Battle over Police Identification during Hong Kong Protests, Court says Complaints System 'Inadequate,'" *South China Morning Post*, 19 November 2020.

²³Lap-Fung Li, "Amendment of the Bill, Police Power, and Revolution of the Era—Examining the Focuses of the Movement through On-spot Survey," *Ming Po Daily News*, 8 September 2019 (in Chinese).

sacrificed their future or even their lives, protecting Hong Kong from deteriorating into a city which might lose freedom and rule of law, or even become a police state, whereas the government cum the police force have employed whatever means “to stop the riot and suppress the violence.”

If the government listened to people’s voices and formally withdrew the bill at the very beginning, the following protest would not occur. As Hong Kong scholar Nelson Chow argues, this saga disclosed the government’s lack of ability in ruling, sincerity in communication, flexibility and adaptability in crisis, affinity in making connection with people, and vision and prospects in governance.²⁴

Imposing National Security Law

A year after the movement, Hong Kong communication scholar Lap-Fung Li claims that Hong Kong citizens are still full of anger towards the government and the police. Citing the result of a poll conducted by the Communication and Public Opinion Survey Center of the Chinese University of Hong Kong in late May 2020, Li points out that 45.8% of respondents have zero point of trust in the SAR government, and 47.5% of respondents have zero point of trust in the police. Many people feel pessimistic about the implementation of “one country, two systems” in Hong Kong, and feel angry and helpless that the central government bypassed the Hong Kong Legislative Council to enact a national security law for Hong Kong.²⁵

From the Beijing government’s perspective, the anti-extradition bill protest has triggered danger to the national security of China, with protesters calling for independence of Hong Kong and support from external forces. In order to plug the loopholes and control the situation, the Beijing government does not hesitate to take action no matter how serious the repercussions are. The National Security Law (NSL) reflects this line of thinking. It came into effect on June 30, 2020, criminalizing the four acts of secession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign and external forces to jeopardize national security. The law allows China’s security officials to executive duties in Hong Kong for the first time since the change of sovereignty in 1997. It also allows suspects of offenders of national security to be tried in China, undermining the judicial independence of Hong Kong

²⁴Nelson Chow, “How Much Time Do Hong Kong has in Collapsing?” *Ming Po Daily News*, 9 August 2019 (in Chinese).

²⁵Lap-Fung Li, “After One Year, How will the Protest Movement Continue?” *Ming Po Daily News*, 11 June 2020 (in Chinese).

and the “one country, two systems” principle. As a result, there is a higher risk of personal safety when participating in protest actions, publishing critical comments on China, or involving in international lobbying.

The government emphasized that only a small group of people will be affected by the law. However, only after a few months the NSL law came into effect, more protesters were arrested, legislative councillors were disqualified, journalists were prosecuted, and teachers were warned or even sacked when they taught civic education and discussed social affairs or historical events with students. The government even set up a hotline to encourage people to monitor each other and file complaint. This would probably create distrust among people, affecting academic freedom, freedom of speech and press. Many teachers and journalists worry whether they would touch the redline of the law.

With the performance of the government and the police delineated above, I find resonance in the *52th Message of the World Day of Peace in 2019* in which Pope Francis highlighted that: “Politics is an essential means of building human community and institutions, but when political life is not seen as a form of service to society as a whole, it can become a means of oppression, marginalization and even destruction.”²⁶ Those who serve in the public office should make every effort to protect the people who live there and to create the conditions for a worthy and just future. All politicians have to work together for the good of the human family and to practice those human virtues that sustain all sound political activity: justice, equality, mutual respect, sincerity, honesty, fidelity. Unfortunately, due to personal incompetence or flaws in the system and its institutions, the political vices of the denial of rights, abuse of power, refuse to listen to opinions, and lack of accountability. These vices undermine the ideal of an authentic democracy, bringing disgrace to public life and threaten social harmony.²⁷

Responses and Participation of the Catholic Church

The Catholic Church has a special role in the world and maintains a close relationship with the world, with its understanding of human dignity, human community and profound meaning of human activity. The Church serves “as a leaven and as a kind of soul for human society as it is to be renewed in Christ and transformed into God’s

²⁶Pope Francis, “Good Politics is at the Service of Peace,” *52th Message of the World Day of Peace*, 1 January 2019, 2.

²⁷Pope Francis, “Good Politics is at the Service of Peace,” 3.

family.”²⁸ In the past, the Church in Hong Kong has involved in various social issues in different ways. In this movement, the Church leaders and Church organizations also participated in it through various means.

The Church leaders issued statements on the Extradition Bill and the related issues a number of times since June 2019.²⁹ At the early stage of the movement, soon after the large-scale march, the diocese issued an appeal on 11 June 2019 in which it requested the government not to pass the law on extradition hurriedly before adequately addressing the queries and worries of the legal sector and of the general public. It also requested both the government and the general public, for the well-being of the society, to exercise due restraint and to seek through peaceful channels a solution which conforms to justice and legal principles.³⁰ Later, the Church leaders urged the government to withdraw the bill formally when the government suspended the bill, in order to meet the strong demand of the general public. In addition, the government was urged to launch a thorough independent inquiry into the June 12 clashes between the police and the protesters. Later, an independent commission of inquiry was urged to set up. After the outbreak of violent assault at the Yuen Long subway station, the Catholic diocese issued statement condemning violence and hoping that the offenders would be arrested and brought to justice. In all the statements, the diocese appeal for a peaceful and rational solution. A year after the movement, Cardinal John Tong issued a pastoral letter, calling for all Catholics in communion with the Church. He said,

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.³¹

²⁸Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 40.

²⁹All press release of the diocese can be found on the website of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong, <https://catholic.org.hk/en/%e6%96%b0%e8%81%9e%e5%85%ac%e5%91%8a-2/>

³⁰Hong Kong Catholic Diocese, “In the face of the extremely turbulent situation of Hong Kong at present triggered by the Extradition Bill, we strongly make the following appeal,” 11 June 2019. <https://catholic.org.hk/en/%e6%96%b0%e8%81%9e%e5%85%ac%e5%91%8a-2/>

³¹Cardinal John Tong, Pastoral Letter *In Communion with the Church*, 20 September 2020.

Apart from the official statement of the diocese, some Church leaders such as Cardinal Joseph Zen, Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha and other priests joined the peaceful rallies. They also addressed in prayer meetings during the movement, praying for the peace of Hong Kong, showing concern to the injured people, encouraging the protesters to employ peaceful means to express their concern and advocate for justice. They encouraged protesters to use peace, love, justice, and wisdom to arouse society and not to demonize others based on hatred. Church groups, including Justice and Peace Commission of Hong Kong, Diocesan Youth Commission of Hong Kong and the Justice and Peace Group of the Franciscans, as well as various parishes organized mass and prayer meetings from time to time to pray for a peaceful solution and reconciliation. Church groups insisted that the setting up of an independent commission of inquiry is necessary to resolve the impasse.³² Bishop Joseph Ha urged the faithful to pray the Rosary throughout the month of October 2019. He said,

The crucial element is 'always to pray and not lose heart' (Luke 18:1)! May the Lord touch the heart of our government officials to respond to the public by setting up an independent commission of inquiry, so that the society can embark on the journey of reconciliation through the finding of the truth.³³

Furthermore, two sharing meetings were organized by the Justice and Peace Commission and the civic organization Mobile Learning in July 28 and November 2, 2019, inviting speakers to reflect on the role of youth, parents, and Christians in the movement as well as allowing participants to share their thoughts, observations, and comments.³⁴ Participants expressed their expectations towards the Church and shared their hopes and beliefs through joining the movement.

Unfortunately, like the social division in the society, members of the Church were also divided in supporting the movement. Some young Catholics opined that certain Church leaders did not show enough support and comfort to the protesters.

³²"Mass Held after Hong Kong Protest Turns Violent," *UCA News*, 13 June 2019; "Catholic Leaders Join Massive Hong Kong Protest," *UCANews*, 17 June 2019; "Church Walks with Protestors," *Sunday Examiner*, 28 June 2019.

³³"Bishop Ha Praying the Rosary, Independent Inquiry Needed for Reconciliation in Hong Kong," *Asia News*, 21 October 2019.

³⁴For details, please refer to the pamphlet on Anti-Extradition Bill Movement published by the Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese, 22 December 2019.

Resistance and Hope at a Difficult Time

According to the Catholic social teaching, authentic democracy is possible only in a State ruled by law, and on the basis of a correct conception of the human person. It requires that the necessary conditions be present for the advancement both of the individual through education and formation in true ideals, and of the society through the creation of structures of participation and shared responsibility.³⁵

In view of the above discussion, an authentic democratic structure in Hong Kong is not within the foreseeable future. Many people feel disappointed, frustrated and helpless, and some even feel hopeless, seeking to leave Hong Kong and move to another country. Moreover, during and after the social movement, Hong Kong experienced a collective trauma. Communication scholar Kit-Wai Ma argues that the collective trauma affects not a single community, but covers all levels of society, including peaceful protesters and ordinary citizens who witnessed violence and brutality as well as the police and radical protesters who experienced physical and psychological violence. For reconciliation, favourable conditions need to be set up and the first thing to do is to find out the truth through an independent inquiry. However, the government refused to do so.³⁶

Nevertheless, as Christians, we should not lose hope even in face of the impasse, with our faith in the resurrected Lord. How to uphold and sustain our hope and the sense of peace in the dark? How can we sustain the spirit of solidarity and participation? To do this, as I have pointed out before, we need to deepen our understanding of democratic values rationally, to feel the suffering of people with compassion affectively, and to keep practicing participation and solidarity in our daily lives.

To pursue advancement of the individual's democratic values, all parties should have a correct conception of human persons, especially those with power. Human dignity of all should be respected; no one should be seen as an object without value. Government officials or political leaders should understand their role of serving people. The models of servant leaders in Christian tradition and benevolent leaders in the Chinese Confucian tradition as mentioned above may inspire them. Instead of suppressing people's participation, political leaders should listen to people's

³⁵John Paul II, *Centisimus Annus*, 46.

³⁶Kit-Wai Ma, "Hong Kong collective trauma and emotional short-circuit," *Ming Po Daily News*, 17 May 2020.

voices and allow them to participate in the decision-making process of policies which affect them.

At present, when Hong Kong inclines to be autocratic, we must maintain our hope and not to give up. To do this, we need to strengthen our inner self through spiritual practice and overcome fear and worries. Contemplation and prayer can help us strengthen our relationship with God and overcome fear. With Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen said that we are called to be contemplatives, that is, see-ers, men and women who see the coming of God. We are called to look, to keep our eyes open, to be awake, alert, attentive, and always watching. We need silent time with God to clear our mind and open our eyes to the outside world. To become a contemplative means to peel off the blindfolds that prevent us from seeing God in the midst of our own world. What blind us are our illusions—the illusion that we know ourselves and the illusion that we can know God. We are called to take away the blindfolds of our illusions that lead to violence, oppression, hatred, and greed. Contemplation will lead to action—repentance and gratitude; the two aspects can never be separated. Action is a grateful response that flows from our awareness of God’s presence in this world. It will bring us to a growing solidarity with our fellow human beings which form the basis for all reconciliation.³⁷

Moreover, to resist evil and maintain hope, we cannot be alone; we need a community to support each other. Jesus teaches us clearly that God calls us not just as individuals, but as a community. How we relate to each other is just as important as how we relate to God. In fact, how we relate to each other is part of how we relate to God. For Jesus, the two great commandments, to love God and love one’s neighbour, can never be separated. We need a worshipping community on earth and also a small faith community.³⁸ This Church community can help us to nurture our religious and social virtues as well as to put our faith into practice. We should learn to talk with each other rather than condemn each other in the Church and in the society, especially those who hold different opinions from us. Moreover, the Church should provide space for those who experienced trauma and injury in different forms, to share and express their stories and emotions.

³⁷Henri Nouwen, “Thomas Merton’s Contemplation and Action,” in John Dear, ed., *The Road to Peace: Writings on Peace and Justice*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998, 196-199.

³⁸Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality*, New York: Doubleday, 1999, 68.

The need of community reminds me of the idea of forming civic groups suggested by legal scholar Benny Tai. Under the existing strong rule, he insists that consolidating the democratic will of resistance through setting up small groups called “civic power points” in the civil society is important. Civic power points refer to groups formed by citizens, including professional organizations, trade unions, churches, civil organizations, alumni associations, parent associations, residents’ organizations, and groups based on special social issues. It is a group of like-minded people willing to listen to each other and communicate sincerely and regularly. The various civic power points can find a topic that everyone cares about, not necessarily a solution to cope with the current situation. Each civic power point can find other similar civic power points and cooperate to promote some issues of common concern. Therefore, once there is a point, it can extend to form a line, then gradually a net can be formed.³⁹ This is one of the means to maintain hope and solidarity. As cultural studies scholar Po-Heung Hui also suggests, the ultimate vision of the protest movement is not only to put pressure on the regime, but to build and protect a free society where people are free from fear. Thus, it is important for the movement to block the spread of authoritarian logic and to facilitate the development and growth of civil society. With mutual support in a community, we can practice democracy in a diversity of ways, such as insisting on telling the truth in the media, schools, government departments and other fields, or continuing to express opinions peacefully; and taking responsibilities in one’s working place and society seriously.⁴⁰

Finally, I would like to conclude with a quotation from Pope Francis’s most recent encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*. He writes, “A love capable of transcending borders is the basis of what in every city and country can be called ‘social friendship’. Genuine social friendship within a society makes true universal openness possible.”⁴¹ For me, this border is not only geographical; it can also refer to border based on class, age, political affiliation or values, and social status. Are we willing to cross the border and reach out to the suffering ones?

³⁹Benny Tai, “Return to Civil Society,” *Apple Daily*, 17 November 2020, (in Chinese)

⁴⁰Po-Heung Hui, “Assessing the Effectiveness of the Movement or Re-evaluating all values?” *Ming Po Daily News*, 14 June 2020.

⁴¹Pope Francis, Social Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, 2020, no. 99.