

Discernment of Spirits and Pastoral Circle in Social Movement: A Theological Reflection on Hong Kong's Anti-extradition Protests

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[Abstract] Tensions between developing spiritual growth and civil resistance often occur when spirituality is perceived as merely a personal pursuit of internal tranquillity and transcendence while civil resistance is regarded as generating confrontations, struggles and sometimes violence against political authority. Such tensions become more prominent in the year 2019 and 2020 when social protests flourish against political, economic and racial injustice in the world. This article responds to such tension by studying how the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola and Gerard Whelan's theological framework of pastoral circle can be applied in discerning the ways that individual Christians respond to the development of Hong Kong since the anti-extradition movement commenced in 2019. This article argues that the social movements in Hong Kong in 2019 revealed the shortcomings of Hong Kong's social infrastructures and cultural superstructures, but at the same time, allowed for the finding of seeds of redemption in the vibrant and resilient civil society, the development of which has been nurtured by previous social movements in Hong Kong. The Spiritual Exercises and the pastoral circle assist in the development of personal discipleship via strengthened identification of beloved sinners,

discernment of spirits and resilience-building under the idea of *agere contra*. Individual believers and Christian communities have also been invited to develop communal discernments and contextual theologies to enrich the mission of the Church. This article contributes to the theological debate on the relationship between Ignatian Spirituality and political activism by offering first-hand experiences from a Chinese society, alongside demonstrating how discernment of spirits can be carried out by Christian activists and Christian communities.

Keywords: Ignatian Spirituality, Discernment of Spirits, Social Movement, Politics and Religion, Hong Kong

Introduction

“Sing Hallelujah to the Lord! Sing Hallelujah to the Lord! Sing Hallelujah, sing Hallelujah, sing Hallelujah to the Lord!” hundreds of people who stayed on the pedestrian bridge leading to the government headquarters repeatedly chanted the famous gospel acclamation before dozens of riot police. At the frontline was a female Protestant pastor, telling the crowds that they would be staying and praying overnight, and urged everyone to remain calm.¹

The event occurred on 13 June 2019, a day after clashes between thousands of protestors and riot police took place outside the Legislative

¹ I was at the scene located on the pedestrian bridge to Citic Tower, Admiralty of Hong Kong on 13 June 2019.

Council Complex in Hong Kong. Lawmakers were set to debate at the second reading of a bill proposing amendments to the extradition law that allowed for fugitives be sent back to Mainland China, which had resumed the exercise of sovereignty over Hong Kong on 1 July 1997. Fearing that the new amendments would have the potential of extraditing Hong Kong citizens alleged of criminal activity to the criminal justice system in Mainland China, a system notorious for its poor record in access to justice and protection of human rights, more than one million citizens took part in a march on 9 June 2019 calling upon the government to withdraw the bill.² Nonetheless, the government insisted on passing the bill as scheduled. Tensions escalated when thousands of protestors blocked major vehicular routes outside the government headquarters and the Legislative Council on 12 June 2019. Hundreds of Christians held prayer meetings around the government headquarters, and some pastors formed human chains before riot police in hopes of protecting the crowds. At 3 pm, the Police dispersed the protest crowds by firing tear gas canisters, rubber bullets and sponge rounds, injuring dozens of citizens. Public outrage broke out after government leaders declared the generally peaceful protest a riot. The clash had attracted attention from the international community over Hong Kong, and the Police's repressive ways of handling protests were widely criticised across international media. Three days later, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong announced the suspension of the bill, but the decision failed to bring a

² Jennifer Creery, "Over a Million Attend Hong Kong Demo Against Controversial Extradition Law, Organisers Say," *Hong Kong Free Press*, 9 June 2019, accessed 18 September 2020: <https://hongkongfp.com/2019/06/09/just-no-china-extradition-tens-thousands-hong-kong-protest-controversial-new-law/>.

halt to further protests. A record-breaking number of two million citizens took place in the demonstration the following day.³

These protests marked the beginning of the anti-extradition movement in Hong Kong. The movement is still ongoing in the city, although the COVID-19 pandemic and the enactment of the National Security Law in Hong Kong on 30 June 2020 have led to the dying down of direct actions. This movement was unprecedented in the history of social movements in Hong Kong, in terms of its scale and duration. Professional bodies, business communities, civil societies and believers of various Christian denominations were deeply involved in the movement.⁴ Protest demands have also evolved from calling for the withdrawal of the bill to investigation of police brutality, de-characterisation of the protests as riots, amnesty of all peaceful protestors and universal suffrage. Although the government eventually withdrew the bill three months after the outbreak of the movement, protest actions continued to evolve and diversify, ranging from chanting protest songs inside shopping malls to occupying the airport.⁵ “Sing

³ I was one of the organisers of the Civil Human Rights Front’s rallies on 9 June and 16 June 2019. The number of demonstrators was announced by the Civil Human Rights Front. Annie Lee, Fion Li and Shawna Kwan, “As Many as Two Million Protesters Hit Hong Kong Streets,” *Bloomberg*, 16 June 2019, accessed 18 September 2020: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-06-16/protests-swell-as-hong-kong-rejects-leader-s-compromise>.

⁴ This article focuses mainly on the dynamics and responses of the Roman Catholic Church and Catholics in Hong Kong. The term “Church” here refers to The Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong; “Christians” and “Catholic” are sometimes interchangeable, depending on the context. Christians from other churches will be addressed in accordance with their denominations, such as Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists or Lutherans.

⁵ There is a multitude of journal articles and books that document the anti-extradition movement in Hong Kong, offering insights and evaluation of this ongoing event from different perspectives. I would recommend three of them for readers who desire for a comprehensive description of the protest: Antony

Hallelujah to the Lord” also became a famous song as it signified the engagement of Christian believers and ministers in the protests and symbolised the peaceful and non-violent nature of the movement during its early stages.⁶

The role played by Christians in rights defence and social movements have long been debated among theologians. The debate became more active when civil disobedience became a popular form of promoting or resisting social change, especially during the civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King Jr. in the 1960s.⁷ Many Christians took part in acts of civil disobedience, direct action and civil resistance after the Second World War, as a way of protesting against war, social

Dapiran, *City on Fire: the Fight for Hong Kong* (London: Scribe Publication, 2020); Zuraidah Ibrahim and Jeffie Lam ed., *Rebel City: Hong Kong's Year of Water and Fire* (Singapore: Scientific Publishing & Hong Kong: South China Morning Post Publishers, 2020); and Kong Tsung-gan, *Liberate Hong Kong: Stories from the Freedom Struggle* (Sydney: Mekong Review, 2020).

⁶ “Hong Kong Protests: How Hallelujah to the Lord Became an Unofficial Anthem,” *BBC News*, 22 June 2019, accessed 8 August 2020: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-48715224>.

⁷ David L. Chappell, “Religious Revivalism in the Civil Rights Movement” in *African American Review*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Winter 2002, Vol. 36 No. 4: 581-595; Dennis C. Dickerson, “African American Religious Intellectuals and the Theological Foundations of the Civil Rights Movement, 1930-55” in *Church History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, June 2005, Vol. 74 Issue 2: 217-235; Curtis J. Evans, “White Evangelical Protestant Responses to the Civil Rights Movement” in *Harvard Theological Review*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, April 2009, Vol. 102 Issue 2: 245-273; Paul Harvey, “Civil Rights Movements and Religion in America” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedias*, August 2016, accessed 7 September 2020: <https://oxfordre.com/religion/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-492>; Vaneesa Cook, “Martin Luther King Jr., and the Long Social Gospel Movement” in *Religion and American Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Winter 2016, Vol. 26 Issue 1: 74-100.

injustice and even democratisation, such as in the United States, Poland, Taiwan, South Korea.⁸

Tensions between developing spiritual growth and engaging in civil resistance often occur due to the difference in nature between spirituality and civil resistance. Whereas spirituality is perceived as personal pursuit of internal tranquillity and transcendence, civil resistance generates confrontations, struggles and sometimes violence against political authorities. Such tensions became more evident in 2019 and 2020 as protests and political movements against political, economic and racial injustice flourished all over the world, including in France, Spain, Chile, Iraq, India, Indonesia and Hong Kong.⁹ The dichotomy between spirituality and activism poses an intellectual challenge to Christian theologians in Hong Kong. Since the Umbrella Movement in 2014, theologians from various Christian denominations in Hong Kong have engaged in debates concerning ways to overcome the dichotomy. The Umbrella Movement, being the other most important movement to strive for full democracy in recent times ended in vain. No political reform was brought about at all.¹⁰ Although a number of scholars from different protestant denominations in Hong

⁸ Daniel Philpott, “The Catholic Wave” in *Journal of Democracy*, 2004, Vol. 15 Issue 2: 32-46; Paolo G. Carozza and Daniel Philpott, “The Catholic Church, Human Rights, and Democracy: Convergence and Conflict with the Modern State” in *Logos*, 2012, Vol. 15 Issue 3: 15-43; Yan-ho Lai, “Building Heavenly Kingdom on Earth: The Roman Catholic Church and Deepening Democracy in Brazil and South Korea” in *Hong Kong Journal of Catholic Studies*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2015, Vol. 6: 173-205.

⁹ Samuel J. Brannen, Christian S. Haig and Katherine Schmidt, *The Age of Mass Protest: Understanding an Escalating Global Trend* (Washington: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2020).

¹⁰ Justin K.H. Tse and Jonathan Y. Tan edited, *Theological Reflections on the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement* (US: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

Kong sought to author some works concerning the relationship between Christianity and the Umbrella Movement, such theological reflections were under-developed within the Catholic Church.¹¹

Against this background, this article engages in the intellectual debate of the relationship between spirituality and activism by demonstrating how the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola and Gerard Whelan's theological framework of pastoral circle can be applied to discern social actions by activists. The *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius offers rich resources for individual and communal discernments of social and political actions. The pastoral circle, proposed by Joe Holland and Peter Henriot and modified by Whelan, serves as an analytical tool for the Church to make decisions on pastoral actions with regards to the context. This article utilises their theoretical resources and explores how individual Christians in Hong Kong responded to the anti-extradition movement. This article argues that the social movements in 2019 revealed the shortcomings of Hong Kong's social infrastructures and cultural superstructures, but at the same time, allowed for the finding of seeds of redemption in the vibrant and resilient civil society, the development of which has been nurtured by previous social movements in Hong Kong. The *Spiritual Exercises* and the pastoral circle assist in the development of personal discipleship via strengthened identification of beloved sinners, discernment of spirits and resilience-building under the idea of *agere contra*. Individual believers and Christian communities

¹¹ The only edited volume of Catholics involving in the 79-day Umbrella Movement was *The Opening Umbrella and the Faith* (傘開·信念), edited by a group of young Catholics. The book was even not published in Hong Kong but in Taiwan (Taiwan: Elephant White, 2015).

have also been invited to develop communal discernments and contextual theologies to enrich the mission of the Church.

The methodology adopted in this article includes participant observation, analysis of existing empirical data and reflections on the anti-extradition movement, alongside interpretation of them in light of theological resources. Particularly, my personal experiences and participation in spirituality and activism have been examined. My connection with activism in Hong Kong began as a junior high school student in late 2002, when I joined the first rally against the national security law with my Churchmates and Catholic priests. Since 2010, I became a social movement organiser in the Student Union of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese. In the following year, I was elected as Convenor of the Civil Human Rights Front (CHRF), a coalition of Hong Kong’s civil society which has been the organiser of the annual 1 July rally since 2003. After the outbreak of the anti-extradition movement in June 2019, I returned to CHRF to help with the organisation of the rallies, and later on, took up the role as Vice-convenor until September 2020. I have witnessed and been involved in the progress and transformation of Hong Kong’s activism for almost a decade. The outbreak of the anti-extradition movement has awakened Christians, including myself, to contemplate on their role in times of political turmoil. With my formation under Ignatian Spirituality, I am urged by the Holy Spirit to share my reflections and insights.

This article is divided into three sections. The first section reviews the essentials of discernment of spirits in St. Ignatius’s *Spiritual Exercises* and Whelan’s theory of pastoral circle. The second section

demonstrates how the pastoral circle can be integrated with the *Spiritual Exercises* for personal discernment amid Hong Kong's anti-extradition movement. The last section concludes the article with recommendations to Hong Kong's Christian activists.

Discernment of Spirits under the Ignatian Tradition

The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius and Discernment of Spirits

St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491 - 1556) was the founder of the Society of Jesus and the author of the *Spiritual Exercises* (the Exercises). The Exercises crystallised his lifetime experiences with God into a manual for individuals to develop spiritual growth in a systematic manner. The Exercises was designed mainly for Christian retreatants to undergo a deep conversion for God by “preparing and disposing our soul to rid itself of all its disordered affections and then, after their removal, of seeking and finding God’s will in the ordering of our life for the salvation of our soul” (Paragraph 1 of the Exercises).¹²

The Exercises is structured into four parts, named as “weeks” for retreatants to exercise in around 30 days. The First Week invites retreatants to navigate themselves towards the “principle and foundation” of human beings, that is, “to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by means of doing this to save their souls” (Paragraph 23).¹³ One should pray for the grace of “holy indifference,” helping oneself to use

¹² George E. Ganss translated, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius* (Chicago: Loyola Press 1992), 21.

¹³ Ganss, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, 32.

earthly things that are created for the pursuit of the end, and to free oneself from things that hinder such pursuit.¹⁴ The “principle and foundation” in the Exercises urge Christians to depart from inordinate attachments and disordered affections to seek God’s will. The Exercises then asks retreatants to contemplate sins and hell, and acknowledge that they are beloved by God, whose power and love transcends one’s sinfulness. The Second Week offers guidelines on meditation and imaginative contemplations of the Gospels to help retreatants discern and confirm one’s election of the way of life, realising discipleship as a Christian. The Third Week comprises a test of commitments for retreatants who made their election for God by contemplation of the passion of the Lord. Retreatants are asked to meditate and experience the costs and sufferings of following the will of God just as what Jesus had undergone. The Fourth Week offers meditation of the Lord’s resurrection where retreatants share the paschal joy and then contemplate the attainment of the love of God in everything, to own a deep interior knowledge of God who gives unceasing graces for and intimacy with his children. The Exercises also supplement instructions on prayer, spiritual discernment, almsgiving, scruples and methods to enhance one’s unity with the Church.

The Exercises can be treated as a manual to live out a genuine discipleship, when exercitants commit to the way they elect to follow the Son of God. Activism can be a path to the realisation of discipleship, as activism is a critical approach to the fulfilment of the imperative of

¹⁴ Ganss, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, 32.

the stewardship when God commanded Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:28).¹⁵ The Exercises offer rich resources to develop one's discipleship, and this article addresses three of them: (1) beloved sinners, (2) discernment of spirits, and (3) *agere contra*.

“Beloved sinner” refers to our spiritual identity. As stated by the “principle and foundation,” we are created to praise, reverence and serve the Creator, whatever we have done in our lives. Our weaknesses and wrongdoings do not separate us from the love of God if we decide to reconcile with the Father like the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32 & Romans 8:35). We are liberated from our sins once we realise the deep-rooted evilness and consequence of the sins we committed and the transcendent love from God. Otherwise, sins and the “sinfulness” in our interior selves would turn to be ‘inordinate attachments’ that obstruct us from realising and achieving our purposes in life. Despite our fragility, we can still be called to be beloved disciples of Christ, to live in whatever way that God invites us. Identification of sinners beloved by God is the disposition and basis of discernment of spirits. Our relationship with God is not defined by our actions or inactions in social movements or our commitment to a distinctive ideology that supports our political participation, but by our true identity as an image of God (Genesis 1:27). Then, we can begin to discern the will of God, who asks us to follow him in a particular way.

Discernment of spirits plays a central role in discipleship. It is an ongoing process to own interior knowledge of God, to love and follow

¹⁵ The Scripture quotations contained in this article are from *The Holy Bible, New International Version*[®], NIV[®] Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.[®] Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

him in our entire lives. In the “Rules for the Discernment of Spirits” of the Exercises, Ignatius explained how exercitants could understand “the various motions which are caused in the soul” (Paragraph 313).¹⁶ In his view, one should receive good motions, or good spirit while at the same time, reject bad motives or evil spirit that drives us away from God. In other words, retreatants and Christians should discern and follow the good spirit and be God-oriented in their lives. The progress of discernment of spirits can be identified by a pair of contrasting ideas: “consolation” and “desolation.” When one increases faith, hope and charity, he or she experiences consolation that moves himself or herself towards God (Paragraph 316).¹⁷ On the contrary, when one moves in the opposite direction, he or she undergoes desolation (Paragraph 317).¹⁸ It should be noted that the ideas of consolation and desolation are not necessarily related to one’s state of emotions, for one can undergo a difficult consolation through sharing one’s experiences of suffering. In other words, discernment of spirits is not an emotional forecast; it requires exercitants to use both intellect to reason and elicit affections (Paragraph 3).¹⁹

Discerning interior movement is an essential part for Christians to collaborate with God. In the short run, it helps us to make good decisions in our daily lives and assists us in moving towards God intimately; in the long run, discernment equips us with the will to commit to the chosen path of Christian life: we are not choosing a specific way of life, but choosing God who may ask us to take an “U-turn” in critical times. In

¹⁶ Ganss, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, 121.

¹⁷ Ganss, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, 122.

¹⁸ Ganss, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, 122.

¹⁹ Ganss, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, 22.

activism, Christians are called upon to discern possible actions with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes, the Spirit directs us to a path that contradicts with the will of other protestors. What matters is whether one can distinguish a good spirit from an evil one, and then insist on following the good spirit and make one's decisions in line with God's will.

The third element that constitutes discipleship is "*agere contra*," a Latin phrase meaning "to act against." It refers to one's capacity to build resilience, which is essential for ensuring perseverance in living out one's election under the discernment of spirits. In the Exercises, Ignatius offers a solution for combating desolation in prayer:

"In time of consolation it is easy and scarcely taxing to remain in contemplation for a full hour, but during desolation it is very hard to fill out the time. Hence, to act against (agere contra) the desolation and overcome the temptations, the exercitant ought to remain always a little longer than the full hour, and in this way become accustomed nor merely to resist the enemy but even to defeat him" (Paragraph 13).²⁰

Ignatius suggested each exercitant of the Exercises to take a full hour for each prayer. Knowing that human tendency inclines to cling to comfort zones rather than to embrace challenges, he asked exercitants to pray longer than an hour if he or she is undergoing spiritual desolation. This is a solution for resisting the temptation of shortening prayer time, which is often a tactic of the evil spirit to distract people from God. *Agere contra* is an exercise of resilience for overcoming temptations. It

²⁰ Ganss, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, 25.

stretches our interior freedom, which may be limited by our comfort zones. We often feel hesitant to act against our conventional practices, and our natural resistance to change results in us being “unfree.” For instance, in public debates, people tend to listen to and reinforce their belief in views that they possess and are reluctant to consider or even try to understand opposing views. The creation of “echo chambers,” amplified by social media, limits our ability to accept diversified opinions and thus restricts our freedom. *Agere contra* is a technique to strengthen our will by allowing us to break through our established ways and stretch our inner freedom and capacity; thereby enabling us to follow the footsteps of the suffering Christ who was nailed on the Cross to fulfil the Father’s will.

Discernment of Spirits, Historical Analysis and the Pastoral Circle

The principles and techniques of discernment of spirits were further developed and systemised by theologians to promote discernment from personal to communal and institutional levels. One famous figure is Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984), a Canadian Jesuit and theologian in the 20th Century. In his book *Method in Theology*, Lonergan proposed an idea of “levels of consciousness” to explain how humans make decisions based on affective connections. The first level of consciousness goes to one’s experiences through his or her senses. The second level of consciousness occurs when one moves to a stage of registering and understanding the experiences. When one’s inner-self contemplates certainty, he or she judges whether his or her insights are true. The third and last level of consciousness is reached where, after

making judgment over the facts and understanding those facts, one decides on his or her actions in order to live in authenticity.²¹ Such a linear stage-by-stage process may be constrained by the unwillingness to be attentive to experiences, the excessive caution in making rational judgments, or the reluctance to live authentically.²² The intervention of the Spirit grants graces of strength to Christians who practice *agere contra*. Religious conversion is essential for the transcendence of human frailty with the love of God and strengthens the resilience of human consciousness in making authentic decisions.²³

Lonergan developed a “theory of history” from his idea of “level of consciousness” that applies the process of individual self-appropriation to historical analysis. Four ideas are addressed in the theory of history: progress, decline, redemption and the mission of the Church. “Progress” refers to the evolution of social structures that move towards the common good, such as changes in technological, economic and political infrastructures alongside cultural superstructures. In Lonergan’s view, a society undergoes “progress” when everyone acts authentically. “Decline” is a regression to such social structure, often caused by selfishness of the privileged class in society. “Redemption” means that despite the strong force of “decline” in human history that

²¹ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007). Interpretations of his theory can be found in Michael McCarthy, *Authenticity as Self-Transcendence: The Enduring Insights of Bernard Lonergan* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015) and Gerard Whelan, *A Discerning Church: Pope Francis, Lonergan, and a Theological Method for the Future* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2019).

²² Gerry (Gerard) Whelan, “Theological Reflection and the Slum of Nairobi” in Pierli, Francesco and Yago Abeledo ed., *The Slums: A Challenge to Evangelization* (Nairobi: Pauline Publication Africa, 2002), 80.

²³ Whelan, “Theological Reflection and the Slum of Nairobi,” 80.

may prevail over the force of “progress,” divine redemption operates in history as well, just as the divine graces that bestow upon individuals undergoing discernment of spirits. In practice, Lonergan believed that redemption happens in social infrastructures and culture superstructures. Lonergan proposed that the mission of the Church be to serve the foundation of redemption in human history through its priestly, prophetic and kingly functions. Priestly function serves as a mediation of religious conversion by the liturgical tradition of the Church. Prophetic function refers to the ministry of engaging in dialogue or advocacy for the moral and social teaching of the Church to influence social values and cultural beliefs. Kingly function means that the Church shall establish various infrastructures to connect the kingdom of God with real human needs, such as schools, hospitals and development projects, except seizure of political power.²⁴

Lonergan’s theory of history has enriched the theological discussion of discernment of spirits, which extended the application from individual Christians to communal and institutional levels of the Church. A Jesuit theologian Gerard Whelan integrated Lonergan’s theory of history with the idea of “pastoral circle,” which is proposed in Joe Holland and Peter Henriot’s *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice*.²⁵ The pastoral circle refers to a repeating process under evaluation, reassessment and reordering of pastoral preferences. It consists of four steps: (1) insertion, (2) social analysis, (3) theological

²⁴ A general description of Lonergan’s theory of history can be found in Whelan, “Theological Reflection and the Slum of Nairobi,” 81-3.

²⁵ Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice (USA: Orbis, 1983)*; Whelan, “Theological Reflection and the Slum of Nairobi,” 78.

reflection and (4) pastoral planning.²⁶ The next section applies Whelan's revised framework of the pastoral circle, which is integrated with Lonergan's insights in history, to study the social context of Hong Kong and discern the presence and direction of the Spirit through my observation and reflection.

Applying the Pastoral Circle

Step 1: General Description

Whelan suggests the first step of the pastoral circle as offering an overview of the institution that the discerner is placed and his or her personal information in relation to the institution. Against the background of the anti-extradition movement and my biography related to Hong Kong's activism set out above, I will focus on discussion of Hong Kong's situation as the context of discernment in this section, which will be set out in four facets.

State repression led to mass resistance in Hong Kong. From 12 June 2019 onwards, protestors in Hong Kong restlessly took collective actions to fight for the five demands and addressing of police brutality. There were at least 300 public assemblies and processions related to the anti-extradition movement, of which 252 of them were objected by the Commissioner of Police.²⁷ The Hong Kong Police was also criticised for using excessive force to disperse protest crowds. A scholarly report

²⁶ Whelan, "Theological Reflection and the Slum of Nairobi," 78.

²⁷ Independent Police Complaint Council, *A Thematic Study by the IPCC on the Public Order Events arising from the Fugitive Offenders Bill since June 2019 and the Police Actions in Response, Volume 1* (Hong Kong: Independent Police Complaint Council 2020), 38.

found that between June 2019 and January 2020, Police fired more than 10,008 rubber bullets, 15,969 tear gas canisters, 1,999 bean bag rounds and 1,852 sponge rounds against protestors and passers-by in protest sites.²⁸ Police’s use of force, together with the attacks by thugs against civilians in Yuen Long on 21 July 2019, escalated violence in subsequent demonstrations, where “black-bloc” protestors vandalised against shops and buildings owned by Chinese business corporations, and vigilant against anti-protest citizens. Casualties in protests were unexpectedly high. More than 2,600 were wounded, of which 520 were Hong Kong police officers.²⁹ However, the Police were also alleged of committing torture and sexual abuses against arrested protestors in custody, as reported by Amnesty International and other human rights organisations.³⁰ Numbers of arrests and prosecutions of protestors by law enforcement also reached an unprecedented level. Between 9 June 2019 and 29 May 2020, Hong Kong Police made 8,981 arrests connected with the protests. Among the arrestees, 1,749 were charged with rioting, taking part in unlawful assembly, assault occasioning actual bodily harm

²⁸ Progressive Scholars Group, *Silencing Millions: Unchecked Violations of Internationally Recognised Human Rights by the Hong Kong Police Force* (Hong Kong: Progressive Scholars Group 2020), 154.

²⁹ Progressive Scholars Group, *Silencing Millions*, 154.

³⁰ Amnesty International, “Hong Kong: Arbitrary Arrests, Brutal Beatings and Torture in Police Detention Revealed,” *Amnesty International*, 19 September 2019, accessed 8 August 2018: <https://bit.ly/2IsgTTP>; Civil Rights Observer, *Policing Protests in Hong Kong: Torture, Cruel and Degrading Treatment and Punishment* (Hong Kong: Civil Rights Observer, May 2020); The Sounds of the Silenced, *Follow Up Submission To The Committee Against Torture Concerning the Fifth Report of The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of People’s Republic of China*, (Hong Kong: The Sounds of the Silenced, December 2019), accessed 8 August 2020: <https://bit.ly/2H886pq>.

and other related offences. In addition, 1,707 were under 18 years old, and the youngest one was 11.³¹

Allegations of police brutality in Hong Kong caused backfire in the global community as well, when dozens of first-aiders, medical doctors and nurses were arrested and charged with rioting for carrying out humanitarian work at the frontline of the protests.³² The most obvious foreign response to the anti-extradition movement was the passage of “Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act” and “A bill to prohibit the commercial export of covered munitions items to the Hong Kong Police Force” by the US Congress in November 2019. The bills grant the US government power to sanction Hong Kong government officials who are alleged of human rights abuses, alongside embargo of crowd-control items such as tear gas and rubber bullets.³³ In

³¹ Adolfo Arranz, “Arrested Hong Kong Protesters: How the Numbers Look One Year On,” *South China Morning Post*, 11 June 2020, accessed 8 August 2020: <https://multimedia.scmp.com/infographics/news/hong-kong/article/3088009/one-year-protest/index.html>.

³² All-Party Parliamentary Groups on Hong Kong, *The Shrinking Safe Space for Humanitarian Aid Workers in Hong Kong: Inquiry into Violations of Human Rights and Humanitarian Principles by the Hong Kong Police Force* (UK: All-Party Parliamentary Groups on Hong Kong, August 2020), accessed 8 August 2020:

<https://mk0whitehousecooxpwm.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/APPG-on-Hong-Kong-inquiry-report.pdf>; Darren Mann, “International Humanitarian Norms are Violated in Hong Kong” *The Lancet*, 21 November 2019, accessed 8 August 2020: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(19\)32909-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(19)32909-5).

³³ 116th Congress of US (2019-2020), *S. 1838—Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act of 2019*, *CONGRESS.GOV*, 27 November 2019, accessed 8 August 2020: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/1838>; *S.2710—A Bill to Prohibit the Commercial Export of Governed Munitions Items to the Hong Kong Police Force*, *CONGRESS.GOV*, 27 November 2019, accessed 8 August 2020: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/2710/text>.

sum, both the State and people in Hong Kong paid a heavy price for the State’s repression against the anti-extradition protests.

The deterioration in Hong Kong’s economy was a price to pay for the protests and repressions. The government’s attempt to amend the extradition bill caused local and foreign businessmen and investors to lose confidence in Hong Kong’s status as an international financial centre, the stability of which has all along been guaranteed by freedoms and liberties and adherence to the rule of law.³⁴ Furthermore, the waves of anti-extradition protests also adversely impacted on tourism and sales, causing Hong Kong to undergo an economic recession for the first time since 2009. Tourism arrivals in Hong Kong dropped by 26% compared with the same period in the previous year three months after the outbreak of the protests in June 2019, which was the second-largest drop since records commenced in the 1990s. Hong Kong’s retail sales fell in August at the quickest rate since records began in 1982.³⁵ The government’s hard-line strategies against the protestors, alongside Hong Kong’s gradual integration into China’s authoritarian rule, also caused global credit rating agencies like Fitch and Moody to downgrade Hong Kong.³⁶

³⁴ American Chamber of Commerce, “Extradition Bill could Undermine Rule of Law and Competitiveness: AmCham President,” 30 May 2019, accessed 18 September 2020: <https://www.amcham.org.hk/news/hong-kongs-extradition-proposal-could-undermine-rule-of-law-and-competitiveness-says-the-amcham-president>.

³⁵ Valentina Romei, “How Hong Kong’s Economy is Reeling from the Protests—in 7 Charts,” *Financial Times*, 27 November 2019, accessed 8 August 2020: <https://www.ft.com/content/0dd8e27e-0ae0-11ea-bb52-34c8d9dc6d84>.

³⁶ AJ Impact, “Fitch Ratings Downgrades Hong Kong as Protests Drag On,” *Al Jazeera*, 6 September 2019, accessed 8 August 2020: <https://www.aljazeera.com/ajimpact/fitch-ratings-downgrades-hong-kong-protests-drag-190906063629632.html>; Jerome Taylor, “Moody’s Downgrades Hong Kong, Blames Government Response to Protests,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, 21 January 2020, accessed 8 August 2020:

Hong Kong has become a traumatised city since the protests began. In January 2020, a research conducted by the University of Hong Kong revealed that nearly one-third of adults in Hong Kong reported symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) during the anti-extradition protests, based on surveys carried out with more than 18,000 Hong Kong residents between 2009 and 2019.³⁷ Seven months later, another polling research of 11,500 survey respondents from the same university found that nearly three-quarters of Hongkongers were exposed to moderate-to-high levels of symptoms of depression, and over 40% showed moderate-to-high levels of PTSD symptoms; among the respondents, nearly half of those surveyed aged 24 or younger reported symptoms of PTSD or depression.³⁸

Christians, especially believers in Protestant denominations, engaged in Hong Kong's anti-extradition protests in multiple ways, which enhanced the moral ground of the movement. Just before the outbreak of the one million people's march on 9 June 2019, two major Christian denominations, the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church Union Hong Kong and the Baptist Convention of Hong Kong published statements to call for the government's suspension and withdrawal of the bill to amend the extradition law, on the basis that the government's

<https://hongkongfp.com/2020/01/21/moodys-downgrades-hong-kong-blames-government-response-protests/>.

³⁷ BBC News, "Hong Kong PTSD Level 'Comparable to Conflict Zones,' Study Finds," *BBC News*, 10 January 2020, accessed 8 August 2020: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-51058233>.

³⁸ Gigi Choy, "One-two Punch of Protests, Coronavirus Playing Havoc with Mental Health in Hong Kong, Study Finds," *South China Morning Post*, 6 August 2020, accessed 8 August 2020: <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/health-environment/article/3096326/one-two-punch-protests-coronavirus-playing-havoc>.

handling of the bill departed from the virtue of justice.³⁹ After the march on 9 June 2019, hundreds of protestant pastors and individual believers organised prayer meetings outside the government headquarters on two consecutive nights until 12 June 2019. One day after pastors and believers were dispersed by tear gas canisters at the protest site, a press conference was held by Christian ministers, who criticised the excessive use of force by the Police against peaceful protestors, and the Police’s use of insulting language against their religion.⁴⁰ Later on, individual believers continued to assemble for prayers and led chanting at the protest scenes. Young Catholics, mostly from the Hong Kong Federation of Catholic Students and members of the Diocesan Youth Commission Hong Kong, also organised prayer meetings, outdoor masses, Way of the Cross and memorial meetings for a protestor who died on 15 June 2019. Parishes and Church buildings near protest sites were open on a voluntary basis to serve people in need.

However, some institutional Churches disappointed protestors and even moderate believers. As regards the Anglican Church in Hong Kong, its Archbishop Paul Kwong and Rev. Canon Peter Douglas Koon, who are serving as political consultants to the Chinese government, were vocal in their support for the government.⁴¹ For the Catholic Diocese,

³⁹ Baptist Convention of Hong Kong, *Statement on Amendment of the Fugitive Ordinance* (In Chinese), 7 June 2019; Christian and Missionary Alliance Church Union Hong Kong, *An Appeal to Believers on Hong Kong Government’s Amendment of the Fugitive Ordinance* (In Chinese), 8 June 2019.

⁴⁰ Javier C. Hernández, “With Hymns and Prayers, Christians Help Drive Hong Kong’s Protests,” *New York Times*, 19 June 2019, accessed 8 August 2020: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/19/world/asia/hong-kong-extradition-protests-christians.html>.

⁴¹ UCANEWS Reporter, “Church Fights Changes to Hong Kong’s Extradition Law,” *La Croix International*, 25 May 2019, accessed 8 August 2020:

Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha attended prayer meetings at protest sites many times, while the retired Cardinal Zen had long been active in criticising the bill and the government's handling of the protests. Cardinal John Tong, who serves as the Apostolic Administrator of the diocese, issued statements to urge the government to set up an independent commission of inquiry, echoing the protest demands.⁴² Yet, the Vatican kept utterly silent on Hong Kong protests. When asked by a journalist about his view on Hong Kong, Pope Francis only replied that he did not know enough about the situation.⁴³

Step 2: Social Analysis

In the second step, Whelan revised Holland and Henriot's guidelines on reflection of history to analyse objective, intersubjective social infrastructures, and cultural superstructures in society.⁴⁴ They serve as navigators to distinguish signs of progress from signs of decline and to identify where redemption arrives.

History and Decline

The continuity of colonialism constitutes the central theme in the history of Hong Kong. Hong Kong was a British colony between 1842 and 1997. Colonial administration, together with the common law

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/politics/church-fights-changes-to-hong-kongs-extradition-law/10178>.

⁴² Michael Sainsbury, "Top Catholic Leaders in Hong Kong Have Backed Street Protesters," *Angelus News*, 4 December 2019, accessed 8 August 2020: <https://angelusnews.com/news/world/top-catholic-leaders-in-hong-kong-have-backed-street-protesters/>.

⁴³ Cindy Wooden, "Pope Francis Fields Questions on Vatican Finances, Nuclear Energy, Turmoil in Hong Kong, Diplomacy and Mediation," *The Dialog*, 26 November 2019, accessed 8 August 2020: <http://thediolog.org/international-news/pope-francis-fields-questions-on-vatican-finances-nuclear-energy-turmoil-in-hong-kong-diplomacy-and-mediation/>.

⁴⁴ Whelan, "Theological Reflection and the Slum of Nairobi," 83-4.

system, were transplanted to this Chinese city. Despite the global decolonisation movement after the Second World War, Hong Kong remained under British colonial rule, and in 1972, Hong Kong was also removed from the United Nations List of Non-Self-Governing Territories under the pressure of China, meaning that the right to self-determination established by the United Nations’ “Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples” was no longer applicable to Hong Kong.⁴⁵

In 1984, a Joint Declaration was signed between the British and Chinese governments, upon which China resumed the exercise of sovereignty over Hong Kong. Most of the colonial administrative institutions, economic and social systems were preserved by the Basic Law of Hong Kong, including the Hong Kong Bill of Rights Ordinance which was passed by the colonial legislature in 1991. Although the Basic Law guarantees universal suffrage of the Chief Executive and Legislative Council in Hong Kong, fundamental political freedoms progressively diminished after the handover. First, the Provisional Legislative Council revived draconian terms in the Public Order Ordinance with the effect that protests are only lawful upon the granting of a permit by Hong Kong’s Commissioner of Police, which sowed the seeds for the mounting tensions between protest organisers and the law enforcement today. Second, the Chief Executive is selected by the Election Committee which consists of only 1,200 members, of which

⁴⁵ Joshua Wong and Jeffrey Ngo, “How China Stripped Hong Kong of Its Right to Self-determination in 1972—and Distorted History,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, 8 November 2016, accessed 8 August 2020: <https://hongkongfp.com/2016/11/08/china-stripped-hong-kong-right-self-determination-1972-distorted-history/>.

more than half belong to proxies of the Chinese government and its collaborators in industrial and commercial sectors. A similar institutional arrangement is provided for in the Legislative Council, where half of the members are returned by “functional constituencies,” which are not seats constituted by direct elections. These arrangements are signs of upholding the capitalist system in line with the interests of the wealthy elites at the time, who had enjoyed much political power in the Executive and Legislative Councils, as well as various consultative committees during the colonial rule. Third, although the Court of Final Appeal has been established in Hong Kong as part of the new constitutional order after the handover, the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress holds the overriding power to interpret the Basic Law. In essence, the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress shares the same status as the Privy Council of the UK during the colonial era of Hong Kong in being an ultimate powerful sovereign. Fourth, in recent years, colonial laws were deployed to sentence activists and leaders of Hong Kong’s democracy movement, such as the charges of incitement and public nuisance against nine activists, professors and lawmakers who took part in the 2014 Umbrella Movement. The inheritance of the colonial system laid the foundation for conflicts between the State and Hong Kong, and the anti-extradition movement became an inevitable result of the tensions when the conflicts reached its optimal point.

Continuity of the colonial system has brought about undesirable social infrastructures and cultural superstructures in Hong Kong. Political and economic infrastructures are intertwined, as evident by the electoral systems of the Chief Executive and Legislative Council which

institutionalise the presence of capitalists and their proxies. Political inequality is sustained as exemplified by the fact that more than three million electorates are deprived of the right to nominate and choose the city’s mayor in free and fair settings, which was further consolidated by the decision of the Chinese authorities made in 2014 to implement a candidate-filtering mechanism if the Chief Executive were to be selected by popular vote. The biased political system also enhanced economic inequality and brought about policies and legislations which were favourable to business and property sectors, who possess the “true mandate” of the executive government and half of that of the legislature. These policies include the privatisation of the management of shopping malls in public housing estates, leading to a focus on commercial interests in the malls rather than that of residents of the public housing estates; the suspension of construction of public housing for several years which was a contributing factor to the sharp rise in property prices; the absence of standardised working hours, collective bargaining and universal pensions in line with employers’ interests; the acceleration of economic integration between Hong Kong and China resulting in the domination of the market of basic necessities by local and Chinese capitalists.

The infrastructure of Church-State relations still possesses colonial features, even though the Catholic Church has gradually become more critical of the government. Many social institutions in Hong Kong are provided by the Catholic Diocese, under which the building and running Catholic schools have been subsidised by the government since colonial times. In addition, Caritas of Hong Kong receives government sponsors for the provision of social welfare and

medical services. In short, the Church has always been a partner of colonial and post-colonial governments. The Church's economic "dependence" raises the cost of any open opposition to the political authority. Collaboration with the Government, however, does not mean that religious freedom and institutional autonomy are taken for granted. The Government introduced the Education Ordinance in 2004, proposing a mandatory "school-based management" that the sponsoring body no longer had a complete say in appointing board members in educational institutions. The new law diminished the role of sponsoring bodies, including that of churches. The Catholic diocese openly disapproved of the law, seeing it an infringement of the church's autonomy and religious freedoms. Yet, the Catholic diocese ultimately lost its application for judicial review in court, whereby it challenged the constitutionality of this new law. This illustrated the diminishing influence of religious organisations in the society, despite the fact that the Church chose to follow the colonial trajectory to position itself as a collaborator to the State.⁴⁶ In sum, regressions can be found in political, economic and religious infrastructures of Hong Kong.

The cultural superstructures of Hong Kong have always been contentious, as reflected by the continual occurrence of conflicts between values and beliefs after the handover. In the early period of British colonialism, the society was much less politicised when people, mostly refugees from China, saw Hong Kong as a "borrowed space and

⁴⁶ Yan-ho Lai. "What can Hong Kong Catholics Learn from the Past 20 Years?" *La Croix International*, 30 June 2017, accessed 8 August 2020: <https://international.la-croix.com/news/world/what-can-hong-kong-catholics-learn-from-the-past-20-years/5452>.

borrowed time.”⁴⁷ The 1967 Riot also reinforced a general mentality amongst the people to stay away from politics. The depoliticised political culture was sustained by the introduction of an independent anti-corruption agency and the absorption of social elites into the administrative system. As a result, the colonial government provided comfort and confidence to the people of Hong Kong, and successfully soothed the population to make up for the democratic deficit.⁴⁸ Only by the beginning of the political transition in the mid-1980s and the Tiananmen massacre in 1989 were the political consciousness of Hong Kong people awakened, who started to strive towards the ideals of freedom and democracy. With the introduction of the Hong Kong Bill of Rights Ordinance in 1991 and civic education by the government before the handover, people’s civic consciousness and awareness of human rights were strengthened. As affirmed by the results of an academic survey conducted in 2017 which invited respondents to rank Hong Kong’s core values, “the rule of law” (22.9%) and “freedom” (20.8%) were ranked as the most important core values in Hong Kong. The core values of “just and corruption-free” (15.3%), “democracy” (11.1%) and “social stability” (8.3%) were also shown to be of some importance to the respondents. The remaining core values asked of the respondents in the survey were “peace and benevolence,” “market economy,” “diversity and tolerance,” “individual property,” “level

⁴⁷ Richard Hughes, *Borrowed Place, Borrowed Time: Hong Kong and Its Many Faces* (Andre Deutsch, 1976).

⁴⁸ Ambrose Yeo-chi King, “Administrative Absorption of Politics in Hong Kong: Emphasis on the Grass Roots Level” in *Asian Survey*. University of California Press, May 1975, Vol. 15 No. 5: 422-439.

playing field,” and “family,” which all received less than 6% of support by the respondents.⁴⁹

Yet, the value orientation of the people of Hong Kong certainly conflicts with the post-colonial State, which favours authoritarian rule for consolidation of the party-state and dismisses the importance of civil and political rights. In 2013, an internal government document entitled “Communiqué on the Current State of the Ideological Sphere” was leaked to the public, highlighting that Western ideas including “universal values,” “civil society,” “press freedom” and “judicial independence” should be banned in higher education institutions.⁵⁰ This document evidences the adoption of a hard-line approach to ideological control by the Chinese Communist Party. The conflicts in ideologies and values between Hong Kong and the Chinese sovereign were revealed in 2014 when the State Council issued a White Paper claiming that the Chinese government holds comprehensive jurisdiction over Hong Kong, which had all along been enjoying political autonomy and self-government under “one country, two systems” since the handover.⁵¹ At the same time, nearly 800,000 Hong Kong citizens voted in a civil referendum endorsing political reform proposals that allowed every voter to be eligible for nominating candidates in future Chief Executive

⁴⁹ Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, *CUHK-HKIAPS Poll: Pluralistic and Diverse Core Values of Hong Kong* (In Chinese), accessed 8 August 2020: http://www.hkiaps.cuhk.edu.hk/wd/ni/20170612-111811_1.pdf.

⁵⁰ “Document 9: A China File Translation”, *ChinaFile*, 8 November 2013, accessed 8 August 2020: <https://www.chinafile.com/document-9-chinafile-translation>.

⁵¹ Xinhua News Agency, “Full Text: The Practice of the ‘One Country, Two Systems’ Policy in the HKSAR,” *China Daily*, 10 June 2014, accessed 8 August 2020: https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-06/10/content_17576281.htm.

elections.⁵² The conflict of values between complete political control from the top and the pursuit of free and fair elections from the bottom led to the 79-day Umbrella Movement, which sowed the seeds for the anti-extradition movement.

Progress and Redemption

While “declines” can be found in Hong Kong’s political and social institutions, “progress” and “redemption” can be found from the people. It is important to notice the movement of the Spirit and examine signs of its graces in Hong Kong’s anti-extradition movement. Are there graces of consolation that move us towards God? It is noteworthy to acknowledge that there were the criticisms of the movement, including the toleration of the various acts of violence, such as the storming of the Legislative Council Complex, the vandalism against restaurants and shops owned by Chinese capitalists, and the assaults against persons who attacked citizens indiscriminately. However, the denunciation of vigilantism that emerged from the movement does not render non-existent the graces revealed in the dynamics of the protests. The resilience and solidarity of the civil society, both organised groups and individual citizens are examples of faith, hope and charity bestowed in the movement. Apart from chanting political demands that highlighted the importance of democracy and freedom, a number of mottos and slogans emerged which depicted the protocol of solidarity in the

⁵² BBC News, “Hong Kong Democracy ‘Referendum’ Draws Nearly 800,000,” *BBC*, 30 June 2014, accessed 8 August 2020: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-28076566>.

movement: “no split,” “no divide,” “no snitch,” “no whistleblowing,” and “just as brothers climbing mountains, each offering one’s effort.”⁵³

Despite the augmented repression by the State, members of civil society also evolved to a more decentralised network, allowing for the introduction of new tactics in sustaining the protests, and the provision of support to protestors through various ways. Radical protestors and moderate participants had a clear and tacit division of labour: moderate participants in a rally would form chains to transfer items such as umbrellas or helmets to the frontline, while frontline protestors set roadblocks to protect demonstrators from being arrested by the Police. Many professionals, including lawyers, social workers, medical doctors and nurses, were involved in the movement and supported protestors with their professional knowledge and skills.⁵⁴ Citizens also voluntarily created social media platforms, such as Telegram channels, to exchange real-time information related to the protests, and organise drivers and vehicles to transport civilians away from the protest sites.

Moderate participants and supporters of the movement also made use of printed propaganda and post-it messages to set up “Lennon Walls” to cheer protestors up and publish messages of the movement across the city. They also formed human chains, imitating the “Baltic Way” in the 1980s, and chanted a movement anthem “Glory to Hong Kong” in public places, drawing media attention and popular support as means to sustain

⁵³ Francis L. F. Lee, Samson Yuen, Gary Tang and Edmund W. Cheng, “Hong Kong’s Summer of Uprising” in *The China Review*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, November 2019, Vol. 19 No. 4: 1-32.

⁵⁴ Nicolle Liu, Sue-Lin Wong and Alice Woodhouse, “The Lawyers, Doctors and Artists Behind the Hong Kong Protests,” *Financial Times*, 30 September 2019.

the momentum of the movement.⁵⁵ Protestors who stormed into the Legislative Council Complex on 1 July 2019 insisted on bringing the remaining four comrades who planned to stay until being arrested out of the Legislative Council Chamber, in accordance with their motto of “going up and down together.” Not only did protestors uphold faith in values of democracy, freedom and solidarity, alongside hope in achieving the five demands, the mainstream population also showed support towards the protest demands. After nine months of protest since June 2019, a public opinion polling showed that supporters of the protests weighted 58% among the respondents; and demands of universal suffrage and setting up an independent commission of inquiry were supported by 68% and 76% of the respondents respectively.⁵⁶

One can also witness the grace of charity and reciprocity bestowed in Christian communities. Parishes opening up in the midst of protests set good examples of being a “good Samaritan.” As mass demonstrations in the anti-extradition movement were mainly held on Hong Kong Island, four Churches around the route of rallies, including a Catholic parish, The Church of Christ in China, and two Methodist Churches, often opened as shelters and service centres to provide refreshments and medical, psychological and spiritual assistance to protestors. The hospitality of those Churches received criticisms from

⁵⁵ Popular participation and support in those protest actions can be found in *Research Report on Public Opinion During the Anti-extradition Bill Movement in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Centre for Communication and Public Opinion Survey The Chinese University of Hong Kong, May 2020), 51-4.

⁵⁶ Felix Tam and Clare Jim, “Exclusive: Support for Hong Kong Protesters’ Demands Rises Even As Coronavirus Halts Rallies: Poll,” *Reuters*, 27 March 2020, accessed 8 August 2020: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hongkong-protests-poll/exclusive-support-for-hong-kong-protesters-demands-rises-even-as-coronavirus-halts-rallies-poll-idUSKBN21E11L>.

State-printed media, *Tai Kung Pao*, accusing the Churches of becoming a “private club for rioters to escape from police arrest.”⁵⁷ Despite the labelling by State media press, the parish priest and pastors of the Churches published a joint statement to affirm their position to welcome everyone without discrimination. They emphasised that church buildings were the “oasis of the city” and is prioritised for providing pastoral care to believers and the neighbourhood.⁵⁸ The response of these Churches offered witness of charity following the command of Christ: “Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward” (Mark 9:41). The humanitarianism amid the conflicts of protests is a sign of redemption where reciprocal bondage between human beings is restored.

Step 2A: Root Causes

Root causes summarise social analysis by searching for the most significant events and reasons leading to the current situation. For Whelan, root causes are the key to “enforcing decline in a situation and resisting redemption,” and they own potentials to be “emergence of a force of redemption in a situation.”⁵⁹ This article suggests that “centralised power structure” and “resilience of civil society” are the two

⁵⁷ Reporter, “Church Turns to Be A Private Club of Rioters: Clothes and Showers are served” (In Chinese), *Tai Kung Pao*, 2 October 2019, accessed 8 August 2020:

<http://www.takungpao.com.hk/news/232109/2019/1002/356570.html>.

⁵⁸ Man-wai Lo, “Four Churches Respond to Tai Kung Pao’s Disinformation: Joint Statement Reaffirms the Provision of Pastoral and Humanitarian Services” (In Chinese), *Christian Times*, 4 October 2019, accessed 8 August 2020: https://christiantimes.org.hk/Common/Reader/News/ShowNews.jsp?Nid=159814&Pid=102&Version=0&Cid=2141&Charset=big5_hkscs.

⁵⁹ Whelan, “Theological Reflection and the Slum of Nairobi,” 85.

root causes. The former cause contributes to the continual situation of decline, while the latter contributes to the presence of redemption.

Centralised power structure refers to the political and economic infrastructures in Hong Kong. With the colonial legacies that undermine citizens’ rights to, *inter alia*, freedom of assembly and association, along with the suspension of Hong Kong’s progress of democratisation by the National People’s Congress, the state power is highly centralised with limited checks and balances. Even if the courts of Hong Kong have the authority to conduct constitutional reviews of government policies and legislation, the National People’s Congress also enjoys the power to interpret the Basic Law which can carry the effect of overturning a court decision. As a result, the centralisation of political power consolidates structures of political and economic inequalities. Tensions between the State and society deepens as the latter cannot enjoy inclusive and democratic governance. The State asserts its authoritarian rule by carrying out acts to suppress dissenting voices, deter protestors, diminish civic space, promote propaganda of monolithic ideology and establish a police society. Power centralisation is thus a fundamental factor leading to the creation of an unjust society in Hong Kong.

Resilience of civil society refers to the strong ties between individual citizens and groups independent of state control. Civil society, sometimes called the “third sector,” is a sphere distinguished from the direct influence of political power and economic capital, and consists of voluntary associations and people who exercise citizenship. Plurality, autonomy, freedom, democratic equality and solidarity are the basic values of civil society. The civil society in post-handover Hong Kong has been nurtured by its protest movements. The creativity, plurality and

solidarity demonstrated in the anti-extradition movement can be attributed to the awakening of civic consciousness and mass protests in Hong Kong particularly since the 1989 Tiananmen massacre, and the partially democratic elections which were implemented in 1991. Thereafter, Hong Kong underwent events of mass protests that contributed to the resilience of civil society, including the demonstration against the national security law in 2003 which recorded a turnout of over 500,000 by the organiser of the rally; the anti-high speed railway movement in 2010 where thousands of young protestors surrounded the Legislative Council building; the protests against moral and national education led by Joshua Wong and some high school students in 2012; and the 2014 Umbrella Movement, which evolved from the Occupy Central with Love and Peace campaign which commenced in 2013. As a member of civil society, the Church, including both the clerical leadership and laity, played a significant role in the movements by holding prayer meetings and mobilising believers to take part in public meetings. The diversity and strength of civil society were enhanced, sowing the seeds for developing greater solidarity which was seen in the anti-extradition movement.

Step 3: Theological Reflections

Whelan invites Christians to contemplate the theological implications of the situation in two dimensions. The first dimension is Christological reflection, where the words and deeds of Jesus in the Gospels shall be paid attention to in the current context. The second dimension is Ecclesiological reflection, contemplating on how the Church can respond to the situation by functioning its priestly, prophetic and kingly ministries, and that they should be weighted equally in

pastoral action.⁶⁰ After Christological and Ecclesiological reflections, Whelan proposes that one should spend time on deciding a pastoral proposal at the last step.⁶¹

Christological Reflection

Christological reflection bridges my experience of engaging in activism on a spiritual dimension. Social movement is often characterised with altruism. When people join collective actions to promote or resist social change, the ultimate goal is to restore a just and equal society that protects the dignity and well-being of everyone. In strategising the movement, activists may fall into the trap of creating antagonism against the State or corporations in order to attract greater sentimental support from the public. In this situation, activists tend to be antagonistic against persons in power, rather than the systems or institutions of the government. In the Exercises, Ignatius invited exercitants to acknowledge that they are beloved sinners in the eyes of God. The identity of beloved sinners does not degrade human dignity. Rather, it helps exercitants to understand and embrace human frailty, and to surrender their ego and narcissism to God. In the Gospel of Luke, when Peter realised the divine identity of Jesus who made a miracle in fishing, he cried to Jesus “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man” (Luke 5:8). Yet, Jesus responded by calling them to be his disciples. God also told Paul in his apostleship that “my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). Paul saw it as a requisite of conversion to Christ: “That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in

⁶⁰ Whelan, “Theological Reflection and the Slum of Nairobi,” 86.

⁶¹ Whelan, “Theological Reflection and the Slum of Nairobi,” 87.

difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10). The notion of beloved sinners reminds Christian activists of their common identity shared with their “enemies” and deepens solidarity in the unconditional love of Christ.

The idea of *agere contra* also inspired me to meditate on the relationship between social analysis and activists’ responses. Acting against one’s habitual behaviours is always a difficult task. One needs God’s grace to build one’s resilience against the temptation of giving up or staying in the comfort zone. Two Gospel images enable us to contemplate how Jesus learned to be resilient for taking up his mission: Transfiguration of the Lord and his prayer on the Mount of Olives. The transfigured Christ did not stay on Mount Tabor for the joy of company with Moses, Elijah and the Father who declared Jesus as his beloved son. He chose to leave the mountain and headed to Jerusalem, as “the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands” (Matthew 17:12). In his prayer to the Father, he expressed his choice to act against his will: “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42). Jesus demonstrated that the source of resilience does not only come from his own will but from his intimate relationship with the Father.

In discernment of spirits, Ignatius did not reject objective knowledge and rationality. He rejected discernments merely on the basis of joyful and peaceful sentiments, which is often a deception of the evil spirit. Yet, he prioritised acts of affection to reasoning, as spirituality is not a game of the mind. Spirituality is fundamentally a process of building an intimate relationship with God. The methods of Lonergan and Whelan stress the importance of affective experience in discernment,

which goes beyond the observation of objective facts. After all, discernment is not equal to selecting the option most favourable to oneself, but the option that follows the will of God. Otherwise, one’s discernment departs from the “principle and foundation.”

The recognition of affective knowledge can be a form of acting against one’s preference, especially for activists who are required to strategise and make decisions by reason. Emotional and spiritual strengths of activists and social movement participants constitute resilience in the face of difficulties, such as failures in tactics or repression from structural injustice. Activists are invited to build resilience to balance immediate gains and long-term goals. In social analysis, seeds of redemption have been revealed in the vibrancy of civil society, and it needs to be cultivated in the long run. Just as the parable of the mustard seed requires patience, faith, hope and charity to nurture a mustard tree (Matthew 17:20), it is crucial for Christians to build a resilient way of life that enables them to seek the will of God and to manoeuvre His kingdom, and to bear the cross of following Him in real lives.

Ecclesiological Reflection

Ecclesiological reflection invites discerners to pay attention to the mission of the Church. Whelan suggests two questions for contemplation: the first question concerns “[t]o what extent is this Church institution performing its functions as priestly, prophetic and kingly,” while the second one evaluates whether “these three functions exist in some kind of balance.”⁶²

⁶² Whelan, “Theological Reflection and the Slum of Nairobi,” 86.

The Catholic diocese of Hong Kong focuses much on the priestly function, which refers to “religious conversion in individual and communities” and the kingly function, which means “direct involvement in works of mercy.”⁶³ The kingly function allowed for the sustainment of a friendly relationship between the Church and the State, and in turn, the Church faces less hurdles in carrying out its priestly function. Yet, such State-Church relations also limits the development of the Church’s prophetic function in society as “promoting ideas, values and symbols that promote the common.”⁶⁴

One major reason is that public theology remains an underdeveloped scholarship within the Catholic Church in Hong Kong. Established under British colonialism, the Hong Kong Catholic diocese mainly interacted with the society by collaborating with the colonial government to provide medical services, education and social welfare. After the handover, the diocese relies on the ties established with the political institutions to secure resources and licences for running schools and providing social welfare services in the city. Thus, the diocese as an institutional Church does not have a strong motivation to take critical positions against the government. Furthermore, when the Vatican started taking a soft approach in engaging the Chinese government in diplomatic dialogue on the appointment of bishops in Mainland China, the diocese has inevitably been affected geopolitically and turned passive on issues concerning public affairs.

This is evidenced by two events. In January 2019, the Diocesan Bishop Michael Yeung passed away. According to the Canon Law of

⁶³ Whelan, “Theological Reflection and the Slum of Nairobi,” 86.

⁶⁴ Whelan, “Theological Reflection and the Slum of Nairobi,” 86.

the Catholic Church, the diocesan Curia is responsible for electing an administrator before the Vatican appoints a new bishop. At that time, Bishop Joseph Ha was the only Curia member ordained as a bishop. However, the Holy See announced soon after the death of Yeung that the retired Cardinal John Tong was appointed as the Apostolic Administrator to govern the diocese of Hong Kong.⁶⁵ Bishop Ha, who was ordained as an Auxiliary Bishop in 2014, was vocal in giving sympathetic understanding to the Umbrella Movement publicly. The decision of not appointing Ha was seen as favourable to the improving relationship between the Vatican and China.⁶⁶ Another event was the diocese’s change of attitude towards the national security law for Hong Kong enacted by China’s National People’s Congress in June 2020. The new national security law was a matter of wide concern amongst lawyers and experts, who were worried that Hong Kong’s criminal law, being deployed in the name of “national security” would become elusive and even absurd, especially when the wording of the national security law was compared to that of the bill proposed by the local government in 2003. Yet, while the diocese vocally opposed the bill in 2003, Cardinal Tong told the media in 2020 that China’s decision to enact the national security law “is understandable,” believing that the diocese’s relationship with the Vatican would not be regarded as colluding with

⁶⁵ Paul Wang, “Card Tong Appointed Apostolic Administrator of Hong Kong,” *AsiaNews*, 7 January 2019, accessed 8 August 2020: <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Card-Tong-appointed-Apostolic-Administrator-of-Hong-Kong-45901.html>.

⁶⁶ Tony Cheung and Alvin Lum, “Hong Kong Bishop Brought Out of Retirement by Pope ‘Mainly over China Relations’,” *South China Morning Post*, 9 January 2019, accessed 8 August 2020: <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/2181250/hong-kong-bishop-brought-out-retirement-pope-mainly-over>.

foreign forces, which is one of the criminal offences defined under the national security law. Tong added that the religious freedom of the diocese would not be affected, as China and the Vatican are on amicable terms.⁶⁷ Public theology includes critical horizons in ethics, ecclesiology and political theology. The dramatic shift of the diocese's position is unfavourable for the development of a scholarship of public theology within the diocese, who manages the only Catholic theology college in Hong Kong. It also reflects the political cause of the Church's unbalanced functions of priesthood, prophecy and kingship.

Step 4: Pastoral Proposal

The outbreak of the anti-extradition movement urges Christian communities in Hong Kong to rethink their relationship with the political authorities, which used to collaborate with religious institutions for “social harmony.” This article suggests that communal discernment and contextual theology should be developed to restore a balance between the priestly, prophetic and kingly functions of the Church.

Communal discernment is a collective process of discernment of spirits among members of the Church to understand their interior movements, to seek the will of God for the community, to own their decisions in God's favour and to be resilient in bearing the price of the decisions. Contextual theology is an attempt to develop theological reflection from the bottom. It begins with the analysing of the context or history in which one is situated and then reflects on how God engages

⁶⁷ CNA staff, “New Hong Kong Laws will Have ‘No Effect’ on Religious Freedom Says Cardinal,” *Catholic News Agency*, 24 June 2019, accessed 8 August 2020: <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/new-chinese-security-laws-will-have-no-effect-on-religious-freedom-in-hong-kong-says-cardinal-john-tong-hon-37713>.

in a specific time and space. Both communal discernment and contextual theology require dialogue among Christians, as well as dialogue between God and men. Cultivating communal discernment within the Church can enhance its priestly function when decisions concerning social actions are results of prayerful dialogue among Christian activists. The Church can also perform its prophetic function to a greater extent by promoting dialogue between social scientists, activists and theologians, and then building a scholarship of contextual theology in Hong Kong. The kingly function of the Church can be enhanced if the idea and practice of communal discernment and contextual theology can be institutionalised in the diocese, spiritual centres or theology college.

This article does not intend to offer a comprehensive pastoral program of the Church. The above proposal serves as a preliminary step for both Christian communities and individuals to contemplate and discern. The final section concludes this article with lessons of the above exercise and offers some guiding questions to facilitate communal discernment.

Conclusion

Five years ago, I presented at a seminar in the aftermath of the Umbrella Movement, entitled “What can we do in the future after the Umbrella Movement?”⁶⁸ I proposed a circle of discernment in the context of community, which was based on the “see-judge-act” formula

⁶⁸ The seminar was held by the Justice and Peace Commission of Hong Kong Catholic Diocese on 28 March 2015.

in liberation theology.⁶⁹ My proposal recommended Christian communities, often named as “cell groups,” to integrate social action with meetings of discernment and liturgical celebrations. Organised Christian communities play a role in mediating personal spiritual growth and participation in social activism, as community engenders and diffuses the graces of prayer and fellowship among themselves to engage in social change.⁷⁰

This article contributes to the study of the relationship between spirituality and activism in another way, exploring how personal experience in social movement can be deepened, and how a sense of discernment from the tradition of Ignatian spirituality can be cultivated in such experience. This article also discusses how the *Spiritual Exercises*, including the identity of “beloved sinners,” the “discernment of spirits” and the exercise of “*agere contra*,” can integrate with social movement participation. It then illustrates a multi-faceted social analysis in Hong Kong under Gerard Whelan’s framework of the pastoral circle and its interaction with the *Spiritual Exercises*. In the process of theological reflection, this article suggests that Christian activists need to uphold the identity of beloved sinners and build spiritual resilience in imitating Christ. Christian communities shall develop communal discernment and contextual theology in order to advance the mission of the Church in Hong Kong. Apart from the three elements of discipleship discussed in this article, there are other principles and spiritual

⁶⁹ Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1987).

⁷⁰ The presentation was published in a book chapter: Yan-ho Lai, “What can We Do After the Umbrella Movement?” (In Chinese) in Catholic Youth under the Umbrella Edited, *The Opening Umbrella and the Faith* (傘開·信念) (Taiwan: Elephant White, 2015), Chapter 30.

constituents such as “finding God in all things,” “two standards” and “being united with Christ in sufferings and resurrection” that can be deployed in discerning actions in social movements. Their roles and contributions to the debate on spirituality and activism are not covered in this article and are topics for study in future research.

As a famous quote reminds us, “the glory of God is human fully alive,”⁷¹ one’s spiritual exercises and engagement in activism generates positive synergy that moves one towards God. The grace of discernment is a grace of awareness and attentiveness to the unfolding divine love. Twelve guiding questions are proposed at the end of this article as recommendations to Christian activists exercising discernment of spirits. These questions are adapted from the same presentation five years ago, for the purpose of encouraging Christians to appreciate spiritual discernment in social actions. May the guiding questions enable us to look for the will of God and make decisions in His favour. Amen.

12 Guiding Questions for Christians in the Anti-extradition Movement

1. What events, details, values or whom are we attracted by in the movement?
2. Do we understand the goals, ideas and rationales of the movement?

⁷¹ The quote is attributed to but not directly from St. Irenaeus. See “Man Fully Alive is the Glory of God—St. Irenaeus,” *Crossroad Initiative*, 27 January 2020, accessed 8 August 2020, <https://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/media/articles/man-fully-alive-is-the-glory-of-god-st-irenaeus/>.

3. Do we identify the political, economic and social infrastructures that make the movement progress or decline?
4. Do we identify the cultural superstructures that influence the progress or decline of the movement?
5. Do we identify the root causes of those infrastructures and superstructures?
6. Are signs of redemption unearthed in the movement? If so, what are they, and how shall we respond to them?
7. Do we affirm our weaknesses as human beings, and the need to surrender ourselves to the power and love of God?
8. What are possible actions in response to the situations, with reference to the words and deeds of Jesus Christ in his public life?
9. Can we notice an increase in faith, hope and charity while analysing the social situations, and discerning responding actions?
10. What can we as Christians do to contribute to our community of faith, which shares the priestly, prophetic and kingly ministries?
11. What are the hurdles or comfort zones that discourage us from taking those actions? What graces can we pray for to act against our tendency towards comfort and convenience?
12. What is our purpose for those actions? Are they compatible with the principles and foundations of us as being created by God?

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〔摘要〕當靈修僅被視作個體追求內在寧謐和超性生活，而公民抵抗被認為是製造對立、衝突甚至有時以暴力對抗政權的行動時，推進靈性成長和參與公民抵抗兩者之間的張力就顯露無遺，尤見諸二零一九至二零二零年在世界各地反抗政治、經濟和種族不公義的社會抗爭。本文旨在探討上述的張力，研究聖依納爵羅耀拉的《神操》和杰勒德·維蘭（Gerard Whelan）有關「牧民循環」的神學理論，如何為基督徒個人提供辨別之途，回應香港以二零一九年反修例運動以來的時局。本文指出，這場運動揭示了香港社會基礎和文化上層建築的缺點，但亦讓人發現救贖的種子植根在活潑和堅韌的公民社會之中，正是香港近年社會運動陶成的結果。《神操》和「牧民循環」的理論能輔助個人使徒身份的發展，包括肯定自己是「被愛的罪人」、進行分辨神類和建立「背道而馳」的抗逆力。個人信徒和基督徒團體亦能藉團體分辨和處境神學豐富教會的使命更豐盈。本文為依納爵靈修和政治行動主義關係的神學辯論貢獻一個來自華人社會的第一身視角，並為基督徒社運人士和基督徒團體示範分辨神類。

關鍵詞：依納爵靈修、分辨神類、社會運動、宗教與政治、香港