



Emergency committee for human rights
in Singapore

UPDATE 28
SINGAPORE HUMAN RIGHTS ALERT

MARCH 1990

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MARCH 1990

Singapore to outlaw religious criticism

By LINDSAY MURDOCH,
South-East Asia correspondent,
Singapore, Sunday

Religious leaders will soon be banned from making sermons or statements critical of the Government of Singapore.

They and members of religious groups whose words or actions threaten Singapore's "religious harmony" will face orders to stop preaching, fines or jail.

The Government admits that the new law will clash with some religions, notably Islam and Christianity, because of a belief that the faiths involve all aspects of life.

Some religious leaders are believed to have objected in meetings with Singapore's leaders, but the Government says the law will be enacted early in 1990.

It will allow the Government to act against a religious leader or group that causes people to become "disaffected with the President or the Government".

Singapore's Internal Security Department, in a report to the Government that was released at the weekend, recommended banning public speeches or writings by anyone deemed to be stirring up ill-will between religious groups or promoting a political cause or subversive activities under the guise of religion.

The report accused Protestant, Catholic, Muslim and Sikh groups of having threatened religious harmony or having become involved in politics in recent years.

It warned of the exploitation of religion by "Marxists and other subversive elements for their own political ends", and said that India and the Philippines were countries in which religion had been exploited for political motives.

Its release coincided with the New Year message from the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines, which urged the Government of President Aquino to implement reforms.

Under the new law, the same message could not be sent by a church in Singapore.

The Archbishop of Manila, Cardinal Jaime Sin, said: "Our Government ... must get its act together, or all of us may forfeit the hard-won constitutional democracy which is now ours."

The report of Singapore's Internal Security Department claimed that one Catholic preacher tried

to infiltrate, subvert and control various church and student organisations in Singapore having seen the communist party in the Philippines use the church as a cover to advance its cause.

Singapore has, in recent years, used its draconian Internal Security Act to arrest Catholic priests and Muslim activists. It has also banned religious activists from Singapore and issued warnings to rival religious groups.

The Government said the law would enable "pre-emptive action to be taken more quickly than possible under existing laws, which either need court prosecution or result in too severe a punishment, such as detention under the Internal Security Act".

The Government will be able to issue prohibition orders on individuals or groups. Violations will be dealt with in court. People or groups convicted will face a maximum fine of \$6000 or up to two years' jail or both. Repeat offenders will receive stiffer penalties.

Sensitive

The Government plans to set-up a Presidential Council for Religious Harmony to moderate relations between religious groups and advise the Government on sensitive religious matters. Representatives from the main religions will be invited to sit on the council.

Singapore's Constitution guarantees freedom of worship to all.

In the 1980 census, 56 per cent of the 2.6 million population were Buddhists and Taoists, 16 per cent Muslims, 10 per cent Christians and four per cent Hindus.

The report warned that it was necessary to act because more than one religious group in Singapore believed that separating religion and politics was not possible. It said the groups would collide if they carried out their beliefs to the full.

The ISD report said that aggressive proselytising and exploitation of religion for political and subversive purposes posed serious threats to religious and racial harmony and public order. "Unless all religious groups exercise moderation and tolerance in their efforts to win converts and maintain a rigorous separation between religion and politics, there will be religious friction, community strife and political instability in Singapore."

GOVERNMENT TARGETS THE CHURCH:

THE MAINTENANCE OF RELIGIOUS HARMONY BILL

Government will control what clergy may say from the pulpit and who is to be appointed to church positions.

On 15 January 1990, the Singapore Government introduced the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Bill which mirrored the White Paper tabled in parliament on 26 December. Under the pretext of granting itself a "neutral" role in preserving harmony between religions, the Bill gives the Government effective political control of all religious bodies.

THE CHURCH'S TURN

The mechanisms and inter-religious goodwill already exist to resolve occasional problems arising from over-zealous missionary activity or other insensitivity. The Government is really aiming at the elimination of religious bodies as potential independent, critical voices in Singapore society. All other independent institutions have been systematically crushed and domesticated (the judiciary,

• Very Rev Dr Alair Brass • Jan Cormack • Fr John Gurnow • Sonja Davis M.P. • Manuka Henare • Kenzie • Sir Guy Powles • Rev Barbara Stephens • Rev David M Taylor • Bishop Whakahuihui Vercoe •

opposition parties, trade unions, media, universities etc.). Now it is the church's turn along with other religious bodies.

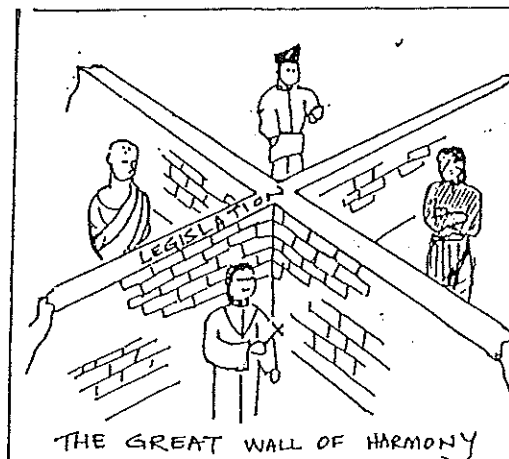
The decision to move against the church politically may also be motivated by the government's research which reveals that Christians increased from 10.3% of the population in 1980 to 18.7% in 1988. Christians are disproportionately represented in the higher paid white collar, professional and business sectors. For reasons of political self-preservation, the government seems to be moving to prevent Christians and their institutions from relating their faith to their political context.

Since May 1987, the Singapore Government has arrested, harshly interrogated and detained without trial 22 community leaders (many of them church-related) and two of their defence lawyers. The Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, the Catholic weekly, the Catholic centre for migrant workers, informal legal aid to workers, the Student Christian Movement, drama and student groups were all suppressed and some forced to disband. The Government expelled from Singapore the headquarters of the Christian Conference of Asia (the Asian ecumenical council of churches) during Christmas 1987. The Government has waged an unrelenting media campaign against the church and its theological commitment to social transformation.

NAMING A NEW ENEMY: SINGAPORE LEADS THE WAY

Legislative provisions to control what clergy may say from the pulpit and who may be appointed to church positions are the latest phase of this attack on the church.

Because of the credibility problem the government would face if it imprisons clergy without trial as suspected Marxists under the Internal Security Act, a new enemy has to be found. The recent formal surrender in Thailand of the remnant of the Communist Party of Malaya and events in Eastern Europe make fabricated Marxist conspiracies a less credible excuse for repression anyway. By conjuring up the threat of religious discord and communalism instead of communism, Singapore is leading the way once again in finding a new national threat to replace the spectre of communism. The religious harmony legislation achieves the same ends as the Internal Security Act of silencing the clergy through the removal of civil liberties or imprisoning them without legal recourse. The church as an institution will thus be forced into submission by a mixture of state regulation and outright fear.



Cartoon from human rights pamphlet, Singapore

SINGAPORE

New laws aimed at controlling religious workers

Render unto Caesar

By N. Balakrishnan

Singapore is in the process of drafting legislation that will define and control the proselytisation and practice of religion in the country, thus extending legislative control over the last major organisations free to propagate ideas and determine their own internal affairs without government control.

The laws, contained in a white paper tabled in parliament on 26 December 1989, would allow the minister of home affairs to prohibit religious workers deemed subversive or threatening religious harmony from addressing congregations and holding office in religious publications. After deciding who are the religious workers engaging in such activities, the minister will issue them an initial warning not repeat such ac-

while the government may be concerned about the misuse of religion for political purpose, so the "church is concerned about the possible misuse of the proposed legislation to silence lawful dissent and legitimate criticism."

The Majlis Ugama Islam, the body governing Islam in Singapore, has not commented on the matter.

The white paper said it is important to prevent hatred and ill-will within Singapore's multi-racial and multi-religious society. In addition, religious workers should be prevented from engaging in politics "under the guise of propagating or practising any religious belief," or from "exciting disaffection against the president or the government" and "carrying out subversive activities under the guise of propagating or practising any religious belief."

The white paper states that members of religious bodies can take part in electoral politics, but "they must not do so as leaders of their religious constituency."

The government intends to set up a presidential council for religious harmony, which will consist of 15 members and will be appointed on the advice of another existing advisory group: the Presidential

Council for Minority Rights. The members of the council on religious harmony will have a three-year tenure.

The proposed legislation is backed by stiff penalties. A first offence would carry a maximum sentence of two years in jail or a S\$10,000 (US\$5,263) fine and a second would carry a maximum of three years' imprisonment or a fine of S\$20,000, or both. The minister of home affairs will be required to give 14 days' notice of any prohibition orders he intends to make to those concerned, the head of the relevant religious group and the council on religious harmony. The council can give its views to the minister, but the minister's decision will be final.

Even those who directly work with re-

ligious bodies are also covered in the ambit of the law proposed in the white paper. "Where those outside the religious group or institution are instigating those with the religious group to engage in such conduct, prohibition orders can also be issued against them requiring them to desist," the white paper states. Such people are subject to the same penalties as offending religious workers.

In an annex to the white paper prepared by the Internal Security Department called "Religious Trends — A Security Perspective," a number of Catholic priests and foreign Islamic preachers are named as having engaged in activities that mixed religion and politics in a harmful way. All the Islamic preachers named are barred from entering Singapore, raising the possibility that the Catholic priests named may be among the first to be affected by the passage of the new laws. The Catholic priests named are Adrian Antony, Andre Victor Christophe, Edgar d'Souza, Patrick Goh and Joseph Ho. Christophe is said to be a French national and d'Souza is now living in Australia.

The white paper says the government can deal with religious subversives under existing legislation, notably the Internal Security Act — which allows for detention without trial of those considered a threat to

national security — and the Sedition Act, which allows for detention of persons promoting ill-will "between different races or classes of the population." But the paper said specific legislation against religious subversives was considered more efficient.

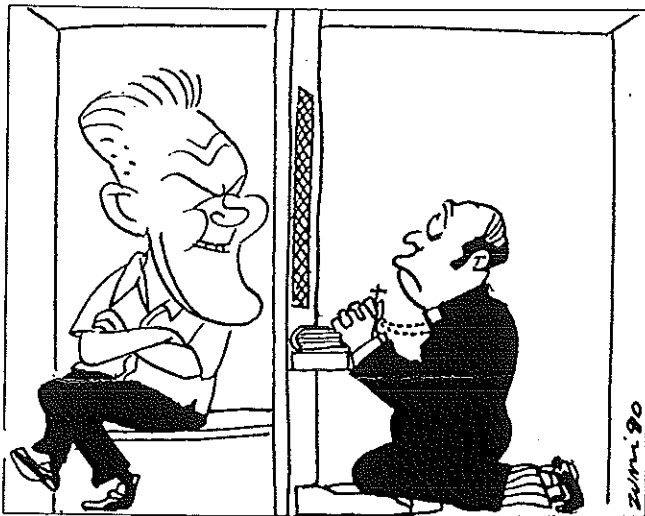


Cheng: detained.

The white paper also makes reference to Vincent Cheng, a Catholic lay worker detained under the Internal Security Act in mid-1987 and who is still in prison, and says he manipulated church publications to "subtly propagate Marxist and leftist ideas."

Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew took the REVIEW to court last year, claiming an article on the detention of Cheng and others that appeared in 1987 had libelled him by saying he had attacked the Catholic Church. The High Court in Singapore found in favour of Lee, but the case is now under appeal.

After its tabling in parliament, the white paper has been open for public discussion and suggestions, but observers expect the relevant legislative proposals will be passed more or less intact, given the overwhelming dominance of the ruling People's Action Party in Singapore's parliament. ■



tions. Those found guilty of committing such an offence after the initial warning would face imprisonment and fines.

The Archdiocese of the Catholic Church in Singapore issued a statement expressing grave reservations about the proposed laws and said it feared they may be used to silence legitimate criticism. In the statement, issued on 8 January, the archdiocese said while it supported the government's efforts to maintain religious harmony, "to say that religion and politics can be separated is at best an ambiguous statement," noting that "there can be an overlap between the secular and the religious."

The statement added, "loyalty to the nation is not to be identified with loyalty to the government," and concluded that

PROHIBITION ORDERS SIMILAR TO "BANNING" IN SOUTH AFRICA

The legislation gives the Minister of Home Affairs absolute power to issue a prohibition order against any religious office-bearer to prevent that person from "addressing orally or in writing any congregation, parish or group of worshipers or members of any religious group", from "printing, publishing, editing, distributing or contributing to any publication produced by that religious group" and from "holding office in an editorial board or a committee of a publication of that religious group".

A prohibition order may be issued on the basis of such catch-all provisions as "carrying out activities to promote a political cause", "exciting disaffection against the President or the Government of Singapore" and "carrying out subversive activities under the guise of propagating or practising any religious belief".

The maximum penalty for contravening a prohibition order is a fine of \$10,000 and/or 2 years imprisonment. Second or subsequent offences incur a fine of up to \$20,000 and/or a maximum of 3 years in prison.

A government-appointed Presidential Council for Religious Harmony will act as a rubber stamp for the Minister's decisions. Judicial review of their decisions is ruled out: "All orders and decisions of the Minister and recommendations of the Council made pursuant to this Act shall be final and shall not be called in question in any court." (Relevant sections of legislation appended.)

The accompanying Review article was written after the White Paper was tabled but before the legislation was introduced (see "Render Unto Caesar").

GOVERNMENT PEDDLES LIES ABOUT CLERGY

In parliament on 6 Oct 1989 the Minister of Home Affairs tried to drum up feeling against Catholic clergy pastorally caring for detainees' families. He asserted that one priest declared during a mass that "the Minister for Home Affairs Jayakumar, all judges and ISD officers would face God's punishment" for the detentions (Straits Times 7 Oct 89). This allegation was repeated along with others in the White Paper and Fr Adrian Anthony was named as having issued this threat which is out of character both with his personality and his theology. On 3 Jan 1990, Fr Anthony wrote to the Prime Minister categorically denying these allegations which are presented as fact by the government.

However, the government is likely to persist in framing the priests in order to suppress the pastoral and sacramental ministry of the clergy and the growing sympathy for the detainees in the church.

MUSLIMS AND CHURCH VOICE CONCERN ABOUT WHITE PAPER

Catholic Archbishop Gregory Yong and Muslim Mufti Syed Isa Semait both welcomed any attempt to maintain religious harmony. But the Archbishop said it was at best ambiguous to say religion and politics could be separated. The Mufti said there could be no such separation for Muslims (Straits Times 31 Jan 90). However, the govt-controlled media has given the impression that these questions are minor quibbles and that the proposed legislation has the overwhelming support of religious leaders.

In a statement responding to the White Paper, Archbishop Yong stated that "Loyalty to the nation is not be identified with loyalty to the Government... It is possible for a person to be a great critic of the Government and a great patriot". He stated further that "It is not sufficient to say that the State is autonomous in secular matters and religion is autonomous in religious matters... Just as the State shows its concern about inter-religious harmony because of its political implications, so religion must show its concern about "secular" Government policies when there are moral or religious implications." (The full text of Archbishop Yong's statement is appended.)

MALAYSIAN ARCHBISHOP ALSO SPEAKS OUT

In response to a mischievous article repeating government propaganda by a Singapore journalist in a Kuala Lumpur newspaper, Archbishop Soter Fernandez wrote a letter affirming that the church's mission is not only personal salvation but also "social transformation, the restructuring of whole societies to enable people to live in peace, justice and freedom. The second task cannot be entered into without some involvement in politics, either directly or indirectly."

The Catholic Archbishop further declared that "Religious leaders are not afraid to sit down to dialogue with political leaders - but collision would be inevitable if laws are used to suppress legitimate ideas, options and practices" (The Star, 28 Oct 1989). (Letter reprinted as appendix.)

AUSTRALIAN BISHOPS CONDEMN LEGISLATION

In a press statement on 8 January 1990, Bishop William Brennan, chairman of the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council condemned the religious harmony legislation and said it was time for action by the Australian and Commonwealth governments. He further said Singapore should be boycotted by travellers and conference organisers (The Age, Melbourne 8 Jan 90).

Don't ignore Singapore attack on civil rights

from Bishop W. Brennan,
chairman of the Australian
Catholic Social Justice Council

In 'The Age' (1/1) the report by Lindsay Murdoch headlined Singapore to Outlaw Religious Criticism draws attention to the lack of democracy in Singapore. Your correspondent contrasts Singapore's constitution under which freedom of worship is guaranteed to all with the proposed new law whereby religious leaders will soon be banned from making sermons or statements critical of injustice inherent in policies of the Government of Singapore.

It would appear that the proposed new "Presidential Council for Religious Harmony" is a eu-

phemism for a body designed to censor and regulate sermons, statements and religious practice.

This presidential council will clearly follow through on the human rights abuses imposed by the Internal Security Act under which Vincent Cheng and Teo Soh Lung are still imprisoned without trial some two years after their alleged offences. If the Government of Singapore is so confident of the guilt of the accused, why doesn't it proceed with trial by jury?

It is, in the view of the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, time for Australia and other Commonwealth governments to take some action in this matter of democratic freedom in Singapore.

CHOGM meetings are held without the subject of human rights abuses in Singapore reaching the agenda.

Since it is some time before the next CHOGM meeting the question arises as to what can be done now. Perhaps it would help draw attention to the matter if international travellers and would-be conference holders voted with their feet and took their stopovers and conferences elsewhere.

Australia's envoys to the United Nations might also investigate raising this matter in New York and Geneva where the United Nations Commission on Human Rights is due to meet shortly.

William Brennan,
Wagga.

RELIGIOUS MEDIA PICK UP THE ISSUE

The major Australian Catholic paper, *THE CATHOLIC WEEKLY* on 10 Jan 90 editorialised on Singapore's religious harmony bill under the heading "Outlawing Religious Freedom". Noting that, in Singapore, a person like Isaiah "would be clapped in jail", the editorial stated:

The repressive law in Singapore should be opposed worldwide by religious men and women and by everyone who has respect for human rights.

Christians in Singapore would be unwise to act provocatively against the government monolith, but for them to practise their faith in supine fashion would bring contempt from their government critics. Pie-in-the-sky theology would mock the sacrifice of those suffering cruel and arbitrary detention.

EDUCATION REVERSAL: RELIGION AS SOCIAL CONTROL BACKFIRES

Religion courses in school on the way out

Secular inroads

By N. Balakrishnan

In a sweeping turnaround, the Singapore Government, which only seven years ago introduced compulsory religious education in secondary schools, has decided to phase out even voluntary religious study in the schools. It is also preparing legislation to restrict the participation of religious groups in politics.

The new moves are designed to curb what the government sees as a growing awareness of religious differences among Singaporeans of different faiths and an increasing tendency among religious organisations to become involved in political issues.

Minister of Home Affairs S. Jayakumar announced in parliament on 6 October that he will introduce legislation restricting religious groups' participation in politics at parliament's next sitting. Singapore already restricts a wide array of individuals and organisations from participating in politics, including student unions, the Law Society and individuals who have been fined more than S\$2,000 (US\$1,017) for criminal offences.

The government said religious education in secondary schools would be phased out over the next few years. The new policy will also forbid optional religious subjects being taught during normal school hours, a move that will particularly affect the Roman

Catholic-managed schools, which have been prominent in Singapore for decades.

The government has said religious courses will be replaced with a civics course, which may include the teaching of some Confucian values. The civics course will not be introduced until 1991 as it will take time for a text to be prepared, the government said. Currently, students must study at least one religious subject from a list which includes the study of Confucianism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism.

Education Minister Tony Tan said the government wanted to be seen as even-handed in its dealings with Singapore's various religious groups. He said the government must also be seen as secular, an objective at odds with its demand that religion be taught in the schools.

Former deputy prime minister Goh Keng Swee initiated compulsory religious education in 1982 with much fanfare, saying that parents who did not want their children to study any religion would be personally interviewed by him.

The government initiatives on religion did not come as a complete surprise as Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and other cabinet members have spoken often of what they view as Singaporeans' increasing religious inclinations — especially towards those religions Lee views as "exclusivist," including Christianity and Islam.

During a libel case currently under way

against the *REVIEW* in Singapore, Lee said there was a "resurgence of all religions in Singapore; it is not just the Muslims, it is also the Christians, the charismatics particularly, [and] now the Buddhists and Taoists."

One consequence of the abolition of religious education in Singapore's schools may be that fewer minority students will qualify for entry into pre-university centres and junior colleges, which leads to university admission.

The required "religious knowledge" course has full academic status and can be used to fulfil requirements for admission to pre-university institutions. Because religion tends to play a more important role in the daily lives of ethnic Malays, in particular, and also Indians than in the lives of more secularised ethnic Chinese, the former groups have been better able to use the religion courses in obtaining places in pre-university institutions.

A study done by the Education Ministry indicates that had there been no religion courses, there would have been 13% fewer Malay students, 15% fewer Indian students and 15% fewer students from other minorities (including Eurasians) at pre-university institutions. The study also indicated that only 4% of Chinese students used the religion courses to fulfil admission requirements.

As the government announced its proposed restrictions on certain religious activities, it also seemed anxious to avoid being seen as opposed to religion altogether. Minister of State for Finance and Foreign Affairs George Yeo, himself educated at St Joseph's, a prestigious Roman Catholic institution, said at a prize-giving ceremony at his old school on 7 October that "the government is secular but it is certainly not atheistic."

STATEMENT BY CATHOLIC ARCHBISHOP GREGORY YONG, SINGAPORE

Maintenance of religious harmony

“THE purpose of the proposed legislation, as set out in the introduction of the White Paper, is to maintain religious tolerance and harmony in Singapore. This is an entirely praiseworthy objective, and it is good to see the Government's concern about preserving and fostering inter-religious harmony. We are well aware of the fact that we live in a multi-religious and multi-racial society. For harmony to prevail, we must be sensitive to the religious beliefs, practices and cultural heritage of peoples from different religions and races.

The White paper upholds the constitutional right of every Singaporean to embrace, practise and propagate the religion of his choice. We are blessed to live in a country where there is religious freedom. However, in view of the nature of our society, it is clear that the right of any religion to propagate its beliefs must be exercised with great prudence and restraint.

The Catholic Church does not approve of aggressive proselytisation. It holds that all men should be free from coercion in the acceptance of a religion. It respects other religions and encourages dialogue with them to search for common spiritual and moral values. To those who enquire about our beliefs we try to give a reasoned explanation, and we stress the importance of personal example in witnessing to what we believe. In the proposed legislation two conditions are put forward as necessary for the maintenance of religious harmony. The first is that people must not cause feelings of hatred or hostility towards those of other religions. It is regrettable that legislation should be necessary to prevent such behaviour. Religion ought to be a unifying influence in society, but we know from sad experience that it can, instead, be a divisive force, often with tragic consequences.

The second condition put forward in the White Paper for maintaining harmony is that religion and politics must be rigorously separate. This is a more complex and problematic proposal. The word “politics” needs careful definition. In a narrow sense it can mean party-politics; and here it is acceptable to say that, at least in Singapore, no religion should espouse the cause of any particular political party. Party-politics is the business of the layman, and we continue to encourage those Catholics who have the necessary competence and inclination to enter the field of politics so that they can help improve the quality of life of all Singaporeans with policies based on sound ethical principles.

In a broader sense, politics means the study and practice of public affairs; in this sense it is akin to religion, in that it affects the whole of human life. To say that religion and politics can be separated is at best an ambiguous statement.

The White Paper makes a distinction between the right of a religious leader to speak as a private citizen, and his right to speak ~~officially~~ as a religious leader. As a citizen of Singapore he has the right to express his views on political and social matters like any other citizen. But it would be wrong for him to make use of his position as a religious leader to foist his personal political or social views on his fellow-believers. This would be an abuse of his official position.

However, when Government policies have a bearing on faith or morals, then the religious leader has a right and duty to teach his co-religionists the stand they have to take according to the authentic and authoritative teaching of their religion.

This is where confusion can arise. It is not sufficient to say that the State is autonomous in secular matters and religion is autonomous in religious matters. There can often be an overlap between the secular and the religious. In such cases the religious leader cannot be accused of going beyond his competence in speaking on the moral and religious overtones of what might appear to be a purely secular matter. Just as the State shows its concern about inter-religious harmony because of its political implications, so religion

must show its concern about “secular” Government policies when there are moral or religious implications.

Every Government must earn the respect and support of the people by the integrity and dedication of its members, and by what they do for the common good of the people. Loyalty to the nation is not to be identified with loyalty to the Government.

Governments may come and go, but the nation remains. Consequently, it would be quite wrong to brand as disloyal or unpatriotic those who oppose some of the decisions of the Government of the day. It is possible for a person to be a great critic of the Government and a great patriot.

In the White Paper it is admitted that the Government does not claim that it is always right in its policies. Hence, there must be room for criticism and dissent. As far as the Catholic Church is concerned, religious leaders whether Bishops or priests, may not use the pulpit to voice their own personal dissatisfaction with Government policies except in so far as these affect Catholic teaching on faith or morals.

The Government is concerned about the possible misuse of religion for political purposes. Similarly, the Church is concerned about the possible misuse of the proposed legislation to silence lawful dissent and legitimate criticism. It is therefore reassuring to see that the proposed Inter-Religious Council will be a Presidential Council. This Council will be obliged to give its considered opinion on the decisions of the Minister.

It is right and proper that the composition of such a Council should be outside the sphere of party-politics. The Council must be free, and seen to be free, from Government control if it is to be credible.”

The church's mission is also social transformation

I REFER to the article "Keeping Politics from Religion" by Seah Chiang Nee from Singapore (*The Star*, Oct 12).

Father Joachim Kang, it is reported, testified that "the right to speak out on social issues, including (its) political views on human rights like in the case of the ISA detentions, has always been part of the Catholic Church teaching for a century."

The point at issue is simply stated: In contemporary theological language, the church's — and hence the individual Christian's — mission is not only personal salvation, i.e. conversion of people to Christ, but also social transformation, the restructuring of whole societies to enable people to live in peace, justice and freedom.

The second task cannot be entered into without some involvement in politics, either directly or indirectly.

How a Christian is to work for socio-political change is the age-old question of religion and politics.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for 1984, in a message to the fourth anniversary of the All-Africa Church Conference in Nairobi, Kenya, had this to say:

"A familiar remark which has become a parrot cry is 'Don't mix religion with politics!' It is a remark which is made not because a politician in his election campaign introduces a moral or religious element.

"No, we almost always hear it when a particular political, social or economic fact of life is criticised as being inconsistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ as most Christians understand it. And so when you work for a more just, participatory and sustainable society whose members share in crucial decision-making about the issues that are important for their lives, that is when you hear the cry, 'Don't mix religion with politics!'"

As part of humankind, and particularly as Christians, faith in Jesus demands from us the practice of justice and the preferential option for the poor.

The Synod of Bishops' *Justice in the World* (1971) says: "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appears to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel."



Archbishop Tutu ... 'Don't mix religion with politics' has become a parrot cry'

Seah Chiang Nee says, "the vast majority of Catholics are, in fact, apolitical."

On the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) on action for social justice, Pope Paul VI had this to say: "Laymen should take up as their own proper task the renewal of the temporal order.

"If the role of the hierarchy is to teach and to interpret authentically the norms of morality to be followed, in this matter, it belongs to the laity, without waiting for orders and directives, to take the initiative freely and to infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality, customs, laws and structures of the community in which they live."

Pope John Paul II, following the example of Pope Paul VI, emphasises the pre-eminent role that belongs to the laity as was reaffirmed in the recent Assembly of the Synod (1987), when he said: "It is their task to animate temporal realities with Christian commitment, by which they show that they are witnesses and agents of peace and justice."

According to the article, because of worry, concern and fear caused by so-called Marxist-Leninist conspirators, the government of Singapore is drafting legislation to keep politics out of religion.

It is heartening to note that "Singaporeans will have a chance to

share their views on the subject when it is referred to a Select Committee."

However, it surprises me to hear that, "the proposed legislation will prevent anti-Catholic sentiments from getting worse." Are there such sentiments and what is their origin?

I believe it is of the utmost importance to have a proper understanding of the meaning of the words religion, politics, church, faith and the like from the Christian perspective through dialogue before any decisions are made, judgments pronounced or legislation passed.

For example, for a Christian, belief motivates and permeates his behaviour. Worship is only one aspect of his faith.

One has to witness to his faith through words and deeds. Very often, freedom of religion is taken to be freedom of worship and nothing more!

I am not saying that only Catholics have a right and duty to make comments regarding social and political matters.

I wish to assert the fact that all religious traditions have to make their contribution so as to improve the existing social order.

The assertion that such religious interest in social matters will end in chaos is made on the assumption that religious people are "trouble makers," moved by self-interest.

There is evidence in the recent past where leaders of major world religions have come together to promote peace and justice in the world.

It is unbelievable that these leaders are proponents of social revolutions.

They are "sticking to true religion" and that is why I see the need to encourage peoples of all faiths to be in dialogue with "secular" and "atheistic" powers and governments.

Religious leaders are not afraid to sit down to dialogue with political leaders — but collision would be inevitable if laws are used to suppress legitimate ideas, options and practices.

MOST REVEREND ANTHONY SOTER FERNANDEZ, D.D., Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur

THE STAR

28 October 1989

KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

Maintenance of Religious Harmony Bill

Bill No. 1/90.

Read the first time on 15th January 1990.

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Minister or any member of the Council, any matter which has arisen at any meeting unless he is expressly authorised to do so.

PART III

PROHIBITION ORDERS

8.—(1) Where the Minister is satisfied that any priest, monk, pastor, imam, elder, office-bearer or any other person who is in a position of authority in any religious group or institution or any member thereof has committed or is attempting to commit any of the following acts:

- (a) causing feelings of enmity, hatred, ill-will or hostility or prejudicing the maintenance of harmony between different religious groups;
- (b) carrying out activities to promote a political cause, or a cause of any political party while, or under the guise of, propagating or practising any religious belief;
- (c) carrying out subversive activities under the guise of propagating or practising any religious belief; or
- (d) exciting disaffection against the President or the Government of Singapore,

he may make an order against that person for the purposes specified in subsection (2).

(2) An order made under subsection (1) may be made against the person named therein for the following purposes:

- (a) prohibiting him from addressing orally or in writing any congregation, parish or group of worshippers or members of any religious group or institution on any subject, topic or theme as may be specified in the order without the prior permission of the Minister;
- (b) prohibiting him from printing, publishing, editing, distributing or in any way assisting or contributing to any publication produced by that religious group without the prior permission of the Minister;
- (c) prohibiting him from holding office in an editorial board or a committee of a publication of that religious group without the prior permission of the Minister.

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(3) Any order made under this section shall be for such period, not exceeding two years, as may be specified therein.

(4) Before making an order under this section, the Minister shall give the person against whom the order is proposed to be made and the head or governing body or committee of management of the religious group or institution which is to be named in the proposed order, notice of his intention to make the order, and of their right to make written representations to the Minister and the Minister shall have regard to such representations in making the order.

(5) All written representations under subsection (4) must be made within 14 days of the date of the notice of the Minister's intention to make an order under this section.

(6) The Minister may, before the expiration of an order made under subsection (1), direct that the period of such order made be extended for such further period or periods of not more than two years.

9.—(1) Where the Minister is satisfied that any person is inciting, instigating or encouraging any religious group or religious institution or any person mentioned in subsection (1) of section 8 to commit any of the acts enumerated in that subsection, he may make an order requiring that person to refrain from doing so.

Prohibition orders against other persons.

(2) Without affecting the generality of subsection (1), an order made under this section may prohibit the person named therein from addressing or advising any religious group or religious institution or any member thereof or making any statement or causing any statement to be made, whether orally or in writing, concerning or affecting the relations between that religious group or religious institution and the Government or any other religious group or religious institution.

(3) Before making an order under this section, the Minister shall give the person against whom the order is proposed to be made, notice of his intention to make the order and of his right to make written representations to the Minister and the Minister shall have regard to such representations in making the order.

(4) All written representations under subsection (3) must be made within 14 days of the date of the notice of the Minister's intention to make an order under this section.

Council to be informed of proposed prohibition orders.

10. A copy of any notice given under section 8 (4) or 9 (3) shall forthwith be given to the Council which may give its views, if any, on the proposed prohibition order to the Minister within 14 days of the date of the notice and the Minister shall have regard to the views of the Council in making the order.

Prohibition orders to be referred to Council.

11.—(1) All orders made by the Minister under sections 8 and 9 must, within 30 days of the date of the order, be referred to the Council.

(2) The Council must consider the order together with all facts or documents tendered by the Minister in support of the making of the order, and the representations, if any, received by the Minister prior to the making of the order.

(3) The Council must, within 30 days of the receipt of the order and the necessary documents, make its recommendations to the Minister.

(4) The Council may recommend that the order be continued, revoked or varied in any manner and the Minister shall have regard to the recommendations of the Council.

Penalty for breach of prohibition order.

12.—(1) Any person contravening any provision of an order made under this Part shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding \$10,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 2 years or to both and, in the case of a second or subsequent offence, to a fine not exceeding \$20,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 3 years or to both.

(2) Notwithstanding the provisions of any written law to the contrary, a District Court shall have the jurisdiction to impose the maximum penalty prescribed for an offence under this Act.

Sanction of Public Prosecutor.

13. No court shall take cognizance of any offence under this Act except with the consent of the Public Prosecutor.

Decisions of Minister and recommendations of Council not justiciable.

14. All orders and decisions of the Minister and recommendations of the Council made pursuant to this Act shall be final and shall not be called in question in any court.

The Straits Times

WEEKLY OVERSEAS EDITION



Membership Has Its Privileges

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MCI(P) 37/8/89

Religious Harmony Bill sent to Select Committee

'Hard to separate religion from politics? I agree, but let's give it a try' says Chok Tong



MR GOH
... "It's like trying to use a scalpel to make a precise incision..."

Bill a 'very fine' instrument to preserve peace

By BERTHA HENSON

MR GOH Chok Tong yesterday answered the main concerns of MPs who expressed reservations about certain aspects of the Bill to maintain religious harmony, and urged Singaporeans to adopt a "practical, commonsensical approach" to religion and politics to safeguard peace.

While acknowledging the views of some MPs that it was hard to separate religion and politics, a major aim of the Bill, Mr Goh's message to Singaporeans was, simply, to try.

When enacted, Singapore will be the first country in the world with such legislation.

"It is very difficult to separate our spiritual life from our political, day-to-day life because the two are inseparable," Mr Goh told Parliament. "But we must try, in the context of a multi-racial, multi-religious Singapore, and for the common good of all Singaporeans."

One solution, in his view, was to distinguish between two types of authority, that of religion and that of the State, and not pit one against the other.

He said the Bill was a "very fine" instrument to preserve religious harmony compared to the Internal Security Act and other existing laws, which some people have suggested were good enough to do the job.

The best check against abuse

"It is like trying to use a scalpel to make a precise incision to deal with problem cells. Instead of having to use a chopper to amputate."

And to those who thought the proposed law gave the Government too much power, Mr Goh made it plain that he thought the best check against abuse was to ensure that only good governments are elected.

The First Deputy Prime Minister was a surprise speaker at yesterday's four-hour debate on the Maintenance of Religious

Bill introduced more in sorrow than with joy

In a sense, this Bill is a recognition of a retrogression, a potential deterioration in religious harmony. The Government takes no joy in introducing it. I take no joy in speaking on this subject. It is not something which we are very proud of. We introduce it more with sorrow or more in sorrow than with joy. It is to prevent us from sliding backward. It is an act aimed at preserving common sense and harmony.

— Mr Goh Chok Tong

It's better to use a scalpel than a chopper

Harmony Bill, which was later referred to a Select Committee headed by Speaker Tan Sui Khoo.

A total of 12 Members, including Opposition MP Chiam See Tong, spoke on the Bill yesterday, making a total of 31 who joined the debate over the past two days.

Among those who spoke yesterday were National Development Minister S. Dhanabalan and Trade and Industry Minister Lee Hsien Loong, both of whom came out strongly in support of the Bill.

Except for Mr Chiam and non-constituency MP Lee Siew Choh, all MPs lauded the principles behind the Bill.

But there were reservations on a number of as-

pects, including the need for such a law to ensure religious harmony, given the existence of statutes such as the ISA, the Sedition Act and criminal laws, the difficulty of separating religion from politics, and the possibility of Executive abuse.

Better to make precise incision

Mr Goh addressed these concerns squarely in a half-hour speech that also traced the evolution of the Bill from as far back as 1988 and his attempts to forge a consensus among his Cabinet colleagues.

Once the need for action to counter the disturbing international and local religious trends was accept-

ed, Mr Goh said, the Cabinet decided that legislation was the way to go.

"We wanted a law that could deal with the problem instead of our having to resort to the ISA or to court prosecution under the Sedition Act or other such laws to deal with those who cause disharmony through religion."

To deal with the problem of a few religious extremists, Mr Goh said, it was better to use powers under the Bill like a scalpel "to make a precise incision" than to resort to existing laws, which would be like using "a chopper to amputate".

Much of Mr Goh's speech, however, focused on whether politics and religion can, in fact, be separated.

He urged the House to

• See Back Page, Col 1

Defence spending will stay at 6pc of GDP

SINGAPORE will maintain its defence spending at six per cent of the Gross Domestic Product as the security situation in the region has not changed despite the improvement in super power relations.

The Second Defence Minister (Services), Brigadier-General (Res) Lee Hsien Loong, who said this in Parliament on Thursday, added that it did not mean

Mindef would be spending the entire amount each year as the GDP was much larger now than 10 years ago, and that a large part of the Singapore Armed Forces had already been built up.

BG Lee, who is also the Trade and Industry Minister, told the House that it would be "foolhardy for Singapore alone" to cut its defence spending as no other Asian country was doing it.

He said that regional tension and conflict would not disappear even if improved ties between the United States and the Soviet Union led to a reduction in their military forces in the region.

He was replying to Non-Constituency MP Lee Siew Choh who asked whether the Government had any plans to review its defence expenditure in the light of the easing of worldwide tension.

BG Lee said that the Government constantly reviews its defence expenditure, which had remained unchanged for many years, to ensure that it had the best value for every dollar spent.

Upgrading of weapons

"It strives to keep the SAF lean and efficient in order to make best use of scarce manpower and limited funds for the security of the nation," he said.

He added that with a large part of the Singapore Armed Forces already built up, Mindef now had more flexibility to time the upgrading and replacement of SAF equipment and weapons in order to get the best possible value for money.

If the cost of military equipment did not escalate too fast and if the economy continued to grow rapidly, the Government might not have to spend all the money. On the "momentous changes" in Europe and the easing of East-West tension, BG Lee noted that this had not been followed by any similar upheaval in the Asia-Pacific region.

He then went on to quote the US Defence Secretary, Mr Dick Cheney, who recently said in the Philippines, that while some cuts in the US military forces in Asia were being considered, the numbers would be relatively modest, as he did not see "the equivalent kind of change in Asia and the Pa-

• See Back Page, Col 7

PM's new libel suit against Dow Jones

PRIME Minister Lee Kuan Yew is again suing the president of the American Dow Jones publishing group and the Asian Wall Street Journal for libel.

The suit is over a Journal report last December on the High Court judgment on his successful libel suit against the Far Eastern Economic Review, also owned by Dow Jones, last year.

That report is already at the centre of a contempt of court action against the Journal, which was heard in the High Court this week (see adjoining report).

Mr Geoffrey Robertson, QC, who is defending the Journal in the contempt of court action, disclosed that the Prime Minister was taking fresh libel action against his client.

He said this during his submission, as he set out his views on whether Dow

Court reserves judgment in contempt case
• SEE PAGE 9

Jones president Peter Kann had criticised Mr Lee or the trial judge, Mr Justice L.F. Thean, in comments published in the Dec 1-2, 1989 issue of the financial daily, Mr Justice Thean heard Mr Lee's libel suit against the Review last year and awarded him \$238,046 in damages.

Attorney-General Tan Boon Teik argued on Tuesday that Mr Kann was referring to the judge when he remarked that he could only hope that "in the long term, the Review's establishment will not, as doubtlessly intended, still honest and independent voices in Singapore".

But Mr Robertson thought that Mr Kann's comment could also be read to be directed at Mr Lee, and revealed that Mr Lee had indeed filed a libel suit against the Journal. He did not elaborate on Mr Lee's suit.

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STRAITS TIMES WEEKLY OVERSEAS EDITION 24 FEB 1990

GOVERNMENT USES DETAINED CATHOLIC CHURCH WORKER'S EXCUSE TO INTRODUCE REPRESSIVE LEGISLATION UNDER GUISE OF INTER-RELIGIOUS HARMONY

Chok Tong quotes excerpts from document found in Cheng's belongings

• From Page 1

consider what might happen if a religious leader was allowed to advance his political views at his place of worship.

"Then we must allow a politician to use Parliament and mass rallies to propagate his religious views. Can you imagine where this would lead us?" he asked.

He painted another scenario: What might happen if a certain religion started using its religious beliefs to try to change Government policies, or even the Government.

The result would be a clash between State and religion and later a clash between religion and religion, he said.

This was because the Government would hit back at attempts to challenge its authority and would use another reli-

gious force to do so if necessary.

To illustrate his point, he gave a hypothetical example of what would happen if the Christians, who form 19 per cent of the population, tried to pressure the Government on secular issues, such as the foreign workers' levy.

Political parties would then craft election speeches to win the votes of the majority Taoists, Buddhists and Confucianists, he said, adding that they might even lobby other religions which view Christianity as a threat.

"I make this point not as a threat, but to urge all Singaporeans to take a practical, commonsensical approach in our religious and political lives.

"The present situation where there is a clear separation between religion and state is the best and most comfortable of all.

We want to keep it that way."

To show that he was not discussing the possibility of a collision between religion and the state in the abstract, Mr Goh reported how a document advocating liberation theology was found among the belongings of Roman Catholic Church worker Vincent Cheng, detained in 1987 for his role in a Marxist plot to overthrow the State.

Report of 1986 workshop

He quoted excerpts from the document, a report of a 1986 workshop held by the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference in Tokyo, which said the Catholic Church should get involved in politics, form liaisons with other groups, including Marxists and other religions, to work for the common good.



VINCENT CHENG ... detained in 1987 for his role in the Marxist plot.

Active non-violence was advocated, but violence could be considered if all means to end injustice and tyranny were exhausted.

Mr Goh asked if it was wise to apply liberation theology to Singapore, where conditions are so much different from Latin America, where the idea originated.

If Catholics got involved in politics, other groups would want a say and the Government would enlist the help of other religions to strike back.

Given its multi-racial composition, Singapore would then end up worse than strife-torn Northern Ireland or Lebanon where, at least, the people are all Irish or Arabs.

Singaporeans were free to pursue their beliefs and free to engage in politics whatever their beliefs, he reiterated. But they should use the ballot box and not religion if they want to throw out a bad or evil government.

Finally, Mr Goh dealt with fears of abuse of the proposed law by Government. The best safeguard against this, he said, was fair and regular elections. "...any abuses of the law will be highlighted by politicians and that government will lose support..." he added.