4. "Do Students have rights?" Annual General Assembly, Hong Kong Federation of Catholic Students, October 12, *1969*

"Do students have rights?" This was a question asked by Father James Hurley S.J. at yesterday's annual general meeting of the Hong Kong Federation of Catholic Students at Caritas Social Center, Boundary Street.

In answering this question Father Hurley said that society, while never denying the rights of students, had hitherto emphasized the responsibilities of students rather than their rights. "The time has now come" he said, "to shift the emphasis, and underline the inherent and basic rights possessed by all students."

These student rights have never been formally spelled out in any charter comparable to the articles of liberties demanded by the Barons of King John in England in 1215, and embodied in the Magna Carta, or to the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 10th, 1948. A charter of student right is needed, and it is to be hoped that the students themselves will take the initiative in producing such a charter.

Much more important than the possession of rights, Father Hurley said, is the possession of ways and means of protecting these rights. Such ways and means do exist for students, but most effective and most appropriate is a strong Student Union; a Student Union that can bargain and negotiate, as an equal, with College and University authorities. "The Student Union I envisage", Father Hurley said, "Would be something akin to the Trade Unions which exist in Europe, America and other parts of the world, but not yet unfortunately in Hong Kong."

With one or two notable exceptions the Student Movement in Hong Kong, in general, has not yet reached this ideal, but it is approaching it. When twelve students were expelled from Chu Hai College a Commission, composed of the three major student organizations in Hong Kong, was set up. Its purpose was to study and investigate this question. With the setting up of this commission the student movement in Hong Kong has entered a new phase, and many of the elders in our community have praised this commission for its balance, maturity, and quiet but impressive insistence on student rights.

However the student movement in Hong Kong must be ready, not merely to study and investigate, but also to bargain and negotiate. Otherwise student rights can never be effectively protected.

Such ideas about Student Unions and the Student Movement may not be readily acceptable just now in Hong Kong. The Attitude of the community towards youth and authority, while rapidly changing, is still characterized by a certain benign paternalism. This, coupled with a rather alarming insensitivity to human rights, might increase the generation gap and lead to further serious confront-actions between students and authority. Father Hurley appealed to all in authority to give serious attention to this problem and avert such confrontations.

Father Hurley is the National Chaplain to the Hong Kong Federation of Catholic Students and also the Chief honorary advisor to the College Student Association of Hong Kong.