

# Role of the Bishop in Precious Blood Golden Jubilee School Controversy

*THE following is a statement issued by the Catholic Information Office:*

1. From various communications received by the Bishop's Office and the reports in the press, there appears to be some misunderstanding about the precise role played by the Bishop in the present controversy over the Precious Blood Golden Jubilee Secondary School.
2. On 9th May 1978 a letter, the first of a series of petitions, was received from a group of some 400 protesting teachers and students who had assembled in the Cathedral Compound; without any prior notice.
3. The letter listed a number of complaints against the principal of the School and ended with a demand: dismissal of the principal. The letter did not in terms call for an investigation into the complaints but insisted that there could be no future for the School without first dismissing the principal.
4. This was the very first occasion on which the Bishop had been approached by a group of students and teachers of the School in connection with the matter complained of in the letter.
5. At the same time the Bishop recognised that whatever moral position he might have as Bishop, the School was a subsidized school governed by the Education Ordinance which defines the powers of the various organs or bodies concerned with its administration. The Principal's tenure of office is governed by the Education Ordinance and it was immediately obvious to him, as it must have been to many other people, that he had no power to dismiss the principal. It was also the very first indication of the demand made to dismiss Miss Kwan as principal. The Bishop had cause for concern and took time to consider the position and study their written complaints.
6. Early in the afternoon of Thursday 11th May, a petition was handed into the Bishop's Office. This requested a meeting with the Bishop or his representatives. The Bishop appointed four delegates to meet the petitioners' representatives. At the meeting the following two points were established:
  - a) The task of the Bishop's delegates was to listen to what the petitioners had to say. They were not given any mandate to enter into negotiations or make any commitment.
  - b) The four delegates were appointed strictly on an "ad hoc" basis, just for that occasion only.
7. At the meeting with the petitioners' representatives three demands were made, the first of which was the immediate reinstatement of the four suspended pupils. As this was a matter of discipline entrusted to the principal by the Education Ordinance, the Bishop upon being informed of the demand, immediately caused a reply to be conveyed to the petitioners' representatives to the effect that the matter was not one within his competence. The other two demands made, the withdrawal of warning letters to teachers and students, and the dismissal of Miss Kwan as Principal, were also outside the Bishop's sphere of competence.
8. Even before the meeting it had been made known by a spokesman of the Education Department in a televised interview that a number of options were open to the Education Department, closure of the school being only one of them. The Bishop knew of these options but as far as he is aware the decision to close the School was not made by the authorities until after the sit-in incident at the Precious Blood Golden Jubilee Secondary School playground at about noon on Friday 12th May 1978 and after investigations were conducted by Inspectors of the Education Department.
9. The continuing protest sit-in at the Cathedral Compound is naturally of concern to the Bishop and to all affected thereby. In the light of the most recent messages conveyed to the Bishop from the protestors and their sympathisers it would appear that the protestors now see the immediate re-opening of the School as a pre-condition for any meaningful form of dialogue. If this is correct the search for a satisfactory solution is rendered extremely difficult. It is hoped however that the position may not be as intransigent as it appears to be.