

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH



IN

HONG KONG

(Father Einaudi, Vicar General of the Diocese of Hong Kong, gave the following address at a Jesuit Workshop in Hong Kong on 26th October, 1984)

by Secondo Einaudi

The Catholic Church in Hong Kong is less than one-hundred-and-fifty years old, which by Church standards is very young; moreover, the vast majority of its members are only first or second generation Christians. Despite its youth, however, it would not be unfair to say that it is burdened with as many institutions and structures as any Church ten times its age. The Diocese of Hong Kong also happens to be the largest Chinese Catholic diocese in the world not only in terms of membership but also in its number of Chinese ordained clergy, religious men and women, and qualified lay people in leadership roles. It is then, this young, large, promising and structure-laden local Church that now is at a crossroads. It faces a unique challenge from without and it is confronting many soul-searching questions from within as it stands at the threshold of a new age.

HONG KONG: A History of Crisis

Confronting crisis is nothing new to the Church here. Involved as it always has been with the social as well as the spiritual well-being

of the people of Hong Kong, it of necessity, shares their history — a history that might well be described as one of recurring crises. Decimating epidemics and rampant disease marked our early years (records show that the life expectancy of a missionary at that time was 38 years). The typhoons and fires that still plague us were even more devastating and disastrous in the past when typhoon shelters were unknown and homes were mat-sheds made of wood. Still fresh in the minds of our older citizens was the terrible period of the Japanese occupation when famine was rife and medical help almost nil. Then, too, there were always the refugees, sometimes a stream, at other times a tidal wave of destitute humanity threatening to overwhelm an already strained social framework. All these calamities and disasters, and those not mentioned, have had a telling impact on Hong Kong, its people and its Church. The Church can add a few crises of its own to the long list. Up until 1950, over 90% of the Hong Kong Diocese's territory was across the border on mainland China. This made it vulnerable to the civil unrest and social disorders that were endemic in China from the last decades of the Ching dynasty to the final victory of the Communist armies during the civil war. Periodic persecutions varied in intensity from minor harassment to severe restrictions that all but put an end to Church activity there. Finally, in 1949, with the Communist take-over, the prefectures of Po On (寶安), Wai Yeung (惠陽) and Hoi Fung (海豐), — along with their 10,000 Christians — were cut off from the rest of the diocese; Church properties were confiscated; Churches, mission stations, schools, and dispensaries were closed down; the nuns dispersed, most priests imprisoned and all foreign missionaries expelled. It seemed at the time that the Church would not survive.

My purpose in recalling these painful events of our past is merely to draw attention to the fact that crisis is a part of our history, and history has shown that, we the people of Hong Kong and the Church, have always risen to the challenges they have presented. It is good to keep this in mind for it serves to put our present state of uncertainty in its proper perspective, to recognize that the people of Hong Kong have become quite adaptable in the face of change and resolute in the face of crisis.

The Phenomenon of Hong Kong

We have become accustomed to regard also the rapid and intense development of Hong Kong as a modern day phenomenon, while, in point of fact, this has been a characteristic of Hong Kong's life from its very inception as a colony. In 1840, "the barren rock without a house upon it" had an estimated population of 1,500. This number increased ten-fold

by the end of 1841 when Hong Kong's development began in earnest. In less than three years, the island had been criss-crossed with new roads, and land reclaimed from the sea had blossomed forth with every kind of public, private and commercial structure to meet the demands of the rapidly expanding population. This kind of development continued almost unabated throughout the years. It was given tremendous momentum during the post-war period by the arrival of thousands of refugees and the development of the kind of infra-structures that transformed an already impressive port into an industrial powerhouse. To give but one example of how fast is the pace of development even today, in 1983 public housing flats were being built at an average rate of one every 7 and-a-half minutes in each 12 hour working day every day of the year. And this figure does not include those that were being built in the private sector.

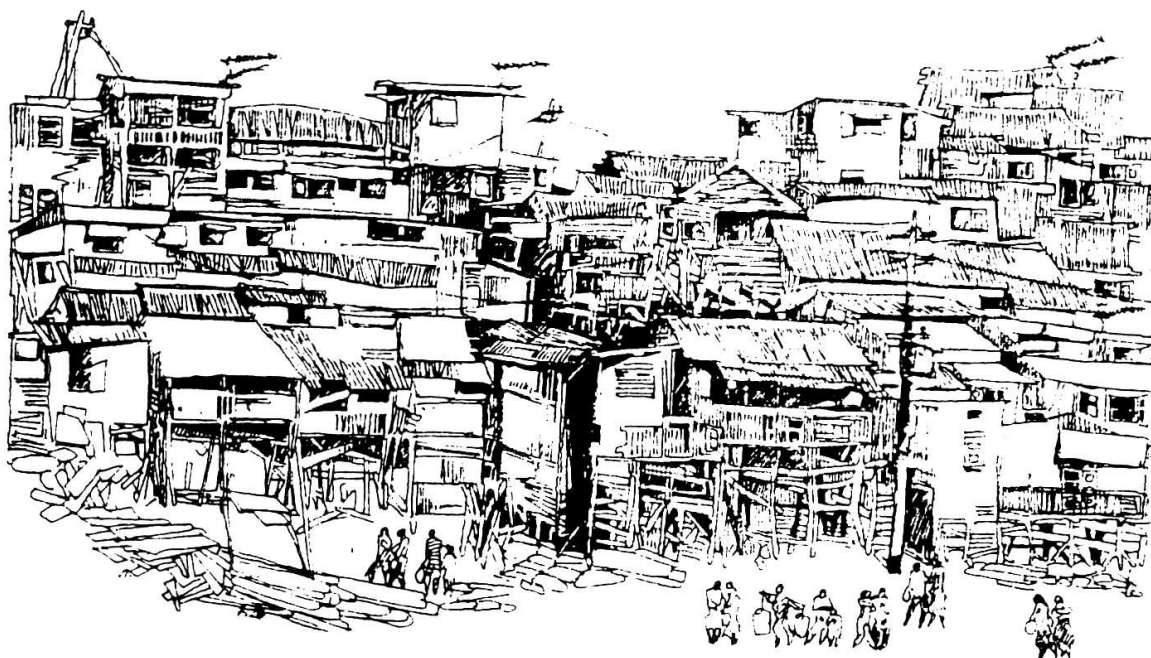
Hong Kong today has a population of over five-and-a-half million. The overall population density is about 5,000 to the square kilometre. Its container port ranks third in the world in size and second in terms of tonnage. It is the world's 3rd largest financial centre (after London and New York), and it is one of the world's leading commercial, manufacturing and communication centres. Impressive figures for a territory without any natural resources to speak of.

The Church During the 50's and 60's

During the 1950's and 60's, the three most formidable tasks that faced the Church were: the problems of refugees, rapid increase in new members, and the urgent need for space in which to expand.

With the end of the civil war in China, hundreds of thousands of refugees swarmed into the colony from the mainland. They brought out with them nothing but hearts burdened with sad memories and bitter experiences, and the rags they wore on their backs. The Church became fully involved in refugee assistance, trying to meet their most basic and immediate needs: help was solicited from abroad, clinics and welfare centres were set up, personnel were recruited and trained to help alleviate their suffering. Wherever there were refugees, the Church was present.

Along with the refugee work, the diocese had to address the formidable pastoral task of caring for the thousands of catechumens that were flocking to the parish churches and other church related structures asking for religious instruction. Great effort and energy went into meeting these pastoral needs: catechists were recruited and given training, and Catholic



associations (notably the Legion of Mary) were mobilized to help in the education-formation of these new Christians. For the diocese, these were the years of the "bumper harvest". The number of converts averaged over 10,000 per year, reaching a peak of 16,169 in 1957. Some classified the new converts as "rice christians" and no doubt there were some "rice christians" among them, but there also can be little doubt that many of the finest and most committed Christians in the diocese today date their conversion to this period.

The third, and perhaps the most formidable task confronting the diocese at that time was space: providing places of worship for this unprecedented increase of new Christians, schools for the education of their young; centres for apostolic, social, cultural and recreational activities, structures for meeting immediate physical needs such as hospitals, clinics, etc. This was not an easy task given the scarcity of land, its prohibitive cost, and the urgency of the needs.

From the Mid-60's to the End of the 1970's

After this period of rapid expansion and growth, the diocese turned its efforts to the work of consolidation. A whole new generation of Catholics had to be formed in the faith, educated to assume their apostolic and social responsibilities as Christians. At the same time, the Church

could not neglect its primary mission, that is to reach out to the non-Christians, to continue its evangelical work in the community.

The Second Vatican Council had just concluded and the diocese had been given the important task of implementing the Council's directives both on the parish and diocesan levels. This demanded a great deal of organization and preparation, not the least of which involved preparing the Chinese texts for the radical change from a Latin to a vernacular liturgy... a time-consuming and exacting task.

In an effort to review the life and work of the diocese in the light of Vatican II, and to lay a firm foundation for its future development, Bishop Francis Hsu, Hong Kong's first Chinese bishop, convoked the Diocesan Convention of 1970-1971. This was a major event in the history of the diocese. The aim of the Convention is best summed up in Bishop Hsu's own words taken from his opening address: "... to take stock of ourselves, to examine our structures, to assess our successes and failures, to renew and update ourselves."

After 16 months of intense preparation, the Convention was officially opened on February 15, 1970. The 400 elected delegates, representing all sectors of the diocese, divided themselves into 11 working groups that met regularly over an 18 month period to work on draft documents covering every aspect of Church life from evangelization to the social mission of Christians. The documents in their final form, with the addition of many practical recommendations for implementation, offered a structured-framework for guiding the diocese into the next period of its history.

This period was also marked by accelerated expansion both within the diocese and in Hong Kong itself. Between 1977 and 1980, well over 400,000 people arrived here from China. The diocese found itself struggling to keep pace with the many sudden shifts in population, and sought ways and means to provide some form of physical presence in the many huge housing estates and new towns that seemed to spring up almost overnight all over the territory. (These new estates and towns numbered anywhere from 100,000 to 500,000 people.) The task was made more difficult by a new government policy of not setting apart land or premises in the new estates to be used specifically for religious purposes. It was imperative that the Church remain with its people, sharing their environment along with their hopes and aspirations, offering its services to them within the communities themselves, helping in fostering a sense of belonging and being a supportive element in their efforts to cope with their new environment. Where land could not be bought nor premises rented, the diocese was left with no alternative but to take on the administration of more and more schools and social centres in these areas in order to have some base of operations, and physical presence among its own people.

Present Situation

In making a brief assessment of the present situation of the diocese, I prefer to begin with a number of problem areas and weaknesses, and then move on to mention some of our strengths which in my view offer signs of hope and possibility for the future.

High on any list of problem areas has to be the heavy burden of diocesan structures and institutions that have accumulated with the passing of time. Some have arisen from internal necessity and others have been forced upon us as organized responses to specific local needs. Whatever their source, they are ever present and tend to project an image of entrenched power and prestige, which is quite removed from that ideal of a people traveling lightly --- a "pilgrim Church on the move". Without intending, we may have come to depend too much on them, and they very well might be hindering rather than facilitating the Church's evangelical mission.

A problem allied to the structural problem is that of indigenization. While the diocese is a local Church, it is not yet a fully indigenous one. The presence and influence of its foreign personnel are still too strong; and, while the enriching influence of various cultures is a definite asset, it can impede fuller participation by the local clergy in assuming leadership roles. This also could help to explain the slow progress we have made in integrating the Chinese culture and its values into the social and liturgical life of the Church. I shall come back to this problem later on in this paper when dealing with the specifics of the 1997 issue.

In the field of education, we are definitely over-committed. There is a shortage of qualified, dedicated and gospel-minded personnel. This results in many Catholic schools being Catholic in name only, and opportunities for presenting the gospel message and imbuing our students with strong Christian values are often lost.

We have registered a large drop in Sunday Mass attendance recently (from 70% in the late 60's to 30% in the 80's). This may be due to a number of factors; constant shifts in population, the rising influence of materialism in a consumer oriented society, changes in life styles and family patterns, rapid growth in the number of converts during the 50's and 60's without matching efforts at formation and integration, ignorance, indifference, or even the restless inconstancy of many of the new generation. Whatever the cause, the drop is there and it is a matter of concern, especially in our parishes. This comes at a time when parishes are struggling with their own serious problems. Most parishes are too large

to give their members a sense of community. Often they become places where people on Sunday meet together but without meeting one another. Such parishes do not, and perhaps cannot, form communities where there is a strong sense of identity, opportunity for personal sharing and consistent mutual support. It also may help to explain why we are unable or unwilling to take full advantage of the abilities, talents, and expertise of all our members, and our failure to tap the rich resources of the people in our midst.

I should like to conclude this far from comprehensive list of problem areas and weaknesses by mentioning one more. It seems to me that we as a diocese, show a certain reluctance to assume a more active prophetic role in society. Are we somewhat lacking in the necessary moral courage to denounce the many practical ills and injustices which are present in Hong Kong? Could we not bring more of our moral authority to bear on our policymakers, exert more of a moral influence to right wrongs and improve the quality of life of our people? I think so.

Sign of Hope: Possibilities for the Future

Anyone familiar with the diocese cannot but be optimistic about the future of the Church here. There are so many rich signs of the work of the Spirit in our midst. Here I shall content myself with pointing out only a few of the more obvious ones.

There is now more than ever before a growing awareness within the diocese of the importance of its prophetic role in society, of its constant need for self-evangelization through an on-going process of self-conversion and self-renewal, of its need for continual updating if it is to retain its youthful ardour in proclaiming the gospel with credibility and effectiveness. There is ample evidence of this spiritual awakening to be found in the keen interest in and lively attendance by large numbers of our religious and laity at retreats, study days, seminars and other such programmes of renewal.

Another positive sign of the times is the ever increasing number of ordinary Christians who are willing to make great sacrifices to deepen their understanding of their faith, not only for their personal enrichment but also to communicate better the Good News to others. Each year over 150 people representing all walks of life are graduated from the Diocesan Catechetical Centre's two-year evening catechetical training course; another 500 to 600 attend the Extra-mural Studies Programme, a year long series of evening theological courses offered by Holy Spirit Seminary. These are clear indications of the existence of a large-scale interest among our Christians not only in increasing their religious knowledge, but also in equipping themselves better to carry out the church's evangelical mission.

The increasing number of adult catechumens is another encouraging sign that bodes well for our future. During the past five years while the number of adult baptisms remained steady, that of catechumens has almost doubled. People are seeking the truth. What is more significant is that these recent converts enter the Church at a time of uncertainty, given the peculiar situation of Hong Kong and the tensions and worries related to its future. Also, they must overcome the many obstacles laid in their path by a highly competitive and demanding work-life that leaves them little leisure time to pursue other interests. It is my conviction that there would be even more converts if we took a more active approach in our preaching of the gospel message and more fully availed ourselves of the many opportunities for evangelization offered to us by our institutions, our social and religious services, and our daily contacts with people from every walk of life.

Another firm sign of hope lies in the gradual but definite emergence of lay ministries in our parishes. Many parishes already have, or are in the process of preparing, lay ministers of the Word and the Sacraments. It is quite common now to find lay people bringing communion to the sick and bed-ridden as well as leading prayer groups and presiding at liturgical services in the absence of a priest. Nor is this phenomenon based on a pragmatic need to supply for the shortage of priests and religious; rather, more and more Christians are coming to a realization of the ministerial dimension of their lives as sharers in the priestly, kingly and prophetic mission of Christ - a ministry they received at baptism.

There is also renewed interest being shown among parish members in parish life and its activities. Parish councils are assuming more responsibility for parish administration, and parishes are offering an ever increasing range of opportunities for involvement, from bible study groups to social projects in the local communities. Also to be noted are the many small groups or 'mini-communities' firmly committed to the pursuit of gospel ideals that are emerging on the parish level. These groups meet regularly to pray, share personal experiences, reflect on the gospel vision, and support spiritual growth among their members.

One of the ways now being tried in parishes in order to stimulate new initiatives, eliminate isolation and promote better communication and understanding among both clergy and lay people is for neighbouring parishes to group together to work out unified approaches to solve common problems. There are already four such groupings operating in the diocese. Here representatives meet regularly to discuss problems, pool information, exchange ideas, and organize jointly sponsored religious services. Such an area group approach to pastoral work has much to recommend it; it serves to

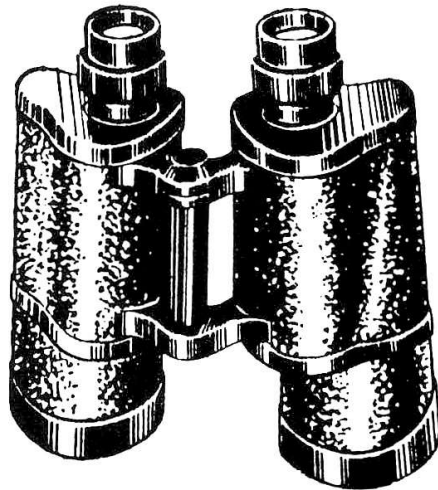
foster a stronger sense of solidarity and a renewed common purpose among its member parishes.

One of the many positive results of the live-in diocesan renewal camp held last year has been the convergence of ideas and efforts on the diocesan level directed towards more unified goals. The camp attempted through a combination of prayer, reflection and study, to sort out diocesan priorities and clarify our goals for the immediate future. Over 100 priests participated; and, in an open letter to the laity of Hong Kong at the close of the meetings, expressed among other things the following concern:

We recognise that we must make an effort to draw up a long term pastoral plan for the Diocese, emphasizing formation of and communication among the laity and priests. We must also make every effort to build a Church that is mature in faith, at the service of others, and indigenous. We are aware of our being a pilgrim Church in need of constant renewal so that we may be able to face the future changes in a positive way, relying on God the Lord of history.

THE CHURCH AND 1997: A Period of Grace

There is no historical record or evidence of a people being told by a communist government in advance to prepare for the peaceful transfer of authority in the administration of their territory or country. In the past, people were given signs, warnings, premonitions, but when it happened, it happened so suddenly and quickly that the populace in general, and the Church in particular, were caught totally unprepared for the change. This was certainly the case on mainland China in 1949.

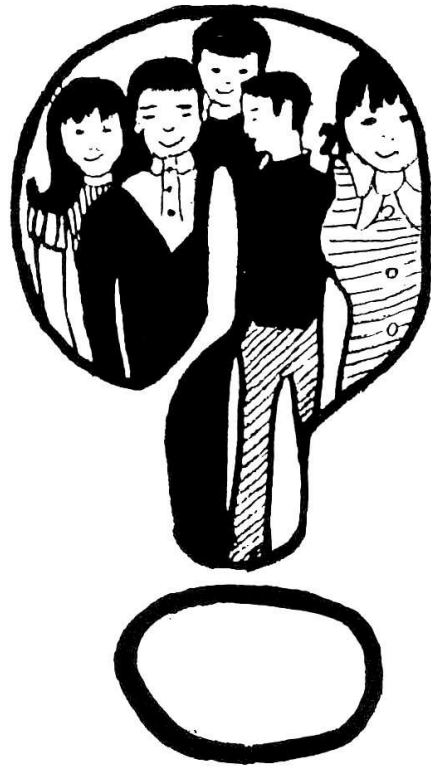


Hong Kong, however, has been given 13 years' notice. This is something quite unprecedented, and in a sense we are privileged in that we have been given a period of grace in which to prepare ourselves and our people for the changes that will come. The new situation will certainly bring about many changes, and radical ones at that—despite the repeated reassurances from all quarters that changes will be few and minimal.

Thirteen years will pass by very quickly. The need to plan and act now is clear and real, and history will judge us according to how wisely or unwisely we have used this time of grace.

Meeting the Challenges

The first challenge to be met by us is that of maintaining our unity; this is particularly important among the church leaders. While remaining united in matters of faith, we must, at the same time, work to reach a general consensus on a positive approach to our new situation, which will necessarily entail our entering into open dialogue and working closely with the Communist Regime. There is no suggestion here of making deals or striking bargains. As long as we remain committed Catholics and they remain atheistic-Marxists, there can be no compromise in matters fundamental to faith or religion. Divided loyalty is no loyalty. On the other hand, it is one thing to reject an atheistic ideology, and quite another to reject the people who follow such an ideology. A stance of rigid intransigence would not only be disastrous but it would be un-christian as well. However, one can be open without being naive, engage the common good of all without having to surrender one's faith or spiritual loyalties. To be united in matters essential to our faith, and to be ready to meet each practical situation with a flexible, positive approach, even if it might mean we must sometimes sacrifice what is non-essential is imperative not only for the good of the Church and our Hong Kong society but also for China itself. The question facing our leadership now is whether or not we are willing and able to maintain a basic unity of faith while coming to agreement on common, positive approaches to the new situation? To fail to do so would have very serious consequences, inflict unnecessary suffering and pain on ourselves, creating confusion among our people, and doing irreparable damage to the Church. Ultimately it would be a disservice to the Church, to Hong Kong and to China. Unity is as fragile as it is vital; discord and disharmony are our most dangerous enemies and we are only too vulnerable as human beings to their attack.



The Social Role of the Church Now and in the Future

The stability and well-being of Hong Kong hinges on public confidence. Its present and future prospects will rise and fall on this issue alone. While representing a small minority, the Catholic Church exercises great influence in this community through its network of schools, social centres, hospitals and other institutions. It is in a very sensitive position, and, in this climate of uncertainty and tension, its leadership is being closely monitored by every section of Hong Kong society both within and without the Church to see how it reacts to the practical realities of our present circumstances. Positive decisions made in favour of our future can contribute to a growth in public confidence, just as negative ones can serve to undermine it. The position is delicate but our responsibility is clear. Our commitment to the people of Hong Kong, particularly to the working and middle classes, demands that we play our role well, for should public confidence collapse, these are the very people who would suffer the most. The perplexing question in all of this is: how will the Church be able to continue into the future to fulfill this social responsibility and at the same time maintain freedom of action for its work of evangelization?

More than a Challenge, an Opportunity

A prophetic appraisal of the new reality we are now facing might well judge it to be providential. Our complacency is being challenged. We must now take a long, hard look at ourselves, our life styles, our work, our priorities. We must confront ourselves with gospel values to see whether or not we need to discard a lot of unnecessary and superfluous baggage that we have been dragging along with us, whether or not we have been relying too much on outward structures and too little on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps we have been influenced too much by the common mental attitude of "nothing succeeds like success" and have lost touch with such christian values as detachment, poverty and simplicity.

In looking at the future changes realistically, we also cannot help but be aware that the Catholic Church in communist countries operates under severe restrictions. While we remain optimistic in the face of reassurances that such will not be the case here, we must prepare ourselves for all eventualities and plant our reasons for hope in deeper soil. History attests to the fact that even where Christians have been deprived of all freedom to practice and proclaim their faith in public, when they have been deprived of all structures and external aids to facilitate the living out of their christian beliefs they tend to emerge from the period of trial

as new persons, more alive and strengthened in faith, and more committed to God and to the Church. In short, we are now being challenged to review the theology of failure and the cross, the strength that comes from weakness, and how, throughout history, persecution, privation and hardship have been purifying instruments in clearing the way for the release of new energies and new life. In this connection, a thorough study of and prayerful reflection on the history of the Church in times of trial, particularly that of the church in China, would seem not only advisable but reassuring. The old saying *historia magistra vitae* still holds true today.

Religious Education for the Future

There can be no denying the recent renewal in the field of formal religious education. We have previously noted the eager interest of many adult Catholics to deepen their religious knowledge and understanding, and catechetical training has become quite sophisticated and confident in pursuing its pastoral goals. The renaissance in biblical studies and liturgy have played a major role in revolutionizing approaches to traditional doctrinal instruction. However, the problem presented by a future where belief itself will be confronted by the consistent challenge of militant atheism gives one pause to think about how this catechetical challenge will be met. Most of our Christians manage to get by with the minimal instruction they received in the catechumenate or as school children. Their religious knowledge is often elementary and incomplete. Except for brief Sunday sermons, most adults receive little in the way of continuing formal religious education. The situation of school children is not much better. Those not attending Catholic schools seldom get more than what is offered in classes designed to prepare them for First Holy Communion and Confirmation. Also the atmosphere of the society in which they live, with its worldly preoccupations and materialistic values, offers little support and not a few obstacles to nurturing idealism and spirituality among our youth. In such circumstances, looking at both the present situation and what the future will bring, it is my conviction that the most pressing task of the Church is to seek ways and means to impart to our Christians a basic, solid and clear understanding of their faith and their Church --- its nature and history and their place and role within it. Again a question: how do we impart this knowledge and how do we reach those in most need of it?



1997: *A Catalyst for Indigenization*

Throughout the years the steady growth of the diocese has not been equally matched by sufficient efforts at indigenization. It cannot be denied that the Church at large has always had as a primary concern the fostering of native vocations, and here in Hong Kong a local seminary for the training of priests was opened just one year after the Church's arrival. The diocese has indeed been fortunate in the number and quality of the priests the seminary has continued to turn out through the decades - men outstanding for their zeal, dedication and loyalty to the faith and to the Church. The diocese also has, during the past 40 years, spared no sacrifice to send local priests overseas for further specialized training and study. At home, especially since the Second Vatican Council, there has been a climate of renewal and change in liturgy, in catechetical approaches, in social involvement, and in administrative structures that has encouraged a more rapid pace of localization. Nevertheless, despite all these efforts, the local Church is still far from being fully indigenous. Some explanation is required. This is not meant to be a search for scapegoats, but rather an attempt to understand what happened in order to remove obstacles that may still stand in the way.

The reasons for the slow progress in implementing indigenization are many and complex. One could start at the very beginning of our history. The Church was established here as a transplant of an institutionalized European Church, a *plantatio ecclesiae* run by westerners along western lines. Given the times, personnel, circumstances, etc. could it have been otherwise? Such has been the history of all "mission" churches. As time passed, the seminary turned out many local priests, who work harmoniously side-by-side with the foreign missionaries. But they were not only outnumbered by the foreigners but also conditioned, to some extent, by them as well. This led to a kind of Church leadership that was foreign, when not in fact, certainly in tone.

Another obstacle in the path of indigenization has been heavy demands of the pastoral apostolate. Local priests returning from abroad after several years of specialized study were plunged into the very active life of pastoral ministry. This left them with little or no time for the kind of research, study, and reflection necessary to integrate their learning into the local culture so as to provide the necessary groundwork for formulating a Chinese theology. Nor was there any encouragement from the universal Church in this matter, for it was only with Vatican II that the entrenched position of a Christian theology couched in traditional western concepts, terminology and cultural values was seriously challenged with

any degree of effectiveness by theologians in the church at-large and even today the influence of traditional western theology remains very strong.

A misunderstanding about the nature of indigenization has, and in some circles still does, hamper true indigenization. For many, indigenization means merely the introduction of native forms into the liturgy, a kind of change of costume that can be easily imposed and tailored to fit local needs. True indigenization cannot be organized and, much less, imposed from without; its growth is not planned but spontaneous, and it must emerge from within the life of the local community itself.

In some circles, indigenization is seen today in highly political terms, as a rejection of western culture, foreign missionaries, or the paternalism and centralism of Rome. This kind of attitude could lead to the promotion of inculturation for inculturation's sake, and foster an unhealthy isolation from actual day to day experience. It is to view culture as a static rather than dynamic reality, operating in an ideal rather than real human context. In Hong Kong where East and West meet, mingle, confront, enrich and corrupt each other in a unique situation, the process of inculturation and indigenization is made even more difficult by this approach.

As 1997 draws near, Hong Kong will begin to experience a reversal of the traditional trend of Western versus Eastern influence. In future, Hong Kong will become less and less influenced by the West and become more and more Chinese. This, in itself, is reason enough to speed up the process of indigenization in order to meet the new changes in the political, social and cultural reality. The Church by its very nature as a living body in time and space must always live, move and act within the context of a given culture. It must also read prudently the signs of the times and act accordingly in the light of its faith. With this in mind, I would like to offer some practical suggestions that I see as conducive to fostering a more rapid pace of indigenization.

First and foremost, local clergy should be encouraged to assume all leadership roles that involve policy-making, administration and pastoral planning in the diocese. Foreign missionaries should continue to contribute to the local Church, but only in supportive and auxiliary roles.

Second, local priests, religious and laity who have the necessary talent and qualifications should be given every possible assistance and encouragement to further the development of a Chinese theology. This theology should be rooted in scripture and tradition and at the same time

integrate the positive values of Chinese tradition and culture. Such a rendering of the gospel message would relate more directly to the people of Hong Kong and provide the proper context for solving local problems.

Thirdly, local Catholics must be educated to a greater sense of belonging to the local Church, and, thereby, to a greater sense of responsibility for its financial support. Foreign subsidies should be gradually phased out, even at the cost of cutting back on some services, in order to achieve self-support and fiscal independence as quickly as possible. In my view, the sooner this is done the better, and it can be done at any time.

Fourth, the work of educating our laity to the realization that consecrated life, ordained as well as lay-ministry flows from growth in their faith and its expression is a sure sign of a local church coming of age. We must continue to train them in every form of Christian ministry so that they can assume full evangelical responsibility for bringing to their people the gospel message in their own tongue, their own culture and their own theology.

With or without the impetus for change represented by the reality of 1997, it is very clear that the time has come for us to move away from the present model of a Church which is over-institutionalized towards another model or a combination of other models that would allow us to become:

--- an up-dated Church which is in touch with both its Christian traditions and the realities of modern life. Such a Church may demand some streamlining and that we do away with those structures and institutions that are merely carry-overs from the past or sustained only because they provide a feeling of security in some church people.

--- a servant Church, which is first of all a servant of God, in order to become a more effective servant of humanity. This would be a Church living as Jesus did in solidarity with all men and women, sharing the joys and pains of God's people. In short, a Church that opens its arms both to embrace and to serve the community.

--- a prophetic Church which struggles with the real, concrete issues of daily life, proclaiming the gospel message in all its dimensions - social, spiritual, moral - upholding the truth without watering it down, preaching a doctrine of human dignity, human rights, social justice and the primacy of spiritual over material values - the quality of life over economic necessity. It is a Church that makes an option for the poor

without turning away from those on other levels of society and their problems. It is a Church of hope amid the growing tide of pessimism and and dispirited resignation over an unpredictable future.

--- a free Church which preserves its independence from political pressures of one kind or another in order that it might bear witness to a transcendent quality of life over and against the immanent, materialistic and consumeristic values of our society.

The Dilemmas of Change

The above models or images of the Church would all entail very concrete and practical changes in existing diocesan structures as well as more diversification in present patterns of work. Certainly, in time, new structures would arise to replace the old ones, for an idea remains only an idea until it is given some structural expression. What these structures might be, of course, remains to be seen. However, as we try to enter this new style of Church-life, we are faced with certain dilemmas that demand serious thought and careful discernment, dilemmas that arise from our current situation in this period of of our history.

If we act now to scale down our institutions, divest ourselves of certain structures, diversify our modes of work, could this be misinterpreted as a form of resistance to future government policy, a kind of subtle boycotting of public policy?

What of our supportive role in the community, made more sensitive now by the impending change of administration? Would policy decisions involving deinstitutionalization be seen as possible signs of withdrawal at a time of difficulty and thereby contribute to an erosion of public confidence in Hong Kong's future? And what of our own Christians who are already dealing with a great deal of uncertainty in their lives and in need of the Church's supportive stability? Radical changes in such a climate could easily give rise to many false assumptions among them.

There are those, too, who would see the Church's efforts to simplify and decentralize in very negative terms, possibly as preparatory efforts to go underground, or to set up "house churches".

A very practical dilemma involved in the decision to diversify our work and cut back on our institutions is that in so doing we would be depriving ourselves of many premises that now serve as centres of Christian activity in the areas where our Christians live.

There is also a problem that arises not so much from the outside but within the concept of ideal small Christian communities. There is the very real risk of dividing ourselves into a multiplicity of small clubs, isolated and turned in on ourselves. How would these small self-sustaining communities be co-ordinated lest they lose touch with the large Church community? And how would they continue to remain open to a sense of the universality of history, of mission, the reality of a Church open to all as sign and sacrament of salvation to all the nations?

1997: Opportunity for New Roles

If the Joint Declaration between Britain and China is able to be implemented according to the expressed terms of the written document, the Diocese of Hong Kong would be in a very good position to serve as a bridge between the Church in China and the Pope, as well as many local Churches in the universal Church community. Hong Kong is ideally suited as an international centre and focal point for the exchange of literature, ideas, experiences, and for the frequent exchange of visits. In future, Hong Kong might well serve as a meeting place for dialogue and cooperation among Churches.

A more intriguing possibility for a future role for the diocese lies in the implications of the "one country - two systems" policy announced recently by the Chinese government. What practical expressions such a policy will eventually take on is a matter of conjecture at this point. But if the experiment of a "capitalistic" city working within the framework of a communist country proves successful, and if the local Catholic Church will be allowed to function freely and without having to break its ties with the Pope and the universal Church, then, it would be in a position to work for a human and just society within a two-system context. It would be free to promote the good of society as a whole, without falling victim to the destructive excesses of either system. This might serve as an alternative model for many local Churches throughout Asia facing similar situations, and, in the end, be a singular contribution that the Hong Kong Diocese can make to the universal Church.