

HONG KONG: A NEW SITUATION

CHALLENGES

THE CHURCH

Editor's Note:

The following article is reprinted from International Fides News Service (May 7, 1986) as a commentary by the Vatican's Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples on the selection of the Diocese of Hong Kong as the special missionary intention of the Apostleship of Prayer for the month of July. The monthly intentions are usually recommended by the Pope as an indication of his special pastoral concern. This is the first time a Catholic diocese and its people have been singled out as the object of prayer intentions, and the commentary below has been sent to local Catholic churches throughout the world to serve as background material for acquainting members of the universal Church with the unique situation confronting the local church of Hong Kong. The Apostleship of Prayer has also designated December of this year as a time to pray for Catholics in China.

Rome (AIF) - An island - Hong Kong - , a peninsula - Kowloon - , and the "New Territories", are the components of the single territory and British Crown Colony of Hong Kong. The territory has a total area of 1,062 square kilometers (Hong Kong 78, Kowloon 10, and the New Territories with 974).

With its more than 5,500,000 inhabitants, with a population density of more than 5,012 inhabitants per square

kilometer, it has one of the highest population densities of the world. And, at the end of 1984, 23.5% of its population were under the age of 15 years.

Ninety-eight per cent of the population is Chinese, of whom 57.2% were born in Hong Kong and the others are originally from the South of China, chiefly from the Province of Guangdong. The remaining 2 per cent of the population is cosmopolitan, that is, composed of persons from all over the world. The principal groups are: 17,700 Britons, 28,000 Filipinos, 15,200 Indians, 14,000 Americans, 9,500 Malaysians, 9,400 Thai, 7,800 Australians, 7,800 Portuguese, 7,200 Japanese, 7,100 Pakistani, 6,000 Canadians, 4,700 from Singapore, 3,800 Indonesians, 2,200 Koreans, 2,300 Germans, 1,600 French, 1,200 Dutch, and others.

1977: Historical Event

On the first of July, 1997, China will reacquire sovereignty over Hong Kong and make it a "Special Administrative Region" (SAR) within China. In the coming eleven years, in preparation for the historical event of 1997, Hong Kong will little by little substitute the traditional influence of the West with that of the Chinese and the East. Changes are also foreseen on the political, social and cultural levels.

The Chinese of Hong Kong, who by and large have been removed from their Chinese roots until now, and more attracted by the West than by China, must rediscover their cultural patrimony and must also strive to enrich it with the values of their modern culture. The youth of Hong Kong will also have to acquire a better knowledge of Chinese history - also of contemporary Chinese history - and of the Chinese language.

According to the Joint Declaration of December 19, 1984 by the Prime Ministers of Great Britain and of China, Hong Kong will enjoy a high level of autonomy, excepting in matters regarding foreign affairs and defense. In line with the principle proclaimed by the Chinese,



"One country, two systems", Hong Kong will be able to preserve its present economic, social and judiciary systems for a period of 50 years; and the people of Hong Kong will continue to avail themselves of their present style of life and of liberty.

One of the paragraphs of the "Joint Declaration" speaks explicitly of religious organizations. "Religious organizations and their members may maintain relations with the same organizations and their members everywhere. Afterwards they will be able to continue the schools, hospitals and aid institutions directed by the religious organizations.

"The relations between the religious organizations and the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong and those that are in other parts of the Chinese People's Republic will be regulated according to principles of non-subordination, non-interference and mutual respect".

The reactions of the people of Hong Kong to the declarations of the interlocutors are varied and complex; and, above all, among the common people, do not inspire faith and credibility regarding the future. There is fear that the freedom and the democratic atmosphere that is enjoyed today will be lost.

Therefore, it is with particular interest that the discussions on the political reforms that are supposed to take place in 1987 are awaited. The citizens of Hong Kong noted that the free elections for the Urban Council and for the District Committees were foreseen well in advance of the Joint Declaration.

The Church in Hong Kong: The Largest Chinese Diocese

The majority of non-Christian believers in the territory of Hong Kong are Buddhists and Taoists. Together they have 360 temples scattered throughout the territory. The majority of the temples and monasteries are open to the public; however, many people, especially the young people, consider religious practices rather as a family tradition with little relation to life.

Muslims are about 50,000, and more than half of them

are Chinese the remaining non-Chinese were born in the territory or are believers originally from Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Indonesia, countries of the Middle East and Africa.

The Hindu community numbers 10,000 adherents, the Sikhs about 5,000, and the Hebrews about 1,000.

There are also 640 local Protestant communities, 124 of which are independent, and the others belonging to more than 50 different Churches. Protestants are almost 250,000. Principal Churches in this group are the following: Adventist, Anglican, Alliance, Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, Pentecostal, Church of Christ in China.

The Catholic Church, present in Hong Kong since 1841, is presently the largest organized religious body in Hong Kong, and the largest Chinese Diocese in the world. At the end of 1984, Catholics numbered 270,000, of whom 'more' than 90% were Chinese, and the others belonged to more than 40 different nations, chiefly Filipinos, Portuguese, British, Americans, etc. In the five year period beginning with 1980, there were 24,960 baptisms, but since then there has not been a significant increase in the number of Catholics, because of the emigration of families, the increasing number of students who leave the country for education (and the number of Catholics in this group is great), and natural diminution.

A sign of vitality is given by the increase in the number of catechumens. The 4,265 catechumens in 1980 reached 5,063 in 1984. And in the same period, the number of baptisms went from 4,967 to 5,052.

4

The Diocese of Hong Kong is pastorally structured in 53 parishes and 3 "Rectories": 13 parishes in Hong Kong, 23 parishes and 1 "Rectory" in Kowloon, and 17 parishes and 2 "Rectories" in the New Territories.

The Church's activity is entrusted to the following ecclesiastical personnel:

- 345 Priests, of whom 140 are Chinese (40.52%) - 77 diocesan and 63 religious -, and the remaining 205 are foreigners of various nations and belong to 15 Religious Congregations and Missionary

Societies.

- 73 Brothers, belonging to 24 Religious Congregations; 32 of the Brothers (43.85%) are Chinese and 41 are foreigners of various countries.

- 790 Religious Women, belonging to 24 Religious Congregations; of these, 474 are Chinese (58.97%) and 316 are foreigners from many nations.

Among the agents of the pastoral ministry there are, in addition: 93 full-time Catechists (33 Religious women and 59 lay persons - 20 men and 39 women -) and 485 Volunteers; 21 Apostolic Auxiliaries, all Chinese; 11 "Focolarini" and other apostolic Groups.

Important Contribution of the Church to the Well-being and Development of the People

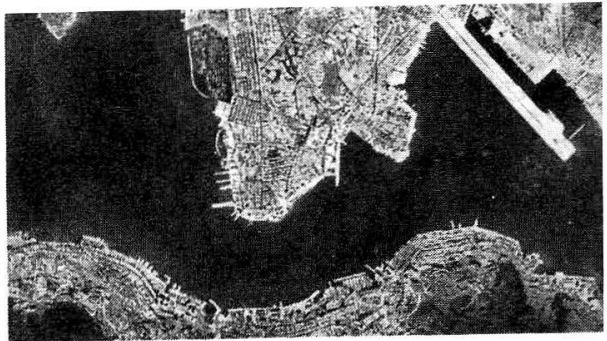
The Catholic Church has the merit of having given, and of still giving today, a great contribution to the general well-being of the people of Hong Kong, in particular in the area of education, of medical service and of social promotion and assistance. This is a contribution that is often acknowledged by the parents and by the local authorities themselves.

At least 313 Catholic schools offer qualified education to 309,296 students, of whom 90% are non-Catholics, while the number of Catholic students is 28,827 or 9.32%. Of the 313 schools, 104 are directed by the Diocese, 34 by "Caritas" of Hong Kong, 62 by Religious Congregations of Men, 97 by Religious Congregations of Women, and 16 by Laymen.

There are a total of 10,180 teachers, including 110 Priests, 38 Brothers, 225 Religious Women, and 9,807 laymen (3,465 men and 6,342 women). Among the lay teachers, 3,929 are Catholics.

A very influential and active service of social and health care assistance is rendered by the Church through six hospitals with 3,017 beds and 104,814 patients cared for; 19 Dispensaries, with 814,919 persons assisted; 18 nursery homes for 3,372 children; 17 Homes for the elderly with 768 residents; 2 Homes for the handicapped, with 32

residents; 14 rehabilitation centres with 3,662 persons assisted; a school for the deaf with 14 sections, and another one for visually handicapped with 13 sections; 16 Caritas Social Centres; 13 Hostels with 1,456 guests; and 3 boarding schools for girls with 241 residents.



An important aspect of the social-assistance service of the Church concerns refugees. Not counting the great movement of Chinese refugees that began in 1949, more than 110,000 Vietnamese refugees have passed through the refugee camps of Hong Kong since 1975. The greater part of these were accepted in other countries, and about 500 were received by Hong Kong. Presently there are still 11,500 Vietnamese refugees here, of whom 20% have been in Hong Kong for five years. In addition, in 1984 there were more than 28,000 migrant Filipino workers in Hong Kong, 26,500 of whom were women in domestic service.

Challenges and Hopes of the Local Church

The new context that faces the local Church of Hong Kong with a sense and rhythm of reckoning on a reverse, imposes on this Church the need for a particular awareness and a preparation under three aspects: of its own identity and internal unity of the local Church within the sphere of the Universal Church in communion with and under the guidance of the Vicar of Christ; of its mission for the integral service to the Chinese people or Chinese society of Hong Kong in its concrete situation open to the future; and of the particular relations with the Chinese Catholic Church on the mainland.

All this implies certain challenges for the Church which ought to arouse some genuine pastoral options. It must first of all reaffirm the proper Chinese and Catholic identity, in all its true components, as authentic local Chinese Christian Church. Necessary and needed, therefore, is a renewed commitment of unity within the local Church of Hong Kong, in order to be able to face the eventual

difficulties and exigencies of the near future with clarity of idea, firmness of character and courageous loyalty of ecclesial communion.

The Church in Hong Kong is a consoling reality, but it must acquire an ever deeper awareness of the missionary vocation and the missionary spirit, ready to give witness to the charity of Christ, announcing the Faith to the nearly 5 millions who do not yet know Jesus. And these same Catholic Schools, so greatly appreciated for their service in the field of education, must be the instruments not merely of scientific and human promotion, but also of evangelization.

The indigenization of personnel is also an urgent challenge. The promotion of native priests and religious is always the rule and the central objective of every local Church. And the 1997 date makes the realization of this pastoral priority even more urgent. Hong Kong, the unique meeting point of encounter and confrontation between East and West, on the cultural, socio-political, religious, etc. levels, and until now predominantly influenced by the West, must become more Chinese, without however losing the true values of universal, traditional and modern strength, of western culture open to the full promotion of man. Therefore, the Church must provide for the formation, in all areas, of priests, and in general also of the other pastoral agents, in order to be able to entrust to Chinese priests those posts of responsibility that had been filled by more educated and more experienced foreign missionaries. And these latter, on their part, must offer valid support and collaboration to Chinese priests.

No less urgent is inculturated evangelization or Inculturation, which calls for a more profound theological reflection, using as much as possible also Chinese religious values which are at the foundation of Chinese culture. Therefore, the education and the commitment of the clergy and the laity in this regard is to be encouraged.

It is also necessary not to lose sight of the increasing need and utility to make use of the Social Communications Media for the work of evangelization.

Also at the level of the structures, it appears to

many that it would be well to review the present organizations in order to make them more functional for the new pastoral exigencies and surroundings.

In the social field, the Church has worked with generous commitment for human promotion and assistance, with qualified service through her numerous works and institutions. But also here, the foreseen exigencies of the future situations will call for greater commitment for the building up of the society, with a spirit of initiative and of adaptation, re-examining the life style and the priorities of today.

As the Pope noted, the geographic position and the ethnic composition of the population places the Church of Hong Kong in position of particular privilege and responsibility toward the Church on the Chinese mainland. The local Church of Hong Kong has the task of giving a witness of fraternal solicitude for the Church that is in continental China; she must give a witness of the clear example of fidelity to the Apostolic See, of unity and communion in the Faith, avoiding everything that might generate confusion among Catholics. It appertains to the particular Church of Hong Kong, therefore, to have a renewed commitment of relation and of dialogue with the Church in Continental China, always in harmony with the directives of the Apostolic See.

Notwithstanding the uncertainties of the future and the challenges noted above, the Church in Hong Kong proceeds with growing maturity and a spirit of initiative that allows it to look hopefully and with optimism to the future.

One notices in this local Church a new awareness of its important role in society, an awareness of the need for renewal and updating of the Church itself, and of its own apostolic commitment and commitment for human promotion.

Signs of hope attesting to this are:

- The Renewal Seminar for the



Catholic community, with the motto, "The Church in Hong Kong, a Community of Faith Today". At this seminar, held from February 12 to March 3, 1984, and continued in 1985, certain urgent options were identified, such as a more profound formation of the clergy and of the laity, greater communication between clergy and faithful in order to achieve closer relationship and to become a genuinely mature Church, in fidelity of service to all, and indigenous.

- The two documents of Mons. Wu, Bishop of Hong Kong, following the Anglo-Chinese Declaration, in order to reaffirm the expectations of the Church in Hong Kong, insisting on the inalienable rights of religious freedom.

- The growing participation of religious and of the laity in retreats and spiritual exercises, in days of reflection and other initiatives of pastoral aggiornamento.

- The growing number of Christians ready to make sacrifices for the purpose of deepening their faith and for the work of evangelization. Each year, more than 150 persons of all categories receive the diploma at the end of the catechetical formation course - two-year long evening courses - at the Diocesan Catechetical Centre; and another 500 to 600 persons participate in evening theological courses of the "Extra-mural Studies Programme".

- The thirst for truth that is noticeable among the people. The number of adult catechumens has almost doubled. And it is particularly significant that the recent converts enter the Church in a moment of uncertainty, considering the peculiar situation of the tensions and the concerns for the future of the territory.

- The gradual participation of the Laity in the various pastoral ministries of the parishes, as expression of apostolic commitment.

- The growing sense of solidarity with the poor and with those who suffer because of injustice, of violence, and of other causes.

- Growth in the interest for parish life and parish activities, with commitments for human promotion, the study of

the Bible and social initiatives. Small communities are also springing up, animated by Christian dynamism. Likewise, interest and commitment for a coordinated pastoral ministry is growing.

- Statistics of the preceding year show that there are 24 Major Seminarians in the Seminary of Hong Kong (11 in theology, 9 in philosophy, and 4 in the orientation course); 18 of them belong to the Diocese of Hong Kong (5 belong to the Diocese of Macau - 3 in theology and 2 in philosophy - and 1 belongs to the Institute of the Missionaries of Guadalupe).

Foreign missionaries holding leadership positions in diocesan organizations are gradually being replaced by local clergy. And in the coming years, before 1997, the Diocese intends to prepare the necessary personnel for the pastoral leadership in the various areas. It has already sent priests to foreign countries to study for specialization in social communications, social action, liturgy, biblical exegesis, journalism, pastoral and moral theology, philosophy, sacred music, etc.

At the end of 1984, in addition to the Diocesan seminarians, there were in Hong Kong: 12 seminarians for religious priesthood, 4 novices (masculine) and 36 women novices, 8 aspirants to religious life (masculine) and 22 aspirants to the sisterhood.

The Diocesan Catholic Centre is an important ecclesial complex, and includes: The Catholic Truth Society, Editorial Offices of "Kung Kao Po" and of the "Sunday Examiner"; Chinese and English Publication Department; Books and Religious Articles and Supplies. Other important Centres are: The Catechetical Centre and the Audio-visual Centre.

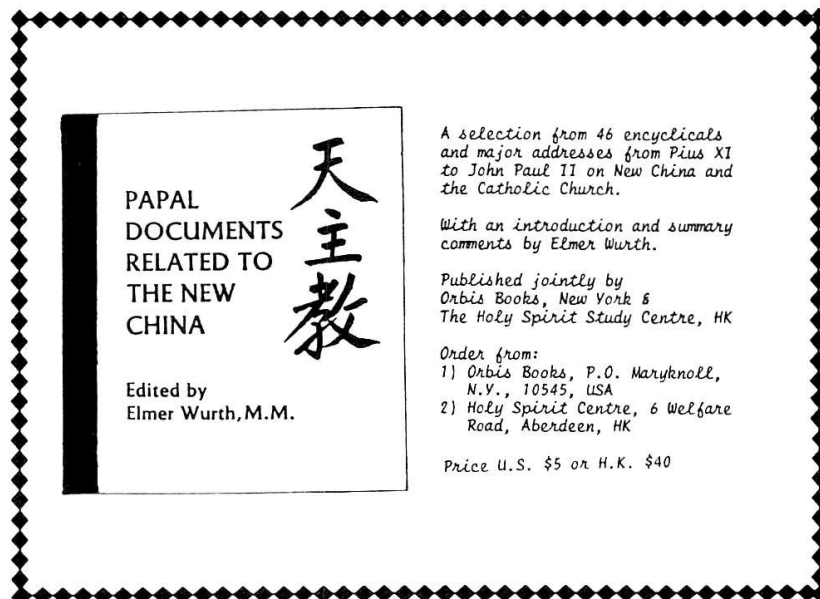
The Church in Hong Kong fosters with particular commitment the ecumenical apostolate and dialogue. It maintains good relations with Protestants in general, particularly with Anglicans: common prayers, exchange of preachers during Unity Week, mutual consultation on social and moral materials, common declarations, two or three times annually on questions concerning social, ethical problems or problems

of social justice, etc.; and joint chaplaincy with the Anglicans for the Apostolate of the Sea, this, for the past 16 years with optimum results.

Through the Commission for non-Christian Religions, the Church also maintains good relations with the leaders of the principal non-Christian religions, in particular with the Buddhists, Taoists, Muslims and Confucianists.

In this moment of historic responsibility and possibility for the Church in Hong Kong, the universal Church must not only be a necessary point of reference for that local Church, but also a sign and witness of solidarity, of esteem and encouragement for it, so that it may be able to fulfill the grand mission that awaits it.

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