

A REFLECTION ON SOCIETY AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

IN HONG KONG — 1950s to 1980s

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(This is a slightly amended text of a speech given to missionaries in a Catholic Institute For Religion and Society-organized seminar entitled 1987-1997: Challenge to Missioners in Hong Kong.)

Pope Paul VI, in addressing a group of Brazilian bishops in the 1960s, said: "You live in a rapidly changing society. The methods you employ in pastoral ministry must cope with the changing times".

Hong Kong society has undergone rapid change over the past forty years. During these years, the Church has, in varying degrees, responded to the challenges of the different times. Hong Kong is now going through a fundamental change in political structure. It is my view that the church should begin fundamental changes in both her vision and structure in order to prepare herself for a more vigorous and effective mission in and after 1997.

My task is to outline the different stages of development* of the society of Hong Kong over the past thirty five years and the corresponding response of the Catholic Church. Then I will focus on the developments surrounding 1997 and the challenge it is posing to the Catholic Church. Although not directly talking on the role of the missionary, I hope it will still be useful for your reflection. Due to limitation of time, I can only do this in a very brief and perhaps telex manner.

* I am indebted to Joe Holland and Peter Henriot for the basic conceptual framework that is used in this presentation. For a more detail treatment of the framework read their co-authored publication *Social Analysis - Linking Faith and Justice*, 1983, Center of Concern, Washington.

Hong Kong has always been living under two major political influences since the British take-over. On the one hand, it is a British colony, dominated by and structured around British colonial officials. On the other hand, it lives under the shadow of China. The time has come that it will soon be mainly influenced by developments in China.

Stage I: Refugees (Late 1940s - early 1950s)

This period starts with 1949 and lasts through most of the 1950s. Tens of thousands of refugees fled from Mainland China and squatted on the hillsides in different parts of Hong Kong. The pre-war population in 1941 was 1.6 million. In 1945 the population dropped drastically to 600 thousand. It increased to two million in 1951. By 1956 it was 2.6 million.

Not only did the government consider the place a borrowed place, and its rule over the colony transient, the population too was considered to be transient. They were expected to stay only for a short period, and once the Mainland was recovered from the communists, they would return. There was no plan for any long-term development.

The major concern during this period was survival. Housing, medical, education, and food were all problems to be solved. Voluntary agencies were the main agents in organizing and dispensing food and aid.

Economic life in the Colony suffered serious setbacks as the volume of trade was drastically reduced. In 1950, at the outbreak of the Korean War, the trade volume was about one-third of that of the previous year. Life was severe. The unemployment rate during this year was estimated at 34%.

Culturally, the emphasis was on freedom - freedom from communist rule. The fact that people voted with their feet, left their homes and their own country, and came to seek a safe haven in a British colony, was itself a telling fact.

The political scene was dominated by the struggle between the pro-KMT and the pro-Communist elements. This was an extension of the political struggle in the mainland, as evident in the riots of the 1950s. There was no significant political development related to people's participation in local politics.

STAGES OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND CHURCH RESPONSE

	Late 1940s to Early 1950s REFUGEES	1950s to 1960s ECONOMIC	1970s SOCIAL	1980s POLITICAL
ECONOMIC	SURVIVAL	GROWTH	DISTRIBUTION	MAINTAIN PROSPERITY
POLITICAL	LAISSEZ -FAIRE		BUREAUCRATIC ABSORPTION	1997 REPRESENTATIVE GOVT.
	EXTENSION OF CONTINENTAL POLITICS		PRESSURE GROUPS	POLITICAL GROUPS
CULTURAL	FREEDOM FROM COMMUNISM (COLONY)	FREEDOM FROM MISERY	FREE TO ENJOY	FREEDOM FROM COMMUNISM (ONE COUNTRY, TWO SYSTEMS)
CHURCH RESPONSE				
FAITH	CHARITY	FREEDOM	JUSTICE	HOPE
VEHICLE	RELIEF	SCHOOLS WELFARE INST.	DIOCESAN & PARISH ASSOC.	BCC
ALLY	WESTERN GOVTS	H.K. GOVT	MIDDLE CLASS	POOR
STAFF	MISSIONERS		DIOCESAN CLERGY	LAITY
SPIRITUALITY	LEGALISTIC/	DEVOTIONAL	LITURGICAL	CHARISMATIC

PASTORAL RESPONSE

Many church personnel also came to Hong Kong from the mainland along with the throngs escaping from communist rule. The manifestation of faith at this period was charity. The major task was dispensing aid. The St. Vincent De Paul Society was one of the most important parish associations in those days.

The church also suffered persecution in mainland China. It was not accidental that her major partners were governments and churches of western countries which generously sent in donations to meet the needs of the refugees for food, clothing, and medicine.

During this period, the major staff of the church were missionaries and members of religious congregations. Chinese and local clergy were few and far between.

Stage II: Economic Development (1950s - 1960s)

Already in the mid and late fifties, people began to see that the communist regime was there to stay, and that there was little chance to return to a China of the old days. Many decided to make Hong Kong their home, and many others left for Taiwan.

The capital, machinery, and expertise that were brought mainly from Shanghai helped to establish the beginnings of industrial development in Hong Kong. Labour was cheap and plentiful. Post-war economic growth in the West provided ready markets. All these factors came together to create the "Miracle of Hong Kong". In 1960, already 70% of total exports were local products, mainly textiles. In 1971 about half of the employment opportunities were provided for by the manufacturing sector.

Generally, people felt there was plenty of opportunity, and the standard of living was improving. Social mobility was high. In 1966, the bottom 60% shared 25.4% of the total income. In 1967 the bottom 60% shared 29.5% of the total income. With industrial development and increased employment, the majority of the people had a share in the expanding economy.



The task of the decade was economic growth. Culturally, the emphasis was freedom, freedom from want and misery, and freedom to climb up the social ladder.

There was a more stable population as more and more people were born in Hong Kong. In 1961, the percentage of population born in Hong Kong was 47.7. In 1966 the percentage was 53.8.

There was still very little local politics. The leftist press was vocal and critical of government policies. But they were largely ignored by the people who still harboured acute fear of communism. Many grievances were channelled to Elsie Elliott (Mrs. Elsie Tu) who became the popular ombudsman of the decade.

The outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in China, and the corresponding outbreak of riots in Hong Kong in 1967, reminded people that China was really at the doorstep, and the People's Liberation Army could march in once the orders were given. The flight of people, and capital, in lieu of the imminent threat of a Chinese take-over, set the scene for profound shifts in preparing for the social, economic and political developments of the 1970s.

PASTORAL RESPONSE

Church social services that were begun as temporary measures to respond to an urgent situation, soon developed into well-organized institutions in the 1960s. These include our Caritas social welfare centres, our schools and many other institutions. They soon became an integral part of the social and cultural life of Hong Kong. They are linked closely to the government through the subsidies they regularly receive.

The faith emphasis was still on charity, but delivered now through bigger institutions. In line with the cultural emphasis on freedom from misery, the church provided the social ladder - her educational institutions - through which the people climbed up to a new and higher status in life, freed from want and misery. Currently, many of the leaders in our society were trained in our christian schools. And to assist those who fell from the ladder and got hurt, the Church provided not only hospitals, but also social welfare institutions for various forms of first-aid services.

There were many converts who joined the Church during the fifties and sixties. But their faith formation was weak.

Our first Chinese bishop was Rev. Francis Hsu, who took over as Bishop of Hong Kong in 1969. Most of the leadership positions in the diocese at this time were still occupied by missionaries.

Stage III: Social Development (1970s)

The focus of economic development during this period shifted from industry to banking, property development and service sectors, whose proportion of the gross domestic product has grown from 17.5% in 1971 to 26% in 1981. This largely explains the growth of a middle class in the colony. On the other hand, the proportion occupied in industrial output during the same period diminished from 28.1 to 24%.



Already during this period, local industry was facing stiff competition from other Asian export-oriented economies, which had the assistance of their governments in investing in related research and development. Decline in the world economy and consequent trade protectionism gave cause for greater concern. It is significant to note that in 1981, the manufacturing sector provided employment for more than 41% of the economically active population, while the banking and service sectors, though contributing a higher percentage of domestic product, provided only 4.7% of the employment opportunities.

At the beginning of the seventies, the government gradually shed the authoritarian model of governing, and projected an image of a more open government led by capable and efficient bureaucrats and ruling by "consultation and consensus". Social and economic elites were absorbed into the bureaucracy in various committees to enhance legitimacy and acceptance by the populace.

There was, however, no lack of grievances. Instead of approaching urban councillors, people now found other channels to voice their complaints. Pressure groups, representing the interests of the public on issues of housing, education and labour, brought a small dose of confrontation into the hitherto stagnant political waters. The

government, having learned a lesson from the previous riots, did not attempt to suppress the groups, but took rather the line of management. It tolerated the activities of the pressure groups, seeing them as a way through which people with a grievance could let off steam. The 1979 report by the Standing Committee on Pressure Groups described them as "a safety valve" in a city without political parties and popular elections.

It was the area of social development that marked the distinct feature of this period. Economically this was reflected in the focus on distribution as contrasted to the focus on growth in the previous period. The challenge was to lessen the widening gap between the rich and the poor. The five major types of services generally grouped under 'social services' included: education, public housing, medical and health care, social welfare, and labour services. Since the late 1960s and well into the seventies and eighties, the expenditures of the government on social services amounted to and remained at around 42 per cent of total government expenditures, and less than ten percent of the GDP of the year. In some western countries the amount spent on social services comes up to about 25% of the GDP. The increase in money terms over the past years was, however, still very substantial, even taking into account the increase in prices. In 1974-5 the amount spent on social services was \$2.7 billion. In 1984-5 this was \$20 billion.

Expansion in the social services started mainly with the ten-year programs of Governor Murray McLehose, assisted by a buoyant economy and higher land prices during the period. In concrete terms, the Government has now succeeded in providing public housing for 45 per cent of the population, many of whom now live in new towns, nine years' free education for children, basic medical consultation and treatment for the sick, a public assistance scheme, and ordinances that ensure sick leave, vacation leave, and maternity leave to employees, and a certain amount of compensation and care to injured employees.

PASTORAL RESPONSE

The Diocesan Convention convened by Bishop Hsu in the late 1960s was an attempt to respond to the call of Vatican II and to prepare the church to face the challenges of the 1970s. With the sudden death of Bishop Hsu, the momentum gradually faded out. But the liturgical renewal and various formation programs for the clergy, sisters and laity, had already brought in a breath of fresh air. New structures were experimented with at the parish level, including parish councils, and in some parishes other associations were allowed a more active role. Obviously the structural reforms didn't go far enough. Many who were

trained in the new theology of Vatican II were disillusioned by a church structure that did not give enough room for the living out of that theology.

Along with government expansion in social services, the church also became more and more linked to government through its aids and subsidies. Our educational and welfare institutions, though remaining under church control, became nevertheless more and more absorbed into the bureaucracies of the Education and Social Welfare Department.

With the movement of people towards satellite towns and the new towns, and the unavailability of land for church building owing to high prices, pastoral ministry became dependent on social services. Mass Centres, even parishes, were tied up to school and/or social welfare buildings. This strategy was workable with a government which pursues a policy of positive non-intervention. Whether it will work under the same government with a different policy, or under a different government, is a question still to be answered.

In the area of local church development, more and more leadership positions in the Diocese began to gradually fall on the shoulders of local clergy.

As the society becomes more organized, literate and professionalized, the kind of services for which people formerly approached clergy and religious are now sought from professionals and relevant governmental departments. This includes counselling, financial and welfare assistance, job seeking etc. Government departments are also setting and enforcing the application of universal criteria in judging the suitability of recipients for services. A survey was carried out in 1984 by a group of seminarians. Most of the priests interviewed said less and less people approached them to get their children into school, and the success rate is also lower each year.

The universal church has, over the years, with *Populorum Progressio* in 1967, the 1971 Synod of Bishops issuing a statement on Justice in the World, and the various statements made by Paul VI, emphasized justice and development. Locally, justice issues have also been raised in society, related to social conflicts arising out of eviction and redevelopment. The challenge of faith at the time seemed to be quite clear. However, except for small scattered attempts of foreign missionaries and several marginal groups in the church, there was very little effort by the church as a whole to respond to these justice issues. Many of the converts in the 1950s have now moved up into the

ranks of the middle class, and do not share the plight of the new urban poor. There was little or no pressure from within the church to address the issue of justice. The challenge remained unanswered.

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT (1980s)

The major and most significant development in the 1980s has been in the area of politics. In 1979, after Governor McLehose came back from his visit to Beijing, moves were made to prepare for the final withdrawal of the British from the colony. The Nationality Act, and the development of a more representative government were but two of the more important steps.

The visit of Margaret Thatcher to Beijing in 1982 and the subsequent negotiations which led to the signing of the Draft Agreement on 26 September, 1984, formally marked the beginning of the transition of Hong Kong from being a British colony to becoming a Special Administrative Region of the socialist People's Republic of China.

The historical era, starting with the Treaty of Nanking after the Opium War, is now declared terminated. Hong Kong will be returned to Chinese sovereignty on July 1, 1997. Thus it can be said that the international problem of unequal treaties from a previous historical situation is now settled. But the political problem of sorting out the transition has only just begun.

From now on, under the 'One Country, two Systems' concept, and here I stress the first part of 'One Country', the destiny of Hong Kong will be tied very closely to the destiny of China. Even for our own good and direct self-interest, we have to learn more about China, and to be concerned about what is happening in the drafting of the Basic law.

I see two important emerging political developments. Firstly, the Government has begun to introduce an elective element at various levels, including the District Boards, Urban and Regional Councils and the Legislative Council. The policy of government by consultation and bureaucratic absorption of elites has been deemed insufficient during this new period. Secondly, developments at the grassroots level also have stepped up. The pressure groups of the 1970s focusing on sectoral interests are considered no longer adequate to cope with the more global political issues of the day. Political groups have been organized. They comment on political developments, and field candidates for the District and Urban Council elections. Society at different levels is becoming more and more politicized.

Economically, the major concern is to maintain stability and keep prosperity. Local capital tends to move out with investment diversification and with increased emigration. Cheung Kong Holdings issuing B shares, allegedly covering an attempt to control more with less capital, is a case in point. By just controlling two percent of the capital, Mr. Lee Ka-shing can control the whole company. This will enable him to deal more flexibly with his funds. With the flight of local capital, Chinese capital is entering Hong Kong more and more, through the banks, through investments in property development, airlines, etc.

Falling reinvestments in machinery and modern technology, along with protectionism, will be serious concerns in our industries. On the other hand, trading activities have increased. Our increasing economic links with China has provided a source of development. The value of our re-exports was 89% of the total exports in 1950. In 1960 this was only 27%. Since the late seventies re-exports began to gradually regain an important position in external trade. In 1984 the value of re-exports amounted to 38% of our total exports, with China once again becoming our biggest trading partner.



Whereas in the previous stage, the emphasis was freedom, the slogan of the day is stability and prosperity. There is however a pervading fear. Stability and prosperity has so far been built on a system attached to London. Will a government attached to Beijing succeed in continuing to maintain a stable and prosperous city? What should one do? 1. Focus on economic developments, and continue to make HK an effective source of revenue and foreign exchange for China, and keep Beijing happy (as advocated by Mr. Law Tak Shing)? or 2. Fight for a directly elected democratic government that can stand up to Beijing, and protect basic freedom and human rights in HK (as advocated by Mr. Martin Lee)? or 3. Emigrate, if you have the means, qualifications and the connections?

PASTORAL RESPONSE

I think we are only beginning to, and have still not yet fully understood the full significance of the political changes that are taking place, mainly because we have been brought up totally ignorant in political matters, and because we have for too long ignored China as an important and imminent reality to be reckoned with.

I would like to make two points here :

1. The fact that our HK church has been able to develop the way it has over the past years is due to several factors. One of these is her relationship with the HK government. The kind of church-state relationship that has existed provided a framework for church development, for its expansion in educational and social welfare enterprises, and for her being able to link up her pastoral ministries with such enterprises.

Now with 1997 in view , the fundamental nature of the HK government will change. It will no longer be accountable to a U.K. government that is basically sympathetic to and supportive of Christianity. It will be directly responsible to the Central Chinese government in Beijing, which is atheistic, socialist, and which harbours an historical suspicion of Christianity.

With the British colonial government, the Church is considered somewhat a partner, an institution that can be used as an extension of government control and services. With the new government, this partner relationship may change.

2. This directly follows from the first point. We may have to re-examine some existing areas of church life that have a direct relationship to government links. These include:

- visas for missionaries
- aids and subsidies to schools and welfare institutions
- curriculum and activities of the institutions mentioned above
- pastoral activities linked to the above-mentioned institutions, including mass centres, christian assemblies, religious instructions, and administering sacraments.

The above considerations are made in view of the political changes that may take place. In facing the future, we should also look at the internal experiences of the universal church as well as that of the

local church, and the new direction and model of Christian community that is in the process of gestation. In my own view recent political changes in Hong Kong have made the actualization of this new direction more relevant and urgent. From my own reading, this new model of the church will have the following characteristics:

A. As church, she has a commitment to Hong Kong, and to the people here. She stays with the people, and accompanies them as they take this journey towards the future. Over the years, she has developed with the people. She will not take what she has gathered from the society here and move off to another country. The bond with the people becomes ever more intimate and strong in face of difficulties ahead.

B. Unlike previous stages, the manifestation of faith during this period is hope. The basis of hope is not just the promise of the Chinese leadership for maintaining the capitalist system for another fifty years after 1997, not just the organization of the people for a more democratic structure, nor the satisfactory wording of the Basic Law drafts. Hope rests centrally on her belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. By journeying with the people, and unfailingly remembering the Kingdom, she becomes for them a tangible sign of hope.

C. The basic structure of the church will not be the parish, but small christian communities (in communion with the parish and the diocese) - communities in which the laity, along with the clergy, have a way of owning and becoming the church, of living the christian life not as isolated individuals, but as a people of God.

D. The leadership of the communities will be centred on the laity, in cooperation with the clergy. The laity will assume responsible roles in ministry, liturgy, and christian formation.

E. The laity will be the principal agents of mission. The family, place of work, society and politics will be declared mission territories, in which our church, through the living witness of the laity, will be extending her frontiers.

F. The church's principal ally will not be the government, but the people, particularly the poor and the weak. She divorces her evangelization efforts from the dominant power structures. She makes allies with, and trusts the resources of the ordinary people.

G. The spirituality of the church will be charismatic, small group oriented and biblical. The spirit will be the guiding force. Christian communities, while remaining in communion with one another, will respond in a pluralistic manner to the actual needs as experienced, each within a concrete situation, according to its strengths and resources.

These are some of the major elements of a model of the church still to be realized. In the gestation period of this new church, the clergy and religious have a very important role to play, at this time, when we are still very much at the starting point. In order to build a new dynamic forward-looking church centred on the laity and christian communities, there is a need to devise a new pastoral strategy.

A. We have to re-examine our priorities and investment strategies. The principal area of investment should be formation, particularly formation of lay leaders.

B. Formation should be holistic, integrating the spiritual and theological, personal and social, conceptual and experiential dimensions. Particular emphasis will be given to christian social responsibility and community building.

C. New structures will be created to allow the re-appropriation of the church by the majority of the laity. Small communities should be established, led by lay leaders. The permanent diaconate, lay ministries, and family liturgies should all be seriously studied and formally inaugurated in the life of the church.

All this calls for a profound shift from our present strategy of heavy undertakings in educational and welfare institutions. I am not asking that these undertakings should be abandoned. In view of our new theological thinking, and in view of what is happening related to 1997, I am asking for a re-examination of our existing strategies and the exploration of a new strategy which will help us face the future more confidently. I also believe that if we are to be consistent with our christian faith, in adopting a new strategy, we will also have to be ready to pay a price.