

II. LOCAL CHURCH



by Anthony Chang

The Church in transitional Hong Kong certainly feels the undercurrent movement though not necessarily fully conscious of all the implications. The Church is being affected by the flux and flow and will continue to be influenced by events and the future environment. In her turn she can certainly make her contribution towards the building up of a better Hong Kong. What I share below are a few points of personal reflection which I hope will stimulate further thinking and discussion on the topic.

LOCAL CHURCH IN THE CHINA CONTEXT

With the coming of 1997, Hong Kong will be returned to China, fully becoming a part of China. The reactions of the people of Hong Kong are varied with inclinations to reject, accept or evade. For some it would be a disastrous event, for others it would bring a greater opportunity to serve their mother country and people. If we look at the situation positively, it has, in fact, given rise to a greater consciousness of China - her life and culture, and of being one nation and people. Definitely, it would deepen a sense of peoplehood in its better sense.

Church members in Hong Kong are reacting to the situation in the same way as Hong Kong people at large and with the same variety. There are no clear and strong indication of what the future plan of the local Church is except for some official indications that the Church will not be leaving Hong Kong and will stay to serve. Nevertheless, this is already a significant decision which has shown the local Church's commitment towards her people. In fact, it is a great occasion for the Hong Kong Church to become her real self, taking the opportunity to

awaken or deepen her consciousness of being one with the people of Hong Kong and the whole Chinese people. the sense of peoplehood, the better side of nationalism and patriotism, is essential to the Hong Kong Church in her mission.

The meaning of salvation in the present-day sense is not strictly for the Church alone but for the whole world. Therefore, the Hong Kong Church should not confine herself to her members alone, but she has to broaden her vision to include all Hong Kong people and, as well as, all the people of China. A concern for salvation for all is a concern that the Chinese people will have lives to live, overcoming obstacles to integral development of each and all. The Hong Kong Church needs to be willing to play a role to serve Hong Kong and China while having full respect for the self-governing of the Catholic Church in mainland China. The Hong Kong Church needs to grope along to see what she can contribute to the creation of the future that will be to the good of the individual, the community, the society and the nation as a whole, and how, with the nation, to contribute to the betterment of the world. In this sense, the Hong Kong Church needs to work out how and what salvation and the kingdom of God would mean and what it would entail in the present and foreseeable future.

FORMATION OF THE LAITY

This positive approach to the future and willingness to be involved and participate in the creating of the future would exclude emigration. The Church would maintain full respect for Church members who emigrate to other countries but would not encourage it, as God's call to the present Hong Kong Church is not such.

In its task and mission, the Church must give full attention to the urgent need of training and involving the laity in the Church structure. The Church has to be conscious of the laity as the main force in the task and mission of the local church in local society.

The Church must then examine whether Church members care for local society and people, what portion lack such a concern and what can be done about it. What can Church leaders do and say and what witnessing and examples do Church leaders show in this regard?

INDIGENIZATION -- ORIENTATION TO OWN PEOPLE AND COUNTRY

1997 also hastens and brings about a decolonization for Hong Kong. This decolonization includes a localization of top level personnel in

the government and the translation and use of Chinese in Hong Kong laws and courts. Decolonization is a re-orientation to our own people and country.

The Church needs to be actively involved and play a more positive role in the change-over, at least so as to shake off some of its own "foreignness". This is a good occasion for the Church to consider the full implementation of indigenization in Church theology as well as liturgies and Church lives so as to make the Church more relevant to the Hong Kong local society.

Indigenization applies also to the field of Catholic education of the young students. It should emphasize the need for a more integral development of the students, and a new curriculum that is more related to society and life. It should also emphasize the use of Chinese as the medium of instruction in schools while maintaining a bilingualism essential to this cosmopolitan city. Chinese culture and history need to be strengthened while at the same time cross cultural exchanges should be maintained.

CAPITALIST VALUES, SOCIALIST VALUES, CHRISTIAN VALUES

The Church is definitely concerned with values and there is a need for a study of the divergences and similarities of capitalist values and socialist values. The Church would also need to be aware of the values she is living out and giving witness to in her life, structures and symbols. She needs to be aware whether she is passively taking on the values endorsed by the Hong Kong society and whether they accord with the gospel values of Christ. How much are Church leaders or members affected by materialistic and spiritual values? What should be done in such a situation? How is the Church to accept influence from society and how may the Church be able to be an influence on society and its values? How concrete can the Church be and how willing is she to be concrete? How can the Church raise her awareness, and can the Church maintain an impetus of constant evaluation so as to be ever flexible and effectively relevant?

SERVANT CHURCH

One of the most basic and fundamental of Christian values is Christ's "Kenosis" -- his self-humiliation of being incarnated into the world. The Church has to further develop the "Servant Church" model. This servant is not to be servile but one that works for the promotion of humanity and against dehumanization, not just offering services but

cooperative service for change, not just being servile but being prophetic.

LOCAL CHURCH AND SELF-GOVERNING

The struggle for democracy is becoming more and more evident in the present political consultation regarding the post 1997 Basic Law. A large portion of the people opt for democracy with universal suffrage and with checks and balances as the best model of the future political system and government of Hong Kong. Others suggest an electoral college style of choosing future legislators and governors. For the implementation of this future structure, some suggest immediate democracy and universal suffrage while others suggest a step-by-step process of arriving at universal suffrage.

With regard to this political scene, the Church needs to query herself on what orientation she will have and at what level she will work. On the other hand the Church needs to reflect also on how she would be affected. History has shown that models of the Church have evolved along with changes in society. As a matter of fact, the present Church system is formed in imitation of a social system of a past age and therefore can be changed according to pastoral needs. Reflecting on the present environmental changes and orientation, the Church needs to ask herself questions such as these:

Is it possible to have democracy in the Church? To what extent?

What does self-governing mean in the Church?

What is the meaning of the local Bishop in the local Church?

Is the Bishop being one with the Church community? Being within it and not above it?

What would this have to offer to society as a witness and model?

Relationship with other local Churches is no more to be that between mother-daughter Churches but that among sister Churches, thereby manifesting more clearly equality among peoples and Churches as well as more clearly and effectively respecting and encouraging the richness of diversity. This would include the Roman local Church in its essence. The latter's role as the local Church where the Pope resides does not detract from it the essence of being a local Church among world-wide local Churches.

This fraternal relationship between Churches pin-points the importance of the "College of Bishops". Thus, greater emphasis and deeper and broader development of the meaning of the College of Bishops and that bishops are not delegates or subordinates of the Pope would be helpful to the theology of the local church and the development of more mature and adult local Churches both in their demeanour and witness. Article 17 of the Constitution of the Church on the local diocesan bishop must then be given more prominence and further development. "Bishops govern the particular Churches entrusted to them as the vicars and ambassadors of Christ. The pastoral office or the habitual and daily care of their sheep is entrusted to them completely. Nor are they to be regarded as the vicars of the Roman Pontiff, for they exercise an authority which is proper to them, and are quite correctly called 'prelates', heads of the people whom they govern." (Lumen Gentium No. 27)

Relationship with the Pope: How can it be manifested that the Pope is one with the world-wide Church community, stands within it and not above it while being the spiritual leader and the symbol and sign of unity or communion among the world-wide local Churches?

The Universal Church is made up of local Churches in communion with one another and the Pope is to be a sign of this union in faith and love.

The local Church has the full essence of 'Church' in itself and theologically is not required to be an arm of any institution. The Church is not like a multinational corporation with a central headquarters in another locality. This is to say that the local Church is not a branch of a 'central church' but is a 'full church' in communion with other 'full churches.'

The above understanding has a key role to play in the future ecclesiological resolution of relations between the Pope and the Catholic Church in mainland China.