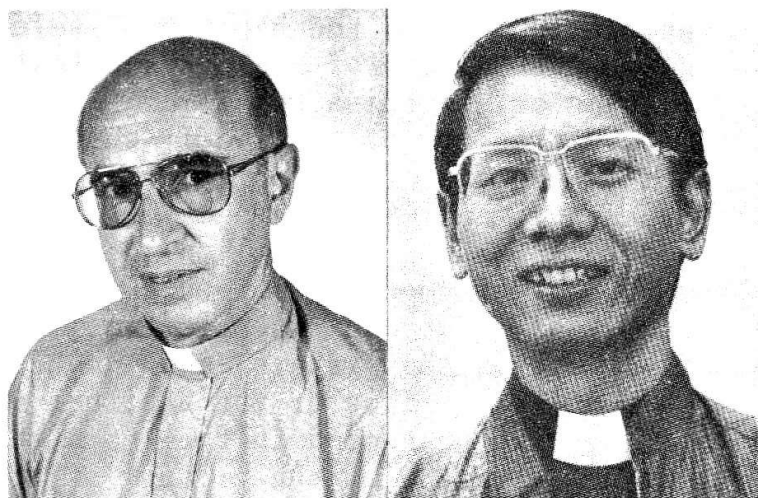


### III. MINISTRY



by John Cioppa & Peter Lo

In the past 150 years, but especially in the last 40 years, Hong Kong has achieved phenomenal economic growth, developing a social environment and common lifestyle greatly appreciated by its inhabitants and admired by its neighbors. During that time the church too has evolved and struggled to adjust not only to the changing environment of Hong Kong, but also to the spirit of Vatican II. The church in Hong Kong today enjoys a great deal of freedom and autonomy. Direct interference by the government in church affairs is minimal, yet there is a comfortable modus vivendi which has developed over the years through mutual relationships, associations and agreements.

Since Vatican II, the church has made several attempts to implement the recommendations of the Council, meeting with varying degrees of success. In many ways, church development in Hong Kong is not inhibited by its environment, but suffers rather from limited personnel overburdened by institutional responsibilities and weighed down by traditional structures and attitudes.

Many of the theological shifts suggested by Vatican II, if fully implemented, would assist Hong Kong greatly as it makes its transition into the new post-1997 era, e.g. greater lay participation, declericalized institutions, small vital christian communities, a strong local church, greater involvement in society, greater indigenization of theology, liturgy and church life, an emphasis on self-support, self-governance and self-propagation.

In the run up to 1997, in the area of ministry, the church faces two challenges: one can be seen as positive, the other as negative. On the positive side, Hong Kong will shed the shackles of colonialism and be reintegrated with China, reunited with its own people and come closer to its own cultural and traditional background. This we can call the Sinicization of Hong Kong and the question is how to capitalize on this situation to develop a truly local Chinese church linked to the church in China and the entire universal church.

On the negative side, the Hong Kong Church's current blessings could well be a source of future anxiety. The Hong Kong church presently has an independence and freedom to grow and develop as it sees fit. Over the years the Church has achieved a respectable status in society and a comfortable liaison with local government structures. The question here is how to preserve those values. This is seen as negative, since many fear that these privileges will be limited or lost completely and feel that the withdrawal of such privileges could cause severe trauma.

Probably the basic question is whether present Church structures are flexible enough and the understanding and depth of faith of Christians is strong enough to be able to accept and respond positively and creatively to the demands of a changing environment which at times will be affirmative, but at other times might be hostile.

#### ON THE POSITIVE SIDE

There is no question that over the years Hong Kong's cultural environment has been greatly influenced by Western values. Perhaps it is moving closer to an international culture, but history will have to be judge of that. In any case the Chinese people of Hong Kong have suffered an estrangement from their cultural roots, religious expression and family values as well as from their native traditions and customs. Ethnically Chinese, geographically part of China and economically tied to China, after 1997, Hong Kong will be able to shed its schizophrenic lifestyle and stand up as part of its native country, albeit as a special administrative region. As part of the process, the church will be challenged to develop a more indigenized theology, a more localized liturgy and a life more integrated in Chinese society. It will be challenged and offered an opportunity to relate in a significant way with the local Catholic church in China as well a with the universal church around the world.

## ON THE NEGATIVE SIDE

A general feeling is that there will be little change in the beginning. However, in time there will be more and more interference by local authorities. Also the presumption is that sooner or later, as in all socialist countries, the government will exercise greater and greater control over institutions, especially over schools and colleges. As mentioned above, the church in Hong Kong is presently in a very favorable position. The fear is that many of the positive elements of our present situation will be threatened, especially our close, and in most cases amicable, relationships with the local government. Some questions and issues which arise are:

### Ministry at the parish level:

Will present structures be allowed to continue as they are?

Will the church members be as free to meet, to evangelize, to criticize, to be a conscience in society, such as regarding the abortion issue?

Will people fear to be associated with the church remembering the experiences of those on the mainland?

Will more people join the church for a sense of belonging to a group which can meet freely and can speak out against abuses in the government, as in South Korea?

Will public religious gatherings be banned, for example, the annual Christ the King celebration?

Will evangelization be limited to church properties?

Will an agency/agencies be set up to monitor religious activities?

Will Catholics themselves, sensing a new nationalism, set up a Patriotic Association of their own, even if the government does not?

Will priests be occupied and thereby controlled through mandatory attendance at government meetings?

Will infant baptisms be allowed?

Will Catholics be allowed to be married in the Church?

Social Institutions:

Will present structures be allowed to continue as they are?

Will the government continue to support financially Catholic schools, hospitals and other subsidized social institutions?

Will the use of government properties, such as church sponsored schools, for pastoral purposes be allowed to continue?

Will religion be allowed to remain as part of the curriculum in Catholic schools?

Will there be freedom of religion in schools allowing for prayer in the classrooms and other religious activities?

Financial Self-support

Will subsidies to church institutions be reduced or withdrawn completely?

Will taxes, rents and rates on properties be raised to a point which makes retaining church properties impossible?

Will there be restrictions placed on the local church regarding income producing properties or investments?

Status of Missionaries

Will foreign missionaries be allowed to remain?

Will visas be more difficult to obtain?

Will the work of missionaries be limited to pastoral work and confined to church properties?

In conclusion, let it be mentioned again that the church in Hong Kong can best respond to the above issues, not by taking a whole new direction and developing new strategies, but rather by implementing more fully the theology and suggestions of Vatican II.