

does in many ways manifest what the Holy Father said to the Chinese at Manila, "a good Christian can be a good citizen" (Sunday Examiner 28 February, 1981) can be put into practice, still when the Catholics encounter social problems such as family planning, how are they expected to act? Are they expected to become good Christians by following the Church's teaching on contraception or are they expected to become good citizens by following the state regulation regarding birth control?

In general, China has become more sophisticated in its approach, especially in many foreign and domestic issues. Facts have revealed that being too arbitrary in its approach to the people of Hong Kong will only accelerate the brain drain. We have reason to anticipate that China will not apply any prompt measures like those in the mainland in the 50's to aggravate the state and church conflict, but it is not impossible that gradual and subtle pressure will be applied to the Hong Kong Catholics who do not comply with demands because of their religious belief. What will church leaders do to help their grassroot Catholics cope with pressure in the form of social discrimination because of their Christian faith? It is expected that an appropriate programme on the formation of laity will be very relevant to their needs.

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## V. CHURCH AND SOCIETY



by Christine Tse

From the period of time beginning in 1949 up until the 1970's, the Hong Kong church addressed social issues mainly through establishing welfare services. The poor who were served by the church were concerned with their immediate needs such as food, housing, schooling, etc. They

generally adopted a passive attitude towards social and political issues. Neither the church nor the education system provided programs to train them to be more critical. Given the situation, it was difficult to expect them to challenge the church to give more depth to its social role.

The involvement of the church in social justice issues came about gradually in a process that began in the early 1970's when the Diocesan Convention was convened. This concern can be identified on two levels: addressing issues and addressing policies. Efforts were made to re-interpret 'poverty' in a society which had become affluent. 'Option for the poor' is understood not simply as a call to serve the materially poor but also in terms of working for the protection of basic human rights and integral human development.

Another effort now being made is to re-define the role of church not merely as defender and transmitter of religious truth and doctrine but as a basic human and christian community which is affected by and, in turn, affects the socio-political, economic and cultural development of Hong Kong. If the church is to continue to take up a servant role, it will have to improve its service by responding to the signs and needs of the times.

The evolution of this kind of thinking led to some concrete action on behalf of social justice. At this stage, the church has become more than just accommodative. The setting up of the Hong Kong Justice and Peace Commission combined vision with action. In addition to social action, there were scattered efforts to come up with some framework for social analysis, research to locate social ills and identify the root causes of social problems.

However, a closer review of the effect of social action for justice showed that such efforts did not penetrate the main stream of church life on the local level. The setting up of the HK Justice and Peace Commission, and during its initial years of operation, encountered many internal difficulties. At the time, justice and peace concerns were picked up faster and addressed better by individual religious justice and peace groups, Catholic youth and worker organizations.

The issue of 1997 stimulated further reflection on the role of the church in Hong Kong. Society is now becoming more politicized. There are strong demands for a democratically elected Legislative Assembly and Chief Executive. There is also a strong demand for provision for human rights clauses in the Basic Law that will govern Hong Kong after 1997.

How will the church respond to these developments? How will the church re-evaluate her social role in the rapidly changing situation? Here I would like to identify three major concerns: The church's role as a provider of social services, as a source of support and vision for the new society, and as advocate of the poor and needy.

Rev. Kwok Nai Wang of the Hong Kong Christian Institute once commented that the church in Hong Kong has done more than its share as a provider of social services. He said that right now, "more than 20% of the medical work, more than 40% of the education and more than 60% of the social welfare programmes are provided by churches or church related agencies." If after 1997 the government discontinued its financial subsidy, what would happen to all the church run social services and educational institutes that are heavily dependent on these subsidies? And, if such subsidies were continued, would the service be allowed to exercise its role freely? In short, will there be certain conditions attached to future subsidies?

Because of 1997, some Hong Kong people are opting to 'vote with their feet' by emigrating to other countries. Those who have to, or choose to, stay want a Hong Kong that will enjoy a 'high degree of autonomy'.

As we look around Asia today, we find 'people power' exercising its influence in several countries. In the Philippines it helped to topple Marcos, in S. Korea Chun Doo Hwan; and in Pakistan it was instrumental in electing the first Muslim woman as prime minister. The church in the Philippines and in S. Korea played an important role in providing vision and support to these popular movements.

Will the Hong Kong church assume a more active role in helping to forge a vision and support by which the whole community may be able to move forward towards greater democratic participation?

With Hong Kong becoming more affluent as it approaches 1997, the church has to understand what 'option for the poor' means in terms of concrete pastoral activities. Serving the poor may mean acting in solidarity with the workers for better wages and working conditions, speaking out on social issues, such as imported labour and illegal immigrants. Serving the poor can also mean deepening her involvement in areas of justice and peace through consciousness-raising and actively supporting human rights. Over the years, the Hong Kong Church has become middle-class oriented. Will it be able to effectively reach out to and take a stand on the side of the poor?