Third Part



PIME missionaries after a community meeting at PIME House in Clear Water Bay Road, on January 16, 1967, at the presence of Bishop Aristide Pirovano, Superior General.

150 Years of Great Challenges

In the years following the World War II and the communist conquest of China, the Church led by Bishop Lorenzo Bianchi, "the bishop of the largest concentration of refugees in the whole world", displayed tremendous effort to meet dramatic social emergencies:

> *All parishes of the diocese have tithed themselves so that they can do everything in their power to assist the needy. Material and spiritual help was provided, schools were built, organizations were set up, counseling was given, assistance in seeking employment was offered, and hundreds of unforeseeable engagements imposed by the presence of refugees were carried out.* (Sunday Examiner, *June 1959*)

Education

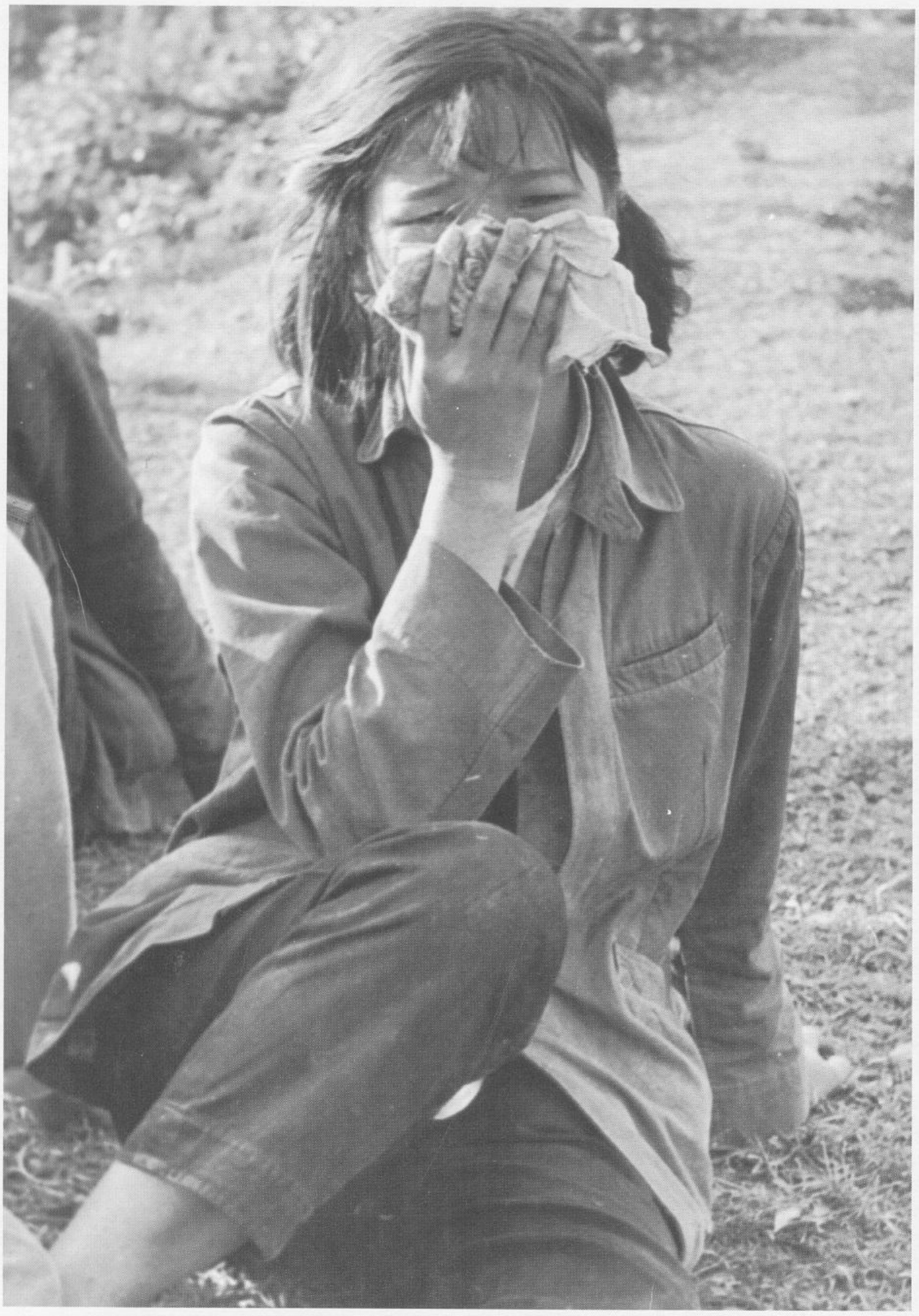
Education was a priority, and the government invited all institutions interested in opening new schools, granting plots of land at a reduced cost or even for free (if the buildings were for education or social assistance), and financial aid for the construction of new buildings. The government also gave the Christian Churches permission to use school facilities as residences for those involved in school administration, including the clergy. Urged especially by Fr. Lido Mencarini, Church leaders responded in a very active fashion and gave full support to the public program of education, by investing considerable human resources and large amounts of money. New schools were opened in various parishes, thus involving almost all pastors in this program. In 1955, the bishop set up a "Committee for the Expansion of Churches and Schools", with Frs. Francesco Lerda, Lido Mencarini and Giuseppe Carrà deeply involved in its projects. In this way, all pastoral programs designed specifically for refugees were integrated into the structural development of the diocese and its parishes. From 1964, the education program of the Church was overseen by the "Diocesan Board of Education", presided over by the Vicar General Fr. Mencarini.

The diocese also got involved in the administration of middle and upper educational institutions, until then largely promoted by the religious congregations. In 1958, Fr. Carrà opened Raimondi College on behalf of the diocese. Other similar institutions followed in short succession.

Social services

Social services to the needy, especially refugees from China, were, at first, spontaneously organized by individual missionaries. Numerous centers of humanitarian aid and education mushroomed around the Churches. The parish Church, schools and social centers were, oftentimes, under the same roof, and included all sorts of services: distribution of food and medicine, schooling and religious classes for catechumens, Sunday Mass, pastoral and sacramental ministries.

In the 1950s, the Catholic Church opened some 20 social service centers, entrusted to the care of religious congregattion diocesan priests. Four thousand homes were built, 55 food and clothing distribution centers and 17 medical clinics were opened.

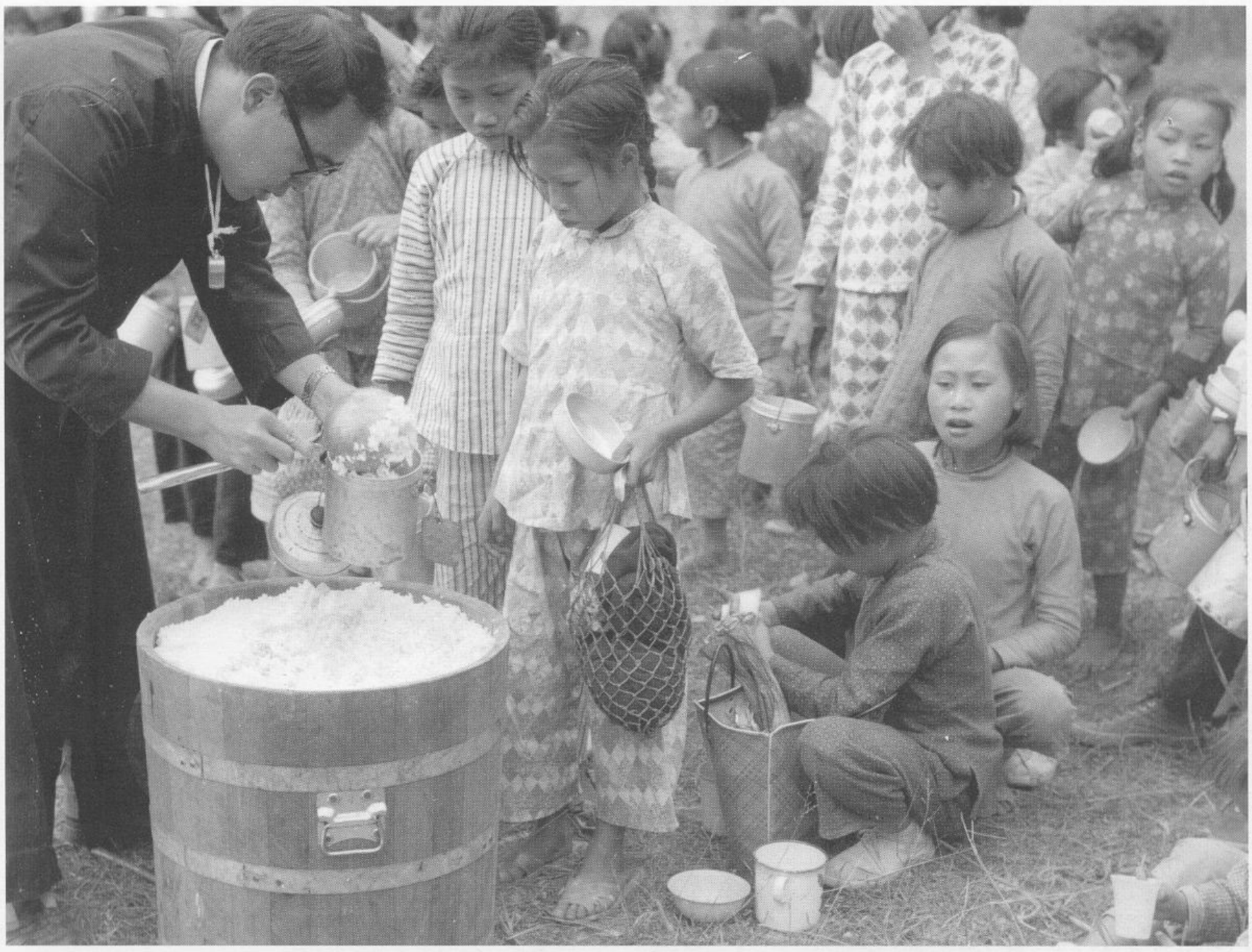


A Chinese girl cries desperately before being forced to return to China Mainland by Hong Kong police. This famous picture stirred great emotions worldwide, attracting the attention on the plight of Chinese refugees fleeing the great famine of early 1960s. Many of them could not be received in Hong Kong and were sent back to China.



Numerous fires worsened the already precarious plight of the refugees. Particularly disastrous was the one on Christmas night in 1953 at Sham Shui Po, which left 60,000 people totally destitute. Substantial help was given by Cardinal Francis Spellman of New York, who visited Hong Kong in January 1953, and by Pope Pius XII. Financial assistance also came from other sectors of the international community, with the Church in Germany showing particular generosity.

Eventually with substantial international help and with experiencegained over the years, the Church was able to offer more professional and specialized social services. The bishop founded the 'Hong Kong Catholic Conference for Social Assistance' and the "Hong Kong Social Welfare Conference – Diocesan Caritas Organization". From 1961 onwards, they were divided as follows: 'Caritas-Hong Kong' for diocesan social services and the 'Hong Kong Catholic Social Welfare Conference' for the coordination of social engagements by religious



Early 1960s: distribution of food to children of fishermen in Aberdeen. The priest is Fr. Joseph Fung.

congregations. The task of humanitarian assistance was taken up and coordinated by Caritas-Hong Kong, which opened numerous institutions and social assistance centers offering a wide variety of services. Members of PIME were directly involved in many of the services.

This new approach promoted professionalism in the Church's social services and allowed the parishes to focus on worship and religious instruction.

Religious congregations flock to Hong Kong

Along with the refugees, members of various religious congregations who had been expelled from China were making their way to Hong Kong. As the numbers arriving at the colony increased, Bishop Bianchi found himself confronted by a serious dilemma. According to the directives from the Holy See, Bishop Bianchi was supposed to help those expelled from China only in transit through the colony. However, many asked to stay in Hong Kong. Bishop Bianchi decided to continue Bishop Enrico Valtorta's policy of accepting those congregations that committed themselves to pastoral work in the diocese.

In 1947, besides Chinese diocesan priests and the PIME missionaries, six other male religious congregations were working in Hong Kong, numbering a total of 68 priests and 10 brothers. There were also eight female congregations with 270 nuns. By 1957, these two figures had risen respectively to 13 male congregations

with 190 priests and 89 brothers, and 20 female congregations with 565 nuns. Bishop Bianchi wrote:

> *Very few mission dioceses can show the impressive number of over 30 religious orders and congregations to the extent that, among outsiders, more than a few have trouble guessing which congregation has been entrusted with the care of this diocese. Yet, we can affirm with confidence that this attitude of ours is not just the result of a spirit of hospitality and Christian charity, but is especially due to our awareness of our apostolic duty. We feel that we are "Catholic Church" before being members of a particular institute.*

During the years helping the refugees, the diocese recorded an exceptional increase in the number of baptisms: over 6,000 in the year 1956 alone. In 1954, the whole diocese took part, with great enthusiasm, in the opening of the Marian Year, with solemn functions held in all Churches. That year, Marian celebrations acquired a special mark of distinction due to the activities of the Legion of Mary. The organization was, and still is, widespread among the Catholic laity. The closing ceremony turned out to be particularly majestic and spectacular, with the participation of almost 40,000 faithful.

The 1967 riots

As Hong Kong sought to cope with the challenges presented by the influx of refugees, another crisis in Mainland China, the Cultural Revolution, brought further turmoil to the colony, which witnessed riots in 1967. The violent protesters sought to introduce the communist revolution into Hong Kong. The riots generated grave worries for the stability and the future of the colony. The Catholic Church experienced the same uncertainty. The bishop issued a brief declaration asking the faithful to disassociate themselves from any illegal and violent demonstrations. Bishop Bianchi also exhorted the faithful to avoid any initiatives prompted by panic, such as leaving the colony. Instead, he invited everyone to contribute to maintaining order and stability.

His trust was rewarded and the life of the Church was able to continue on the road of renewal (aggiornamento) and development urged by Vatican Council II. Eventually, the Catholic community reached a higher degree of grassroots involvement and of maturity as shown by the handover of the diocese leadership to a Chinese bishop.

A difficult succession

The Holy See accepted Bishop Bianchi's resignation in December 1968, but was reluctant to grant full power to his successor, Fr. Francis Hsu, who was named only Apostolic Administrator instead of Ordinary of the diocese. This unforeseen development triggered sadness and bewilderment in Hong Kong, especially among the Chinese clergy, the laity and Bishop Bianchi himself. The prudence on the part of the Vatican, supported by the nuncio, Bishop Luigi Accogli, was excessive. It seemed as though the Holy See could not fully trust the Chinese clergy. Bishop Bianchi left Hong Kong in April 1969, and was apparently able to lobby Pope Paul VI, a fellow citizen of Brescia, to redress the injustice against Fr. Hsu. The latter was nominated Ordinary Bishop of the Hong Kong diocese on May 29, 1969. This put an end to a period of uncertainty and polemics. The following October 26, his solemn investiture as the first Chinese Bishop of Hong Kong marked the official termination of PIME's "commissio" over Hong Kong.





1958: Fr Lido Mencarini, Vicar General of the diocese, visits refugees living in huts.

Numerous PIME missionaries assigned to Hong Kong (1951-1968)

Numerous PIME missionaries expelled from Mainland China were assigned to work in the Hong Kong diocese. From Kaifeng, Fr. Amelio Crotti (October 8, 1951 to 1954) and Bro. Vittorio Polo (from October 24, 1953); from Nanyang, Frs. Angelo Bacchin (from February 14, 1954), Giovanni Viganò (from January 2, 1954), Giuseppe Carrà (from December 2, 1953), Bro. Luigi Brambilla (from September 22, 1952) and Francesco De Maestri (from March 26, 1955); from Weihui, Frs. Domenico Maringelli (from February 25, 1954) and Ferruccio Tettamanzi (from May 26, 1954); and from Hanzhong, Frs. Valeriano Fraccaro (from October 11, 1952), Narciso Santinon (from April 7, 1952), Luigi Bolis (from January 6, 1953) and Pietro Martinelli (from March 5, 1953).

Assigned to Hong Kong from Italy in 1953 were: Frs. Pietro Bonaldo and Luigi Gambaro, followed in 1954 by Frs. Secondo Einaudi, Antonio Formenti, Giulio Busato (returned to Italy in 1955) and Antonio Garaventa. In 1955, Frs. Vincenzo Carbone, Giuseppe Viganò and Fr. Francesco Lerda joined the PIME community. Those assigned in the year 1956 were: Frs. Angelo Lazzarotto, Egidio Giussani and Filippo Comissari. The following year, Frs. Fernando Galbiati, Enea Tapella and Angelo Negri, followed them. Fr. Giuseppe Monti arrived in August 1958 and, at the end of the same year also Frs. Gianni Giampietro and Italo Baffioni (he returned to Italy a few months later due to poor health). Those assigned in 1959 were Frs. Arturo Daviddi and Dino Doimo. On September 30, 1960, Frs. Benito Bottigliero, Mario Marazzi and Antonio Uda left for Hong Kong. In 1961 those who came to Hong Kong were: Frs. Luigi Colombo, Domenico Cozzolino, Piero Galbiati, Carlo Monteverdi and Bro. Andrea Causa. In 1962 Fr. Carlo Tei reached Hong Kong and the following year, Fr. Guido Meneghetti. Those arrived in 1964 were Frs. Eddo Fazzioli, Tommaso Ferrarese, Armando Magnacca, Ivano Salonia and Sandy Garzarelli. In 1965 it was time for Frs. Amedeo Barbieri, Robert Grothaus (returned to the USA the following May), Vittorio Beretta and Adelio Lambertoni. At the beginning of 1967, Fr. Giacomo Girardi reached Hong Kong, followed in a short time by Frs. Giosuè Bonzi, Franco Gritti, Giuseppe Salaroli and Piero Zambarbieri. In 1968, Frs. Emilio Leoni and Vittorio Grioni were added so that year the number of PIME members working in Hong Kong rose to 68.

Missionaries of Love

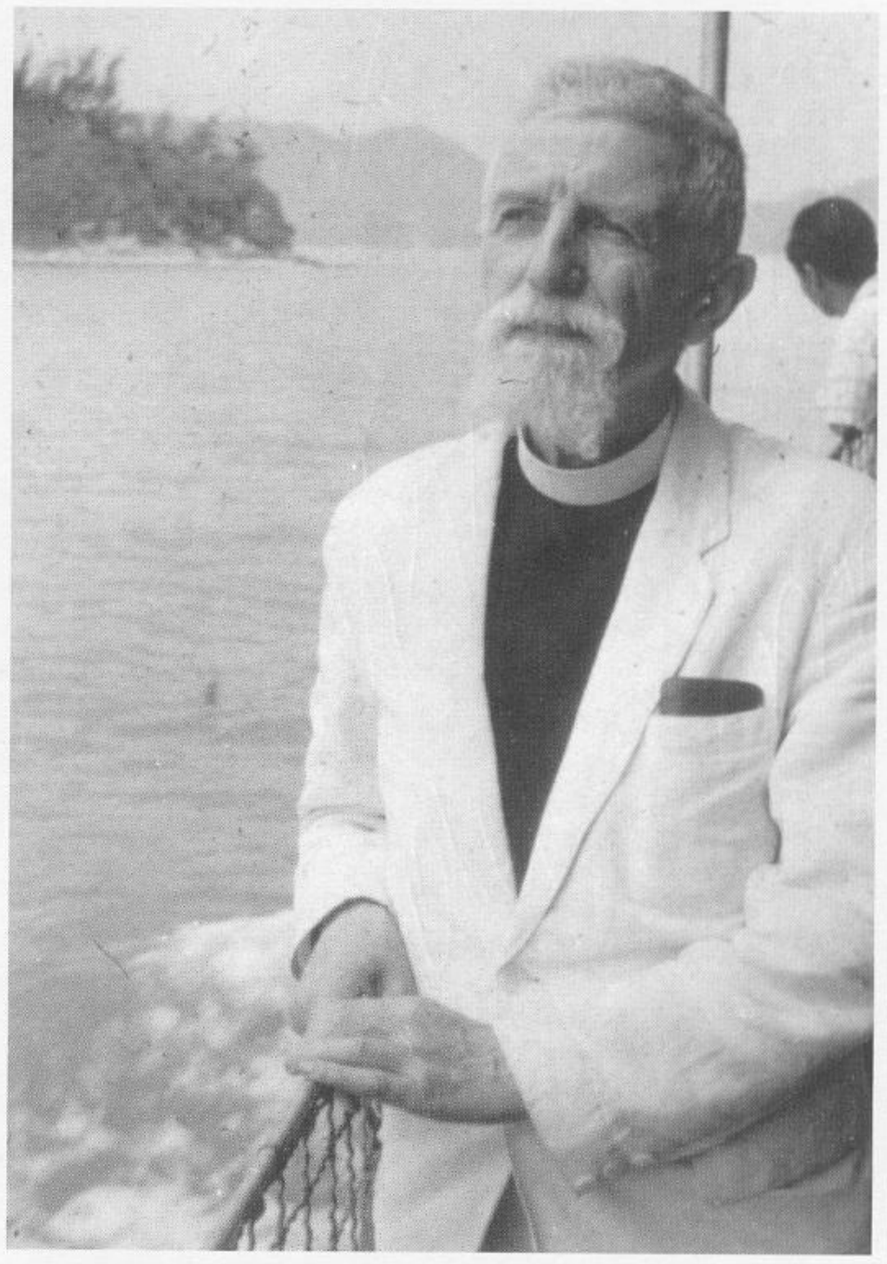
Did the missionaries use social assistance to induce conversions, creating so-called 'rice Christians'? Undoubtedly, missionaries were justified in hoping that many people would be impressed by their examples of generosity and would feel a particular attraction towards the Christian faith. On the other hand, from the standpoint of the Christian faith, using traditional terminology so familiar to missionaries, the well-being and salvation of the soul is no less important than the well-being and salvation of the body.

The teachings of the Vatican Council II and of the Magisterium, in particular of the encyclical of Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (2006), affirm that the preaching of the Gospel and humanitarian assistance are complementary; they need each other, they refer to each other, and both stem from the dialogue opened by the Holy Trinity with humanity. The love of Christ, which is boundless, prods Christians to witness their faith through works of mercy. It would be unfair to Christ's love to use it as a trade-off in order to get something in return, even if that something would be conversion to the Christian faith. This type of faith would be totally meaningless because it would not stem from a free decision of the will and heart. PIME missionaries, in the example set by Christ himself, hoped to draw people to Him, yet, without ever turning anyone down, even if some did not want to convert, or even showed aversion to the Gospel. Charitable assistance does not have conversion and education to the faith as its goals.



The Saint Francis of Hong Kong

Father Riccardo Brookes is remembered as the 'father of the poor' or the 'Saint Francis of Hong Kong', and was one of the best-loved priests in the history of Hong Kong. He was born in Italy of an English father and an Italian mother in 1892. He arrived in Hong Kong in 1921, where he lived for the next 56 years, before retiring in Italy where he died in 1980. He held almost every post open to a missionary priest. He served as rector or parish priest in both the city and the countryside. He was chancellor and Vicar General of the diocese, prison chaplain, leprosy colony chaplain, and 'Jack of all trades' when anything needed to be done. He was always busy and cheerful. The work



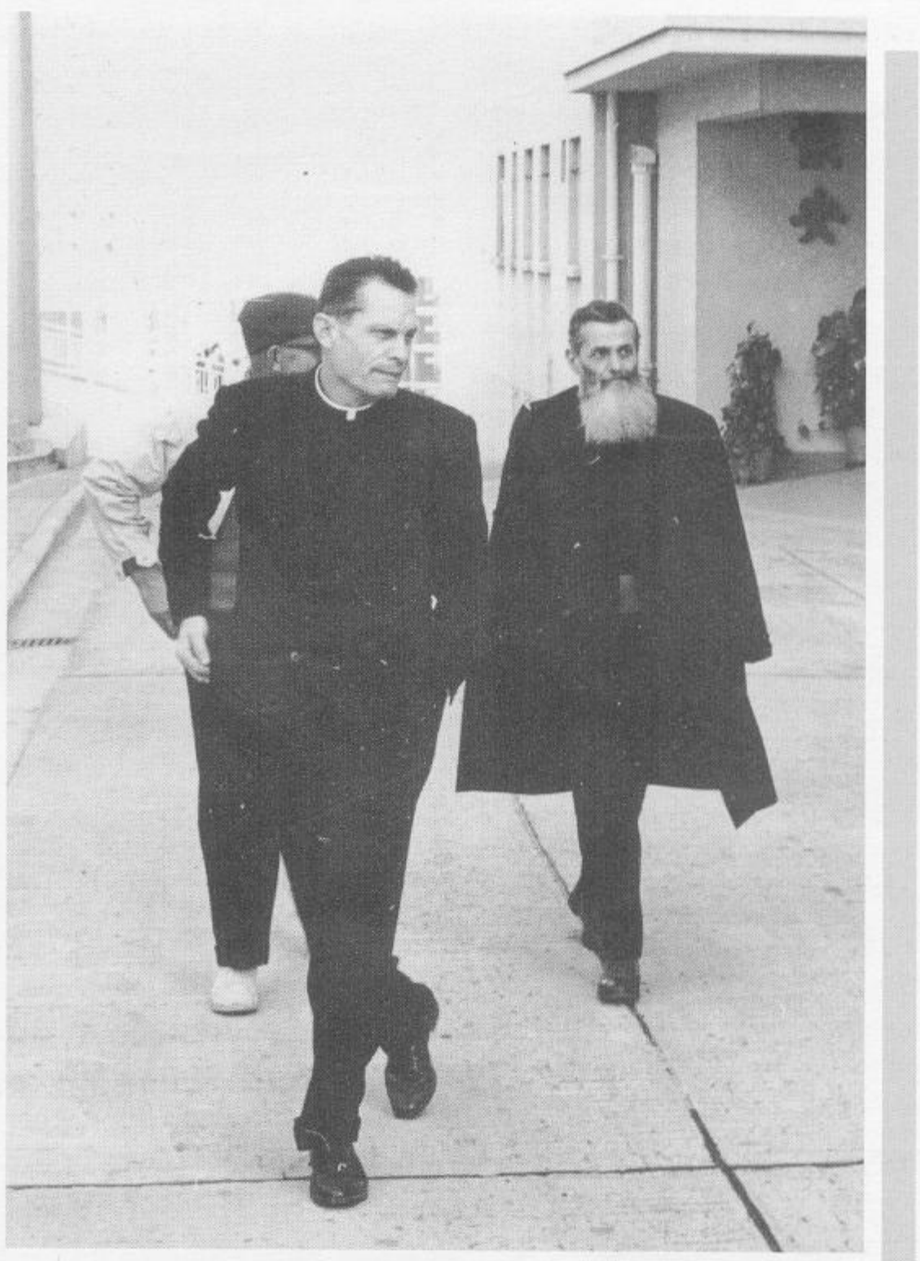
Fr. Riccardo Brookes on his way to Hei Ling Chau Island where he visited the leper colony.

as chaplain to the Catholic lepers on Hei Ling Chau Island was especially dear to his heart. Hence, he founded together with Fr. John Collins S.J., the society of St. Camillus for recovered lepers.

Fr Brookes was a missionary loved for his simplicity of heart and boundless charity. He was immersed in the care of those struck by misfortune. He was a man who lived among the poor in a truly Franciscan spirit, spending nothing on himself, yet begging vigorously for the sake of those whom he had befriended. He was often fooled by scam artists. Yet, it seems he never learned to avoid falling victim to their ruses. He could not bring himself to believe that anyone could engage in deliberate deceit. Moreover, he was willing to be deceived time and time again, rather than risk not helping anyone truly in need.

Caritas-Hong Kong

Caritas-Hong Kong was created by the diocese to help cope with dramatic social emergencies in the colony. Its origin dates back to July 1953, thanks to the impulse of German born priest Fr. Charles Herman Vath. In 1955, it came into being as the Catholic Social Welfare Conference of the Hong Kong diocese, an affiliate of Caritas International. The institution was renamed Caritas-Hong Kong on October 1, 1961. Fr. Francesco Lerda was appointed as its vice-president, and then served as its president from 1968 until his death, on June 28, 2003. Under the leadership of Fr. Lerda and his collaborators, a small group of volunteers, Caritas-Hong Kong grew into a major institution in Hong Kong's society, to the point that for ordinary Hong Kong citizens the name Caritas is more familiar than the name of the Catholic Church. After years leading Caritas-Hong Kong and as he grew older, Fr. Lerda submitted his resignation but it was not accepted because of the deep esteem in which he was held, not only by the bishop but also by Hong Kong's secular society, as shown by the large crowds at his funeral.



Fr. Francesco Lerda showing Caritas services to PIME Superior General, Bishop Aristide Pirovano, in December 1966.

A shy man

Father Lerda's contribution to social services in Hong Kong and Asia was incalculable. Yet, he remained a shy man, who carried out his job with selfless dedication, humility and without ostentation. These qualities made him approachable by everyone. Over the years of his untiring work, Fr Lerda felt deeply uncomfortable in the limelight. He was never at ease at ritzy social functions and fund-raising events. He avoided them whenever he could, preferring to spend his weekends in the quiet outlying island of Cheung Chau. He never stayed away from simple, down-to-earth and hardworking people. He felt at home

among the poor and needy. They reminded him of his humble origins, the values he had received from his parents and the simplicity of his upbringing. It was undoubtedly this simplicity, together with his natural ingenuity, that allowed him, not formally educated for the administrative roles he played, to be sharp with money, investments and complex organizational demands. The exceptional results he attained are visible to everyone.

The wide-ranging services provided by Caritas-Hong Kong address basic human needs and included social work, education, medical care, community development and hospitality. Caritas serves the community through more than 240 service units in about 140 locations. It has more than 4,900 full-time employees on its staff and receives ongoing support from over 10,000 volunteers. Although the government provides funding for some of the services, Caritas relies largely on the fees and subsidies from those who participate and use its services. It receives donations and organizes fund-raising campaigns throughout the territory. Caritas receives contributions from the Community Chest and actively participates in its fund-raising activities. Thus, the degree of flexibility achieved enables it to provide extensive assistance to those in need. Caritas-Hong Kong is also active in providing assistance beyond Hong Kong's borders, including in Mainland China, North Korea and India, especially in the event of calamities.

Give blood to save a missionary



Like St. Therese of Lisieux, Fr. Enea Tapella made a difference not through apparent exceptional qualities, but through an authentic inner goodness and deep spirituality expressed in humility and total dedication to charity work. He was a simple, open, joyful and optimistic man, capable of being moved to compassion and action by human suffering of any kind. With his simplicity and sincerity, he inspired many people around him. The deep love and affection that people felt towards the unassuming missionary was eloquently illustrated during Holy Week 1977, when Fr. Tapella was fatally injured in a motorcycle accident. He was searching for a site where to take a group of disabled persons for a summer camp. The young man who was riding with him on the motorcycle when the accident occurred, received his last words. It was a simple goodbye to parishioners and friends, and words of encouragement to young people to continue to work for the Kingdom of God to the best of their abilities.



Following the heartbreaking news of the accident, more than 150 friends and parishioners from Saint Francis of Assisi parish in Sham Shui Po, where he had served as assistant pastor, lined up to donate blood in the hope of saving his life. For three nights, in the various Churches where he served, the faithful gathered to pray. Fr Tapella was in extreme agony, but he endured it with patience and a smile. The numerous visitors could not help but see a parallel between his agony and the passion of Jesus. His death, on Tuesday of Holy Week (April 5), was mourned by many with tears and a sense of loss "rarely seen in the history of the Church in Hong Kong", according to a report in the *Sunday Examiner*.

Fu Hong Society

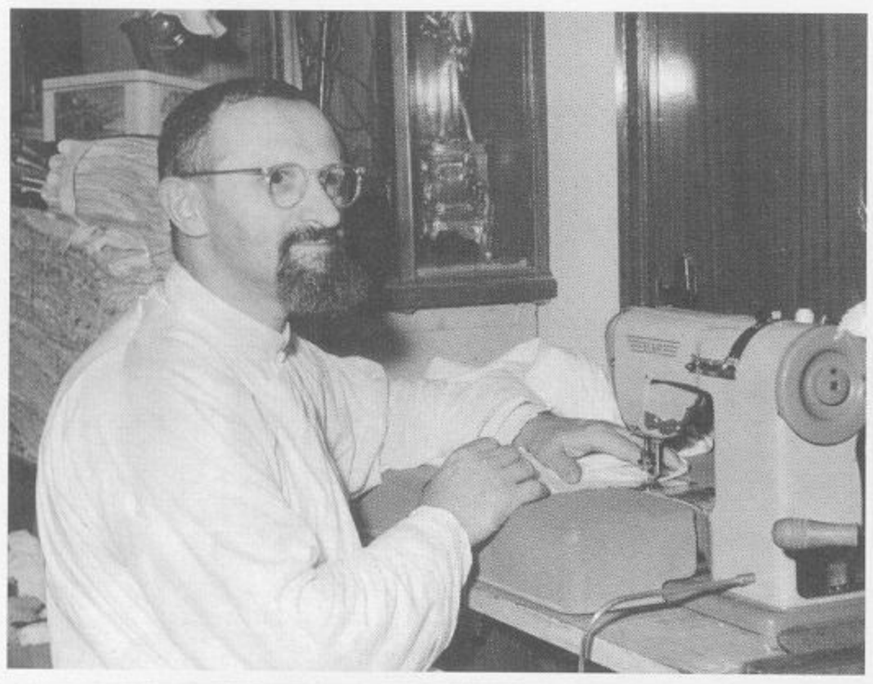
Father Enea Tapella, a missionary with great sensibility and inner goodness, in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, organized groups of volunteers to make home visits, arranged social and religious gatherings as well as summer camps



Fr. Enea Tapella distributing food to children of refugees in Wong Tai Shin.

for the disabled, to whom he devoted much of his care. Moved by his tragic death at the age of 48, many people called for his work to be continued. Some PIME missionaries, a PIME sister and volunteers opened a residential and training service unit called Father Tapella Home. In 1977, with a group of highly motivated volunteers from various professions, including prominent Hong Kong citizen Simon Li, Fr. Giosuè Bonzi set up The Society of Homes for the Handicapped (since 2001 called Fu Hong Society), with the mission of ensuring continuity and stability to the services of Father Tapella Home.

Fu Hong Society mission offers services to adolescents and adults with mental disabilities, and aims to help the disabled achieve the greatest independence possible. The society, which works in partnership with the government's Social Welfare Department, has currently more than 40 service units, where nearly 1,000 operators serve about 3,600 people. Among the most notable initiatives of the society are special family units, called casa-famiglia (family - home), where people with and without disabilities, live together. These family units provide holistic care and a homelike environment for the disabled. Fr. Bonzi resides in one such family unit, the Casa-famiglia Encounter, in Ho Man Tin, Kowloon.



Bro. Luigi Brambilla at his working desk in the Bishop House.

PIME Brothers

We would like to include the PIME Brothers among the missionaries of love because they were mostly engaged in social and community service. There have been ten Brothers serving the mission in Hong Kong. The first was Brother Luigi Tacchini, who arrived in Hong Kong with the first members in 1858, and the last Brother Giovanni Marasi, who is still active among us, after 38 years service in Hong Kong.

Fondly remembered in the PIME community is Bro. Luigi Brambilla, who after serving in Nanyang (Henan), where he underwent trial and duress, arrived in Hong Kong in 1953. He won deep affection from those who knew him for his valuable and unpretentious work at Central Mission House in Caine Road, and from 1969 to his death in 1982, at PIME House in Clear Water Bay.

The longest serving and most appreciated PIME Brother in Hong Kong was Mario Colleoni, who was "for over half a century one of the best known and best loved members of the People of God in Hong Kong" (*Sunday Examiner*). Brother Colleoni arrived in Hong Kong in 1934 and served the mission for 53 years with unassuming charm, humour, keen intelligence and ready fellowship. He was an assistant at the diocesan procuration, superintendent of the Catholic Cemeteries (a post that demanded not only efficiency and readiness, but also human sympathy that he never lacked), aid to Fr. Nicola Maestrini at the Catholic Truth Society and a Scout Master for the Catholic Boy



Bro. Mario Colleoni with Cardinal Grégoire-Pierre Agagianian during his visit in December 1958, on the occasion of the first 100 years of PIME presence in Hong Kong.

Scouts Association. He was also Procurator for the PIME Institute in Hong Kong. Besides his official duties, Brother Colleoni was always available for a multitude of unofficial calls. Older Hong Kong Catholics have vivid memories of Brother Mario driving Bishop Valtorta on his pastoral rounds.

Brother Colleoni was an organizer and an improviser. When crises arose, he was the first person to call on. "Brother Mario says he will do what he can" became a familiar phrase, and Brother Mario always did what he could, with the proverbial dedication that won him deep fondness in the large Catholic community.

