

# Hong Kong Catholic Works of Mercy

(Seventh of a Series)

## THE HAND OF GOD

By Richard Core

It was sunset on the Bund. The old man's shuffling, rolling gait accentuated his years as he walked uncertainly. In the deep-set eyes below his furrowed brow there was a story that the oncoming, well-dressed Chinese could not fail to read.

"You seem lost," he said, "Could I be of some help to you?"

"Why, yes," he stammered, his eyes brightening at the show of friendliness. "I'm - m - looking for Vincent . . ."

"Vincent who, my friend?"

The old man nervously rubbed a forefinger across his lips.

"Oh, a fellow just told me to see a Vincent Paul. Owns a club or something. Said he could help me."

"Perhaps you mean the St. Vincent de Paul Society, sir," returned the younger man. "They will be happy to offer you some charity . . ."

The old man winced.

"I don't want charity!" his voice became husky. "I won't stoop to charity! I got robbed, see. Last night I got lost and robbed. This guy told me Vincent who's—it would just loan me a few dollars until . . ."

At this the other man reddened.

"You are a spiteful, selfish old man! No matter what your hard luck story! You are depriving people like the St. Vincent de Paul Society who love God to show that love by helping people like you! Now beat it!"

He started off abruptly.

"Wait!" the old man yelled after him. "Look, mister. I'm sorry. I'm sorry, see! I - er - I never looked at this charity that way before. Please, forget . . ."

Sophisticated reasoning in many large cities tends to echo the old man's words. For one cause or another, it scoffs at charity as a degrading, middle-age practise unworthy of dignified society.

### Needy 'Little Ones'



These two small beggars snapped round the corner from the "Sunday Examiner" office, are counterparts of many "beloved of God" who find new hope in the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

It forgets or ignores Mary Magdalene's anointing of Christ's feet from the alabaster jar; her act of charity our Blessed Lord promised would be memorialized to the end of time.

"For the poor," He said, "you have always with you, and when you want you can do good to them."

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul here in the Colony as elsewhere in the world is the everlasting and outstanding example and promoter of the idea that the merciful alleviation of the distressed and the needy is simply man's way of showing in concrete terms his love for God.

This world-wide charity started in the Hong Kong in 1863 at the Central Catholic Mission house. There were then only two conferences whereas now each diocesan parish has its own local chapter.

From the beginning, the monies came directly to the board of directors, in the form of free-will offerings. The year 1877 saw the start of "Rose Day" when on the first Monday of December an appeal is made directly to the general public.

It was not until 1917 that the annual bazaar was commenced. From this substantial amount of revenue realized for the hundreds of beneficiaries. The British Government has always helped with a yearly grant and the Society has been graciously accredited as a tax-exempt corporation.

Portuguese Catholics have ever assumed a prominent part and interest in the work. At the request of their leaders in 1920 the Society's beneficiaries were extended to include all Hong Kong's poor "regardless of race, colour, or creed."

Years ago there were only 200 main beneficiaries; today there are over 700 institutions and people who benefit by their charity.

Sixteen doctors, not all of whom are Catholic, offer free services in cases recommended to them by the Society for examination and care. Four hospitals at the request of St. Vincent de Paul Society have provided at minimum charge, or entirely free, medical facilities for deserving poor people.

In November, 1948 direct from the Society's world-headquarters in Paris, France, came Brother Henry Jacob to discuss modern approaches of the organization. He offered

valuable recommendations for the Society's betterment here and showed how certain problems arising could be handled.

Soundly alert to changing situations and needs, St. Vincent de Paul Society finds it expedient at times to make a departure from their constitutions which restrict their charity to Hong Kong people.

Refugees are helped. Stranded travellers are aided in continuing their journey or assisted in unforeseen predicaments. Emergency situations like the fire last year in squatters' Boom Town in Shumshuipo will always find the Society of St. Vincent de Paul foremost among those succouring the needy.

As a means to keep alive interest in its own objectives the Society participates in various campaigns of other charity groups. Often this is done by maintaining a stall at bazaars.

It is really only when an organisation closes its eyes to the objectives of similar charity groups that it becomes a little

pompous and ragged at the edges.

Even religious congregations now and in the past have been guilty in this respect. Nothing short of an A-bomb explosiveness seems able to dislodge their petrified point of view.

It is a fond hope of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the foreseeable future to establish in Hong Kong a group of about 25 women duly organized as sort of lay-sisters who will be governed by a set of constitutions modelled upon those adopted in Paris.

Here as elsewhere, the Society is solely a man's work in design. But rare is the organisation, in practice, religious or otherwise, wholly devoid of some interdependence upon the opposite sex. The most urgent present need of the Hong Kong chapter is a group of lay-women as in France. Admittedly women are more proficient on social welfare house-to-house visitation in ascertaining domestic difficulties and needs.

Women throughout the centuries have been the pillars of the Church which Christ had entrusted to His apostles. The present success of the Society in the Colony in no small measure is due to four women who have been described as "the backbone of all our efforts."

Mrs. F. Noronha, Mrs. O. B. Gosano and the Misses C. Xavier and Elizabeth Wong help to plan and execute most of the money-raising projects on which the Society depends for its funds to distribute.

In a sense the organization may be likened to the Hand of God. The Fingers stretch out over society and like the probing, skilled hand of the master surgeon delicately locate and administer to the tender spots of the suffering body of Christ's Mystical Body.

It is such societies which rear above the level of modern mediocrity—the curse of our age. And it serves a lesson on the world that faith without works is useless—like an empty beautiful house without children's laughter, a magnificent concerto without musicians to give it life, a body without a soul.

TO love God we must have three hearts in a single heart. One must be a flame for God, the other must be of flesh for our neighbour, the third must be of bronze for oneself.

—St. Benedict Joseph Labre.

### Yes! We've Met The Brothers of St. Vincent de Paul



—St. Benedict Joseph Labre.