

The rapid growth of the major Southeast Asian cities, and their modernization, requires a new understanding of the church's role in the age of the Asian metropolis. Until recently church leaders have centered their thinking on the rural areas of their countries. Even though the national offices of the churches have been in the major cities, little thought has been given to urban mission. Urban mission, when it has been considered, has taken the form of social welfare projects. The church's mission in the city is associated with doing things for people instead of working with them to develop themselves. There is need to reassess the role the city has played in the development of Southeast Asia and to pay special attention to the demands laid upon the churches to work for more responsible human urban growth.

The Urban Center

In the history of Southeast Asia, the focus of change has been the urban center. The cities of Southeast Asia, born out of colonial contact with the Western nations, became the centers of commerce in the region. The Southeast Asian's experience of the modernization process came through his participation in the development of these cities. Trade with the West brought with it new ideas and new relationships with the external world. Once the process was begun, the capital city provided the milieu through which the forces of modernization were set to work in bureaucratization, education, mass communication and transportation, industrialization and secularization.

The growing complexity of urban life demands that the churches of Southeast Asia choose their involvement carefully. They cannot hope, with their limited resources and personnel, to do all the jobs called for in humanizing the urban environment. Let us look at possible areas of involvement in the Southeast Asian region.

Hongkong and Singapore

New patterns of living are being shaped by the multi-storied apartments which now compose a large portion of housing in Hongkong and Singapore. A recent study of Hongkong resettlement housing shows that high density living

a mission for the churches : the human issue in asia's cities

BY RICHARD P. POETHIG



has weakened parent-child relationships. Crowded conditions in the apartments of the resettlement blocs has forced children out into the streets. This has weakened parental control and has been responsible for the growth of "teddy boy" activities in the resettlement areas. The housing manager of the Tsz Wan Shan resettlement area (170,000 population) reported an increase in criminal assaults, indecent attacks and robberies among the youth. High density housing is also accountable for the breakdown in neighborliness. One Maryknoll Father reports that in the twenty-story buildings where they work, people keep their doors closed and rarely have contact with their neighbors. Conditions in the resettlement blocs and housing estates present the church with the necessity of organizing people for community-centered projects.

Hongkong authorities, however, have been careful to keep the growth of any organizations in the resettlement blocs

under close surveillance. Up until 1967 the government did not allow the "Kaifong" (the traditional neighborhood association) into the resettlement blocs. They have since lifted this ban, but limit the present *Kaifong* to special activities e.g., running of kindergarten, planning social outings, suggestions about landscaping.

In Singapore, the government is committed to a high rise housing program — both as a means of employment and as a solution to its squatter problem. Even with its remarkable record of building houses for 700,000 of its 2,000,000 people, the government will not be able to provide shelter for the lowest stratum of people who compose twenty per cent of Singapore's population. The government is, in fact, tearing down older sections of the city and removing squatters without providing the people a reasonable alternative for shelter.

Many families do not want to live in high-rise housing. A family may pay \$50 (Singapore) for shop house-house accommodations, while in the housing estates they would be required to pay, besides rent, their utilities and maintenance. Shopkeepers in the housing estates consider new residents poor credit risks, since they are committed to the priority payment of rent and utility charges. The schedule of payments required by the government restricts a family from using the money where they need it most.

In both Singapore and Hongkong an ecumenical strategy for developing community organizations in the residential areas is a primary consideration. The experiment in community organization being attempted in the Jurong Estate provides insights which can be used in other residential areas. The prewar housing areas should not be forgotten. Buildings in the older sections of Hongkong and Singapore are crowded and run down. Community action aimed at rehabilitation and regulation could spare some communities the disruption which accompanies urban renewal. In the newer housing estates, organizations for drawing people together around community issues need to be developed. One urban planner has suggested the need for working on more and better bus service to and from the Jurong Estate.

An experimental community action program could be tried in one of the

Hongkong resettlement blocs or housing estates. Various churches and religious orders are carrying out separate social welfare ministries in different housing areas. Cooperative work in one of the housing areas could be explored in an effort to share past experience and to stimulate wider community participation in shaping the government's policy in regard to housing facilities and new town planning.

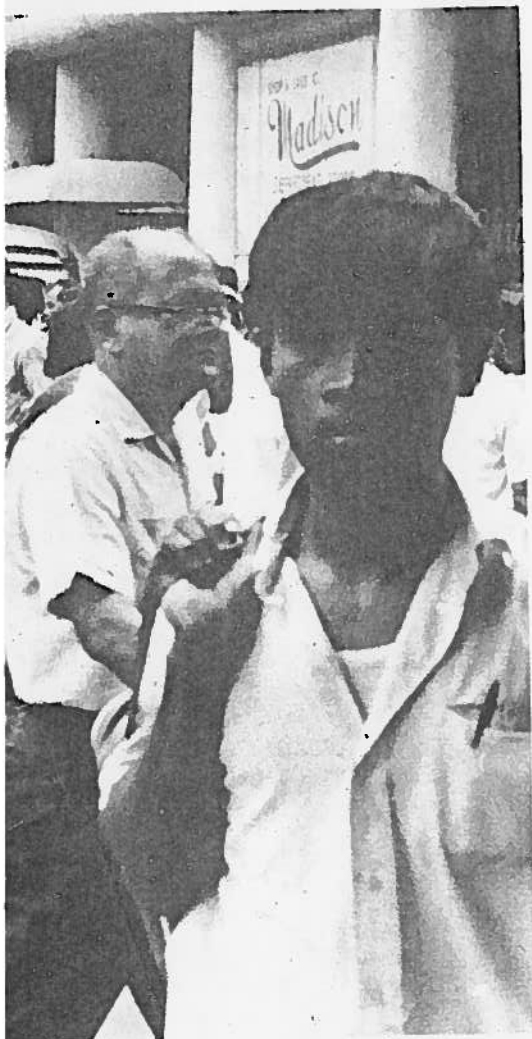
Bangkok

In Bangkok, the total Christian community is very small. The vast area covered by the city and the few people committed to an urban ministry make it imperative for the churches to concentrate their efforts in one urban district. An area could be chosen where the issues of poverty and justice are clear cut and where a ministry could be developed which would provide a pattern to ministries in other areas. There are many urban slum and squatter areas throughout the city. A municipal adviser of the Bangkok municipality estimates one hundred squatter and slum areas — many hidden from public view. The few pastors, priests and seminarians available for urban mission, should challenge the churches to look to the laity in the development of the ministries throughout the city. Students in the social sciences could be involved in the some aspect of the church's urban ministry. Students in architecture or engineering could be stimulated through church sponsored seminars to take an interest in the human aspects of urban development. There is also the possibility of tying allied agencies into the overall urban strategy of the church. For example, the YMCA camping and training programs could be related to the needs of an urban area in which the church is involved with young people.

In developing joint strategy in Bangkok, the Asian regional agencies of both the Roman Catholic and the Protestant churches could organize an ecumenical team of urban missionaries to visit Bangkok for a two to three month period to help establish ecumenical ties and to discover people in secular agencies concerned with improving life in the city.

Kuala Lumpur

Deep-seated racial tension shapes the



the human issue *Continued*

church's mission in Kuala Lumpur. The riots of May 1969 have left deep scars on the heart of Malaysia. The church's task of reconciliation is central to any work it undertakes in the city. If the Chinese, Malay, and Indians who compose Kuala Lumpur are to achieve a more human and less racially volatile urban environment, it becomes imperative that they be drawn around common issues.

The major issues in Kuala Lumpur — Petaling Jaya are low incomes and assurance of a place to live without threat of eviction. These problems are centered in the squatter *Kampongs*. They can become the focal point for a unified approach in the squatter *Kampongs*. Since the riot in May 1969, the government has been intent upon solving its urban squatter problem by relocation. In early 1970 it began by clearing out 500 families from the Central Business District. Only 20% of the families moved had the income and the desire to live in the multi-storied housing supplied by the government. It is assumed the other 30% resorted to squatting again. Since squatters compose 30% of Kuala Lumpur, the problem of finding adequate living space and sound living conditions become a primary issue. This can become a main concern of Christian mission in Kuala Lumpur — Petaling Jaya.

There already exist examples of the churches working together in community projects in the *Kampongs*. In the case of Kampong Muniandy, the problem is drainage. This Indian *Kampung* residing on an old tin mine. The community was subject to continuous flooding during rainy season which washed their houses away. A team of Roman Catholics and Methodists joined together to help the community solve the problem by digging a drainage ditch. This community action approach needs to be broadened to include the development of organizations to work for other community goals.

An ecumenical base for joint action mission is already laid with the conical people among those in the Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Methodist churches. Cooperative projects such as

the one begun in Kampong Muniandy could be built upon by creating an ecumenical committee to deal with the problem of urban squatters in a larger context. Such a committee would not only gather information but lay the foundation for community action projects. It could develop a strategy aimed at organizing people in the *Kampongs* to achieve land ownership; to win services (e.g., drainage, water, electricity, roads) from the national or municipal government, to establish job skills training programs for increasing employment possibilities. There are a number of people at the University of Malaysia who can be extremely helpful in providing information and giving insights into urban problems.

In the public housing areas, the committee could work toward the establishment of orientation and training programs to help people acclimate themselves to high-rise apartment living. This specific concern for housing could lay the basis for wider discussions among civic, university and government leaders around the human and social factors which enter into new town planning.

Djakarta

The program of urban-industrial mission is just beginning in Djakarta. The churches therefore, have several advantages. First, they can learn from the past twenty years of urban-industrial mission in Asia. This will save them much in time and energy. Second, they have the advantage of beginning the ministry from a national level, which can provide them an over-view of the issues facing the country. Let us look at the possibilities open to the National Christian Council.

The National Christian Council has the opportunity of working on two levels. It can plan an overall national strategy and at the same time develop programs and personnel within particular local urban areas. This can be done in conjunction with allied institutions, such as seminaries and other Christian agencies.

At the national level the National Christian Council has the possibility of directing its ministry to a crucial area of Indonesian life — the mass migration

into the urban areas of Java. The Indonesian government has placed the problem of rural-urban migration on the top of its priority list. In an effort to lessen the effects of this migration, particularly into Djakarta, the government has adopted a policy of social transmigration. This policy sends migrants into areas which need manpower for development. The government has given responsibility to each Djakarta urban district (*Tjamat*) to collect those it considers vagrants. Individuals and families are gathered from off the streets and along the canals and sent to rehabilitation camps (*banti-sozial*). The families are screened and trained for development work. They are then sent off to other islands needing workers for economic development projects (e.g., tin and rubber plantations, forest areas). Many never make the trip, but return to vagrancy in Djakarta or other cities.

The National Christian Council has the opportunity of planning its work from within an overall national perspective of the rural-urban problem. If it achieves this perspective, the work of the National Christian Council would be saved from the separate development of rural and urban-industrial work which now exists in most countries. It is apparent today that rural and urban problems are interrelated. The N.C.C. has the advantage of beginning its work within an integrated framework.

Beside the development of a national strategy there is also the need to begin specific urban and industrial ministries at the local level. More information is needed about the nature of Asian urbanization and an intimate knowledge of the issues which have evolved out of Indonesian urbanization. The N.C.C. also has the advantage of drawing upon the materials, the case studies and the examples of urban-industrial mission projects carried out in other Asian countries. It could at the same time conduct seminars for pastors and laymen on the city, and courses in the seminary on the church in an urban society. Information on Djakarta problems could be gained from development of field work and other practical involvement in spe-

cific urban projects by seminaries and allied agencies. Urban districts, where there are strong congregations, could be selected as focal points of urban mission. Urban congregations could be used as a base to work through the neighborhood association (*rukien* — *te-tangga*). These neighborhood associations could become the means for achieving leverage on behalf of local community improvement and for alerting people to wider city issues. Community action projects could be initiated in selected neighborhoods where there are clear cut issues which will encourage the participation of local citizens. Djakarta is latent with opportunities to develop an urban ministry which can be tied into a rural-urban strategy at the national level.

Community Action

In view of the growing ecumenical climate the urban situation provides opportunities for bringing people of different groups together in open, creative relationships. The complexity of the city necessitates drawing like-minded people together in cooperative efforts. Traditional church channels are often restrictive and official programs too church-centered to provide the ground for ecumenical approaches to urban problems. Those in urban mission should be encouraged to explore *ad hoc* types of action programs which draw people together across religious lines around an urgent need. Mass-based organizations and community action provide the best ground for this approach.

The Tondo foreshoreland, a reclaimed section of the Manila port area, provides an example. The foreshoreland area includes the piers and warehouses for interisland shipping. Many of the squatters living in the area work as stevedores on the docks or as vendors in the nearby canteens and market area.

Since 1950 the government has followed a policy of relocating squatters who are on land planned for other purposes. The evicted squatters have been relocated to resettlement sites outside Manila. The squatter resettlement schemes have been inadequate. They have been located too far from employment opportunities. Transportation

back into the city has been too expensive for the incomes earned by the squatters.

The United Church of Christ in the Philippines had been working among the North Harbor squatters since 1959. A program of the Committee on Industrial Life and Vocations sought to develop "community organization" in 1965. The Mabuhay Community Organizations was the outcome of its work in 1967. The Roman Catholic Church, through the Franciscan sisters and a Jesuit Priest, had been working in the Barrio Mag-saysay squatter area of the Tondo foreshoreland in the middle 1960's. Recognizing the need to bring the work of the two groups together a series of exploratory meetings were held in August 1969.

Out of the meetings an ecumenical strategy brought about the organization of a broad-based Council of Tondo Foreshoreland Community Organizations. This took place in September 1969. From the initial cooperative effort a larger ecumenical body has been formed to carry out the training of Filipino community organizers. The Philippine Ecumenical Council on Community Organization is presently setting up a community organizers training program using the Tondo foreshoreland as its laboratory.

Regional Strategy

In all Southeast Asian cities there is an overriding concern for the squatter population and its effect upon urban growth. The people concerned include university professors from many disciplines, municipal advisors, urban planners, housing officials.

The Asian churches — Roman Catholic and Protestant — have a role to play in the development of the region's cities. They can help sponsor regional conferences on the planning of Asian cities from a human point of view inviting people similar to those suggested above. Such a meeting could sort out major issues confronting the Southeast Asian city, look at attempted solutions, and develop guidelines for greater sensitivity in the planning of cities for human growth and social fulfillment.

Conclusion

The strategy for the churches is to strengthen those agencies, religious or secular, which have possibilities of providing new humanizing thrusts in an urban society. There is a need to draw attention to those groups which are striving to become part of an urban society, but do not have the channels to achieve power and justice. There is a need for the churches to be close at hand in order to facilitate the participation of these groups in decision-making for their communities. There is a need to work for those changes in their living conditions which will enhance their self-respect, self-formation and self-determination. There is a need to make sure that those in authority take account of the problems of the poor in the formulation of policy. There is a need to keep those in authority mindful of the human issues involved in the planning and in building the city, so that expediency does not replace sensitivity to the human aspects of urban living.



Republic of the Philippines
Department of Public Works and Communications
BUREAU OF POSTS
MANILA
SWORN STATEMENT
(Required by Act 2580)

The undersigned, ROSAURO C. CRUZ editor/managing editor/business manager/owner/publisher, of "IMPACT" (title of publication), published Monthly (frequency of issue), in English (language in which printed), at 2655 F. B. Harrison Street, Pasay City (office of publication), after having been duly sworn in accordance with law, hereby submits the following statement of ownership, management, circulation, etc. which is required by Act 2580, as amended by Commonwealth Act No. 201.

Editor: Rev. Fr. Cornelius Breed — 2655 F. B. Harrison, Pasay City
Managing Editor: Rev. Fr. Cornelius Breed — 2655 F. B. Harrison, Pasay City
Business Manager: Rosauro C. Cruz
Owner: Impact Magazine
Publisher: Impact Magazine
Printer: Social Communication Center
Office of Publication: 2655 F. B. Harrison Street, Pasay City

In case of publication other than daily, total number of copies printed and circulated of the last issue dated September 1970.

- 1. Sent to paid subscribers 14,500
- 2. Sent to others than paid subscribers ... 2,500

Total 17,000

ROSAURO C. CRUZ

(Signature)

Business Manager

(Title or Designation)

SUBSCRIBED AND SWORN to before me this 1st day of October, 1970 at Manila, the affiant exhibiting his/Residence Certificate No. 4335697 issued at Manila on January 23, 1970.

(Officer Administering Oath)

NOTE: This form is exempt from the payment of documentary stamp tax.