

13 February 1981

2 CMP

# Abortion Bill: too much —and too little

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The new law on abortion met with a variety of extreme reactions from the community yesterday.

While the Roman Catholic Church in Hongkong adamantly opposed the new law, community leaders said it was not liberal enough.

Under the new law, it will be easier for an abortion to be approved for girls under 16 years, for women who have been raped and for those diagnosed as being pregnant with an abnormal foetus.

Yet, despite the passing of the controversial Bill, the Roman Catholic Church remained firmly opposed to abortion.

"What is legal is not necessarily moral. Wrong is always wrong even when the majority says it is right," the Roman Catholic Bishop of Hongkong, the Most Rev John Baptist Wu, said in a statement issued last night.

"Abortion is not a Catholic issue only, and it is not even a specifically religious issue. It is a fundamental human concern and as such it affects us all."

The bishop reiterated the church's teaching that abortion, at whatever stage of pregnancy, is wrong.

In proclaiming this, he said, the church speaks for human rights and the dignity of us all, not just for the unborn.

He said that a stand

against abortion is a stand for humanity.

"The unborn, whether suspected of a handicap or not, have the same right to life that you and I enjoy.

"If we ignore or deny this right, we discriminate against the weak and helpless."

Bishop Wu said the church wants to uphold and protect the right to life belonging to every individual human being, irrespective of faith, age or race "even if the law should fail in its duty to protect the weakest members of our society."

He said the question of abortion poses many problems — moral, physical, psychological and economic, and a constructive solution cannot be easily found.

The complexity of this sad social dilemma demands that we make honest efforts to work together, he added.

Yet, he said, we should not opt for "facile" answers that can only fragment our community.

"We must encourage one another to be more compassionate and concerned for those in distress, particularly the young and those who cannot cope."

A milder objection came from pressure groups which have been campaigning against the amendment to the legislation.

These campaign fighters were dissatisfied with the new law, but they said they are prepared for the worst.

They vowed that this will not dampen their future efforts to help those who do not want abortion.

"There is nothing we can do now that it has become law. But we hope that it will not make people believe that our moral standards will become loose," the chairman of the Birthright Society, Miss Alice Wong, said.

She said the Government should spell out clearly details of the new law, especially on some ambiguous points.

The law, she suggested, should be reviewed from time to time by a working party commissioned to oversee its proper working.

Her view is echoed by the honorary secretary of the Action Group on Abortion Bill, Miss Therese Howard.

In order to see how the law is working, Miss Howard said the Government should try to improve its statistics on all matters related to abortion.

"It should keep more accurate statistics in future in order to review the situation."

The lack of statistics, she said, has actually hampered the evaluation of the local scene in the past.

Like the Birthright Society, the group said there is a great need now to educate the public on all issues related to abortion.

Some community leaders, on the other hand, have advocated a more liberal law — abortion given on demand.

They maintained that the final decision to have an abortion should rest with the women themselves, and not their parents or medical practitioners.

"No matter what the law or the doctors say, a woman will still have an abortion if she decides to," the chairman of the Christian Industrial Committee, Dr L. K. Ding

(Cont'd on Page 14 Col 2)

# Abortion Bill draws mixed reactions

(Cont'd from Page 11)

said. Dr Ding pointed out that the debate in the Legislative Council was "futile."

"What is the point of arguing over something that we have given on humanitarian grounds?" he said.

"In cases where pregnancy is unwanted, it is a frightening experience for the persons concerned," Dr Ding said.

An Urban Councillor, Dr Denny Huang, agreed with Dr Ding that those who opposed the law are "religiously or socially biased."

"The right to have an abortion should be regarded as a human right to women," said Dr Ding.

"It protects them from unwanted babies and miseries," he added.

"People faithful to their religion or philosophy can choose not to have it, but they should respect others' choice."

Allegations that the change in law will lead to immorality or promiscuity were regarded as "unfounded" by both of them.

Dr Huang said similar allegations had been made years ago before the introduction of The Pill.

"But it turned out that the situation is not as bad as people predicted," Dr Huang added.

"I believe that our girls are strongly bound by social sanctions and strict Chinese moral codes."

He added that pills, abortions and other related measures in fact offer "practical help" to the public.

The two leaders agreed that educating the public on the risks of the operations and the alternatives is important.

"We should also try to direct more emphasis to family life education such as the handling of sexual relationships."

They believed that the number of women going to China for abortions might not drop.

Dr Huang said most women decide to have abortions because of financial or social reasons.

But the new law only legalises the operation on medical grounds or extreme situations such as being sex victims.

"Therefore, most of them will go to China or elsewhere to try their luck," Dr Huang said.