

Social Conscience

At the Dedication and Opening Ceremony of the new South Wing last Friday, Archbishop Peter Kwong left us with two main thoughts. Firstly, he said that while the new South Wing is a wonderful building today, there will come a time in the future when it will become old and like other buildings before it, will be replaced. The second point that Archbishop Peter made was that each of us needs to take our responsibility to the community more seriously and to be involved in community issues and community service. I would like to reflect on those two points this morning.

Over the weekend I was out looking for Christmas presents. Like many other people I started in the large electronic shops and focused on the latest digital cameras for sale. It has been two years since I bought my digital camera and what I noticed straight away was that the new cameras offered more mega-pixels, a larger display screen, greater optical zoom and a host of other features than the camera I purchased some twenty four months ago. I also noticed that the newer cameras were also a lot cheaper than the one that I had bought. This was also true of other items. In another part of the store, the floor-to-ceiling walls of plasma and LCD televisions were not only larger in size but also considerably cheaper in price than even twelve months ago.

The quality and features of electronic goods is definitely improving and the prices are falling due to the insatiable demand. However, it would be wrong to say that the latest digital cameras or flat-screen televisions are by any means 'cheap'. While these items are not as expensive as they were previously, a digital camera still represents about a month's wage for a domestic helper, while a flat-screen television is beyond the means of many Hong Kong families.

It is the speed of change that is so dramatic. With Christmas approaching, I am sure that you are sending out some very direct hints to your parents as to what you would like to receive as a present. But you might like to think back three or five Christmas's and recall what presents you received at that time. It would not surprise me if the presents you were given then have already become outdated, particularly if the gifts were electronic. Many of those items have become disposable, to be thrown away when the new model or version comes along. This is particularly the case with mobile telephones, where twelve months is becoming a long time to keep the same cell phone.

I am sure that we can all come up with examples of goods that we have bought but no longer possess. However, would we have been so keen to hand over our money if we had known that we would throw the item away in the near future? Any of your teachers could give you plenty of examples of things that they have purchased in the past but no longer use or own. We live in a world that is driven by material wealth and where so many goods are viewed as having a use-by-date.

Archbishop Peter reminded us that the most important part of this College is not the new South Wing but the education that is received by each student within its walls. The

buildings will come and go but the knowledge, understanding and skills that you acquire will remain with you for life.

Archbishop Peter also urged each of you play your part in helping others in the community. The Archbishop pointed out that St. Paul's College boys have always been willing to help those less fortunate than themselves and not afraid of speak their mind on issues that affect the community. At the 155th Anniversary Reunion Dinner on Saturday evening, Archbishop Peter referred to the problem of air pollution that is seriously undermining the quality of life for all people in Hong Kong's. Yesterday was a beautiful day. The sky was blue, a fresh wind was blowing from the north and most of the smoke from along the Pearl River was being blown out to sea. From Victoria Peak you could see all the way to Causeway Bay and Kowloon, and even parts of Lantau Island. But what is sad is that such days do not come along very often.

Earlier this year, the World Bank reported that of the 20 most polluted cities in the world, sixteen are in China. The country's worst pollution problems come from its heavy dependence on coal. Indeed, another recent survey stated that China now consumes more coal than the United States, the European Union and Japan combined. It is difficult to see a solution to this major problem, at least in the short-term. The colossal growth of China's industrial sector shows no sign of slowing, nor does the overseas demand for China's products.

As Archbishop Peter said, St. Paul's College boys have always been encouraged to be independent thinkers, to accept leadership roles and to be active in the community. Many of our old boys have entered politics, become university lecturers, and moved into social work. Topics like air pollution are important issues and need to be spoken about. I encourage each of you form your own opinion about important social issues that affect the lives of so many people.

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