

Convention News

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

GROUP 2 has spent two meetings discussing the adult catechumenate. At the most recent meeting (June 9), a member of the drafting commission introduced a revised version of the long recommendation (n.7) that sums up the draft document's thinking on this question. In the new version care is taken to bring out the distinction between enquiry classes and pre-catechesis: these differ in the aim; the former simply provide the interested with information about the Catholic faith and answer questions, whereas the latter aims at bringing to faith in Christ one who wants to believe. The recommendation also treats of the catechumenate—the formal preparation for baptism—and the need for keeping close contact with the newly baptized.

One speaker thought that the division of the preparation for baptism into these three stages applied to educated persons only; while for the many who turn to God from the worship of spirits the process is less complicated and there seems no need for a long drawn out programme. Another delegate asked whether it was possible to assign definite periods of time to the three stages; whether the same instructor should supervise the individual's progress through the different stages or pass him on to another instructor at the completion of each stage. Other speakers stressed the difficulty of laying down definite lengths of time since some needed more time than others.

A person could have studied the catechism for 10 or 12 months, one speaker reminded the Group, and yet have little or nothing of the Christian spirit. The important point, he went on, was to be able to tell when a person was ready for baptism. Some suggested that the only valid criterion is the living of a Christian life. Another delegate felt it is incorrect to state that the aim of the catechumenate is to give an intensive formation. This speaker maintained that the catechumenate in the early Church did not consist only in teaching a set of rules, but was the immediate preparation for baptism; hence the proper time for instruction classes is during the stage of pre-catechesis; the period of catechesis should last about three months and should be the final preparation for baptism through the liturgy and spiritual retreats.

Voting took place on the several different proposals that make up the recommendation (n.7, pg.21f). They were passed with large majorities with the understanding that the Redrafting Committee would take into consideration the views that had been expressed during the debates. In addition to those mentioned above, some other points were made, e.g. those attending enquire classes, in addition to receiving an introduction to the Catholic religion, should be told how Christianity is lived out in daily life; in the stage of pre-catechesis, stress should be put on prayer (community and individual) and on active participation in the life of the Church.

A good deal of discussion preceded the vote on the motion whether mention should be made of a definite length of time for the presentation of the Christian message prior to baptism. Some favoured a minimum for all with the possibility of individual exceptions; others thought something vaguer would be better, e.g. "a period of time commensurate with the importance of bringing someone to the Catholic faith"; others again felt that the main criterion of fitness for baptism should not be any fixed period of time but the faithful practice of a Christian way of life. It was finally decided by 28 votes to 7, with 7 abstentions, to include some mention of a period of time as a general guideline for the diocese.

EDUCATION

THE first topic for discussion at the last meeting of Group 3 (June 10) was a point not included in the draft document but which had been raised at the previous meeting: curriculum and textbooks for primary schools. The first speaker of the evening was of the opinion that these questions are too detailed for treatment by the Convention: they are matters to be decided upon by individual school principals. Another speaker who stated that the RK textbooks at present in use in many primary schools are too difficult, was reminded that this matter is being dealt with by the Religious Instruction Group. It is not possible for Catholic schools to operate in complete independence of the ED, another delegate maintained, hence the document should not state: we want this, we want that. The ED can only advise concerning the manner of teaching and of textbooks, a lay delegate pointed out, adding that the ED consults schools in many matters and notably with regard to RK textbooks. We should not make light of the recommendations of the ED, another speaker said; they have the facilities for conducting extensive research and can draw on men of experience in educational matters.

The draft in section 17 commends the type of education which takes for its object "the full development of the child, his moral and social qualities." A delegate asked for some practical illustrations as to how this lofty programme can be carried out. Another remarked that often the curriculum is blamed for faults that really arise from misplaced emphasis, when too much stress is laid on one particular area to the neglect of others, thereby putting obstacles in the way of this full development.

A delegate appealed for the inclusion of a section in the draft that would set out general

principles of education, including moral formation, from the point of view of the Catholic school. This should be a statement having relevance for all the stages of education and would also serve the useful function of giving an inner unity to the whole draft document. He suggested setting up a special subcommittee to draw up such a statement of principles. A member of the drafting commission explained that the reason for the absence of a general unifying statement e.g. on the philosophy of education, could be traced to the way in which the document was compiled by various subcommittees, each dealing with one specific area of education.

The question was also raised as to whether there existed any organisation by which cooperation among Catholic primary schools could be effected. A member of the CEC present reported that last February the Council had sent out a circular suggesting the setting up of just such an organisation, but had received only four replies from primary schools! As the document deals in a later chapter (Sec. 174) with the organisation of educational groups in the diocese, it was decided to postpone debate on this issue.

Towards the end of the meeting the question of the election of a Redrafting Committee came up for discussion. As a result of the views expressed it was decided that the revised draft should be written in Chinese and then translated into English, and that the committee should consist of four members, one of whom should be responsible for the English version. The election of these four persons will be on the agenda of the next meeting.

LAITY

AT their last meeting (June 11) the members of Group 4 chose a Redrafting Committee of three from among a short list of candidates whose names had been suggested from the floor. Those elected were Father Juniper Lee, Mr. Dominic Cheung and Sister Marie Pauline Wong. It was further decided that the revised draft be written in Chinese and translated into English.

Discussion then started on section 23 of the draft document, which lists various ways by which families can respond to the demands for active involvement and concern for others made on them by Christian charity. A delegate questioned the relevance to Hong Kong of two or three of the ways mentioned, namely the adoption of abandoned infants, hospitality to strangers and assistance in managing schools. Another speaker thought that the most important item on the list was that which urges families to strive to obtain for others a fairer share in the benefits of an expanding economy, in other words to fight for social justice. However this point could easily be overlooked since it comes at the end of a long list, the delegate continued, suggesting that this point should be given more emphasis by explaining it in greater detail and adding some practical illustrations.

Another example of the family apostolate cited by the draft is the providing of material assistance to adolescents. A delegate thought that this should be changed to "helping young people to solve their problems." Another speaker pointed out that the list is a quotation from the Vatican II document on the Laity and that therefore the wording cannot be changed; at most, phrases that do not apply may be omitted. This same speaker then gave an example of material assistance to adolescents that was relevant to Hong Kong, namely making available places where dance-parties could be held.

A number of motions were then proposed concerning changes in the section under discussion. The first motion called for the removal of the words *People of God* where the text describes the scope of Christian charity: our charity should extend to all men. The next motion proposed deleting mention of adopting abandoned infants as an example of family apostolate not very relevant to Hong Kong. Several speakers thought that this example should remain, saying that giving orphaned children the opportunity to grow up in family surroundings is a very Christian thing; care however should be taken to ensure that the adopting parents will treat the child well. It was pointed out by another speaker that the SWD is very careful in recommending adoption orders. On a vote the motion was defeated.

What does the giving of assistance in the managing of schools mean, a delegate asked. In reply another delegate suggested that the phrase should be taken in a very broad sense so as to include activities like PTA, helping in fund-raising bazaars, etc. Other speakers pointed out that it is not necessary to try to apply each and every phrase of the Vatican II quotation in section 23 to the Hong Kong situation. The importance of the citation stems more from the fact that it sets out the basic principle of Christian charity than from the practical examples that it gives. On a vote it was decided to retain mention of assisting in the management of schools.

Discussion on this section ended with a vote to accept the general ideas it contained, with the recommendation that the text be rewritten by the redrafting committee and submitted to the Group at a later date for approval.

In the little time remaining the debate moved on to section 24. This will be the first item on the agenda of the next meeting.

The officials of the Working Group announced that some days previously they had held an informal discussion among themselves on the points that would be dealt with at the meeting. They had agreed that such informal sessions had a definite value and could help improve the quality of the debates at the formal meetings. They therefore invited all interested delegates to attend an informal discussion at the Catholic Centre (16th floor) on Thursday, June 18, in preparation for the next meeting of the Group.

Programme of Forthcoming Meetings of Working Groups

Liturgy and Sacraments	:	Monday, June 22
Religious Instruction	:	Tuesday, June 23
Education	:	Wednesday, June 24
Laity	:	Thursday, June 25
Priestly Life	:	Friday, June 26