

Convention News

SOCIAL MISSION OF CHURCH

At the last meeting of Group 7 (December 1) the section of the draft document dealing with pornography and prostitution was discussed.

The text in describing the situation as it exists in Hong Kong, states that "nearly every newsvendor and bookstall owner displays a wide selection of pornographical literature. . . ." One speaker felt that this was exaggerated. He said that many of the magazines on display at "nearly every newsvendor and bookstall" are indeed sexy or indecent, but pornography is too strong a term to use to describe them. A member of the original drafting commission maintained that many people are unaware of the real nature of many of these magazines and it is for this very reason that the draft recommends that "mature members of parish organisations should be deputed to obtain and read the contents of current pornographical literature in order to realise the extent of this problem."

A priest delegate stated that the law in Hong Kong is strict as regards pornography; the problem is its lax enforcement. He thought that this might well be an area to which the activities of the proposed diocesan or ecumenical anti-corruption committee could be extended. A problem regarding law enforcement was brought to the attention of the Group, namely the labour involved in translating offensive printed matter into English in order to bring it to the attention of the courts.

Some speakers felt that the approach of the draft was too negative and this was reflected in the Group's discussion which was chiefly concerned with the suppression of indecent literature, films, etc. We should take a more positive view, it was suggested; the draft should recommend the need for wholesome books, pictorial magazines, films. Since we cannot ask Government to take measures in this matter unless these enjoy the support of a wide section of the population, the importance of influencing public opinion was stressed. Moreover, it was pointed out, in view of the recently published findings of a U.S.A. government-appointed commission to examine into the social effects of pornography, a simple statement asking Government "to impose stricter control over the spread of pornographical literature" is hardly adequate; we must spell out the reasons for such a request, e.g. the protection of the immature from shameless exploitation, the upholding of the ordinary citizen's right to walk the streets without having his sensibilities outraged.

In reply to a request for clarification, a lawyer-delegate explained that, although a number of persons are brought to court to answer charges of publishing obscene matter, more often the police enforce the law by threatening

legal action against publishers of pornography who do not immediately mend their ways.

A lay delegate deplored the general lowering of moral standards noticeable over the last ten years or so. He said that we should not accept the specious argument that what was definitely beyond the moral pale some years ago could be tolerated today. He suggested that the Church should set up its own moral standards; these should not be overstrict but should take into account traditional Chinese attitudes.

With regard to films, a delegate proposed introducing a system of official classification. Another delegate, however, pointed out that in the experience of some European countries, an X certificate served only to increase a film's drawing power! Government, another speaker said, has often been asked to pass legislation which would ban young people under 16 from films judged unsuitable for children. Government's refusal to act was based on the alleged difficulty of estimating the age of young people. Then there is the added problem; who is to enforce such a prohibition? Would cinema-owners be likely to do so? On the other hand, would not such legislation at least have a deterrent effect? Or would perhaps its obvious non-enforcement only bring the law into disrepute?

With regard to prostitution, several points of law were clarified by legal experts present. The delegates learned, for example, that prostitution in itself is not a crime, but that soliciting is, and living off immoral earnings; that one lady does not constitute a brothel, etc. A delegate felt that more police action should be taken against "barbershops" that remain open until the early hours of the morning when no respectable barber would be plying his trade. Another delegate praised the effectiveness of an "early warning system" in use in some countries as a means of putting pressure on such establishments after police raids fail to produce sufficient evidence to warrant court action: police stationed on the street outside these establishments warn would-be clients of the risk of unpleasant publicity they run on being caught inside when a raid is carried out.

At this point, and again in the question of girlie bars, the Group was reminded of the need for a more positive approach. Outright suppression entails the risk of driving undesirable activities underground. Efforts on an ecumenical basis are needed to influence public opinion as a means of raising standards, and to educate people towards more acceptable ways of employing their leisure time. One speaker pointed out that there are 200,000 students in Catholic schools. If through these children other members of their families can be reached, we have to hand the means of influencing upwards of a million people.

A nun pointed out the difficulties involved in helping prostitutes. Many of them, she said, are women in their 40's, with little or no education, who cannot make a living in any other way; they therefore find themselves trapped in this way of life and see no practical avenue of escape. Furthermore, there will be never be a shortage of recruits to the ranks of bar-girls as long as these can earn far more money than university graduates.

GROUP 8

On Wednesday, December 2, Group 8 (Communications Media) failed to achieve a quorum and so the meeting was cancelled. This Group has almost finished its work. In accordance with a resolution adopted some meetings ago, the delegates will meet just once more. Thus Group 8 will be the first of the Convention Working Groups to complete its task. This is due partly to the fact that the document on the Communications Media was one of the shorter Convention documents. However, the principal reason for the Group's being able to finish so soon is that it was lucky to have among its members two or three who were willing to do a

great deal of hard work in between the meetings, gathering material and drawing up the revised document.

GROUP 9

On Thursday, December 3, the delegates of Group 9 (Ecumenism) heard reports from the members of the Redrafting Committee. The Committee finds itself in difficulties. Discussion of the draft document has been completed, but more members are now needed by the Redrafting Committee to help in the work of revision. A number of names were suggested at the meeting. But it was not easy to find people prepared to serve on the Committee as the number of delegates who regularly attend the meetings of Group 9 is not large.

GROUP 10

Group 10 (Government of Diocese) did not meet on Friday, December 4, the evening of the Pope's visit. This Group will meet again in a fortnight's time, on Friday, December 18.

Programme of Working Group Meetings during Coming Week

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| Religious | Monday, December 14 |
| Evangelisation | Monday, December 14 |
| Social Mission of Church | Tuesday, December 15 |
| Communications Media | Wednesday, December 16 |
| Ecumenism | Thursday, December 17 |
| Government of Diocese | Friday, December 18 |

Place: Caritas Centre, Boundary Street, Kowloon.

Time: 8 p.m. to 10 p.m.