

Convention News

THE first two-week cycle of meetings of Working Groups ended on Saturday, March 7th with the meeting of Group n.11 (Evangelization). By that date all the eleven Groups (with the exception of Education and Liturgy, which put off their first meeting to await the publication of their draft documents) had met to discuss their document. The second cycle began on Monday, March 9th, when the Liturgy Group met for the first time. As there will be no meetings during Holy Week, the third cycle will start on Easter Monday (March 30th).

Eighty-seven people (of whom 28 were members of the public) attended the meeting of Group 7 (Social Dimension of the Church) on March 3rd. In the Introduction to the draft document on this topic, three general social problems were listed as reflecting the conscientious concern of those who had written to the Convention: labour, the poor and medical services. The Vice-Convenor, Mr. Paul K. C. Tsui (who had prepared a ten-page comment on the draft: this has been circulated among the members of the Working Group), asked whether these were the only matters which gave rise to problems among the faithful. He appealed therefore to priests to give the Working Group the benefit of their priestly experience in order to broaden the scope of the discussions.

In the course of general comments from the floor on the document, several interesting points were raised: it was stated that many of society's ills resulted from the lack of a supernatural outlook: we should understand that on the Last Day we shall be judged according to our treatment of our neighbour; the draft should come closer to the daily life of the laity: it seemed to some to be a professional paper prepared for professionals: it did not contain enough about what the ordinary Christian can do to remedy the present situation. Another speaker remarked that the draft was largely taken up with the problems of the poor: but the rich had their problems too: their responsibilities and obligations to society need stressing.

The hope was expressed that the laity present at the meeting would speak up: priests and religious were too far removed from real life: they had a great deal to learn. The Chairman of the Drafting Commission, Mr. Louis Tong, indicated what might be some of the more controversial points raised in the document: e.g. dialogue with Communists, legislation regarding the percentage of working places individual factories should allocate to the disabled, the assessment of a family living wage, compulsory education up to 14 (or better still 16) years of age, an anti-corruption bureau sponsored by the diocese, the prohibition of the employment of bar-girls. The Convenor, Mr. Leo Goodstadt, stressed the importance of accurate statements in the document: care must be taken to eliminate all errors of fact. He had earlier put the problem of the nature of the document: was it to be a statement of the highest ideals we should be aiming at or of rather more practical goals which would win wide acceptance. At its next meeting, on March 17th, this Group will discuss sections I-III of the draft under three main headings: a) faults in Government structure and policies; b) weaknesses in our social and political outlook; c) dialogue with Communists.

On the following evening Working Group n.8 (Communications Media) met. The Convenor, Sr. Beatrice Leung, invited comments from those present on the draft document as a whole. Some speakers remarked that there was need for a richer theological introduction; the document should avail of the principles laid down in the Vatican Council: it was only in the light of these principles that the practical conclusions proposed could be judged. The Introduction should point out why the communications media are so important and encourage teachers to train their students in their use and appreciation. It was felt also that there should be some discussion of the use to which the Church could put the media as means of spreading the Gospel: should they be used directly or indirectly for this purpose?

A theme that kept recurring during the evening was the ecumenical aspect of the matter under discussion. It was suggested that here was an obvious field for close co-operation among all Christian Churches in Hong Kong. Some of those present at the meeting considered there was need for experts to share their specialist knowledge of the media with the members of the Working Group. Accordingly it was decided to invite some lay people with experience in these areas to future meetings. The Group decided to discuss the contents of the Introduction at their next meeting (March 18th). There were 45 people present.

Working Group n. 9 (Ecumenism) met on Thursday, March 5th. The first item on the agenda was the election of secretaries. Miss Loretta Tsang and Mr. Hector Wan, both delegates from St. Teresa's Parish, were chosen as English and Chinese secretaries respectively. After a vote to remain together as a single group, the discussion opened on the draft document in general. Some thought it should be more practical; others pointed out that misunderstandings in future would be avoided if the practical conclusions were seen to rest on sound theoretical foundations. It should be indicated clearly why ecumenism is so important: that there is something wrong with the Christianity of the person who neglects this area; Christian unity must be seen as something intimately bound up with the nature of faith. It would be useful, it was thought, to set out some of the theology of ecumenism, even if many of these points are already found in the Vatican Council documents and in the Diocesan Ecumenical Guidelines: it was felt that the Convention documents would be more widely read than these others and that this opportunity for educating the faithful ought not be neglected.

Some speakers favoured a factual description of the ecumenical situation in Hong Kong, without however trying to classify Church groups as being more or less enthusiastic and involved: besides being impertinent, this would be unfair, given the fluid situation and the constant efforts being made to change people's outlooks. The document stresses more than once the need for conversion, for a change of heart. One speaker asked for an explanation and elaboration of this notion; another considered it so important as to merit a special chapter to itself. This Working Group will hold its second meeting on Thursday, March 19th.