

Convention News

UP to this, Working Group 11 (Evangelisation) has been holding its meetings on Saturday evenings. This time does not seem very convenient for priests. Some Group members hope that more priests, especially those occupied in the parishes, might attend the meetings if these were held on a different evening. During the last couple of weeks approaches have been made, though unsuccessfully, to two other Groups with a view to an exchange of evenings. Now that Group 6 (Religious) has suspended its meetings for the time being, the Evangelisation Group will change to Monday, starting from June 15. This is only a temporary measure until the meetings of Group 6 begin again.

LITURGY

The members of Working Group 1 discussed sections 6, 7, and 8 of chapter 1 at their last meeting (May 25). Section 6 opens with the words: "All the acts of our daily life are a spiritual sacrifice pleasing to God." Someone thought that this statement was not very clear and asked whether all human actions—stealing, for instance—were and could be a spiritual sacrifice. And if not all our acts, then which ones? Another suggested that we should perhaps say: all our actions *should be* a spiritual sacrifice, since all human activity, given the proper intention, can be offered to God. A delegate pointed out that the New Testament speaks oftener about spiritual sacrifice than any other. Unless the Christian offers the sacrifice of his daily living to God, he added, he will not be ready to take part effectively in the Mass.

Section 7 goes through the various ceremonies of the Mass, adding short notes on their connection with daily living. One speaker, commenting on the few lines which deal with the exchange of the sign of peace, wondered whether people really understood the gesture and the greeting that accompanied it. Our Lord cautioned those about to offer sacrifice to be reconciled with their brethren before bringing their gift to the altar; but the *pax* ceremony is now within the Mass: does this imply it has acquired a different meaning?

Section 8 deals with liturgical celebrations for various special groups (teenagers, children, workers, students, etc.) and says that these are to be fostered, adding that "in these circumstances special theme Masses should be allowed." These theme Masses did not create much difficulty: the question debated was whether special Masses for small groups are to be encouraged. One speaker stressed the fact that the ordinary parish Masses provide a unique opportunity for people of very varied backgrounds (racial, social, educational, economic) to come together. This represents an important value that should be safeguarded. On the other hand it is true that small closely-knit groups do need occasions for developing a deeper intimacy which special liturgical celebrations can provide. It must not be forgotten, another delegate said, that special group Masses are a regular feature of

the diocese, e.g. in religious communities, schools, hostels, etc. Are these to be encouraged? Many felt that special Masses should continue to be available for already existing groups such as these.

The term *small group* used in the discussion was ambiguous and a number of speakers searched for a distinction that would bring greater clarity to the issue. A few people mentioned children's Masses; while it was good for youngsters to attend Mass at which simplified prayers and suitable readings are used, the advantages resulting from the whole family worshipping together are not to be overlooked.

These were some of the views expressed during the course of the discussion; though at the end it was still not clear whether special group Masses should be encouraged or not.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

The section of the draft document on the Adult Catechumenate with its corresponding recommendation (n. 7) was the topic for discussion at the last (May 26) meeting of Group 2. A statement in this section pointing to the need for contact between members of the Christian community and catechumens provoked the query: how are these members of the Christian community to be formed for this task? It could be done, it was suggested in reply, through sermons and parish renewal programmes. However, what the draft here wished to stress was a more general attitude, namely that baptism is not a purely private act but one whereby the catechumen enters a living community.

Is pre-catechesis always necessary for catechumens, as the recommendation seems to suggest? What of those who have already had long contact with Christianity, for instance in a Catholic school? It was pointed out that pre-catechesis was necessary in every case, but need not always immediately precede entry into the catechumenate. Although all modern catechetical writing stresses the importance of pre-catechesis for enquirers, a delegate pointed out, this stage of the journey towards faith and baptism was often omitted in Hong Kong. The new Taiwan catechism, for example, has several chapters devoted to a discussion of ordinary human values. Another delegate stated that many parishes in Hong Kong do have enquiry classes where those attending receive a course in pre-evangelisation; if such classes could be a feature of every parish, many more would wish to enrol as catechumens. It is a question of publicity, another speaker claimed; our document should offer concrete suggestions about publicising these classes.

A priest-delegate remarked that the draft says nothing about the length of time to be given to catechesis; at present in many parishes it lasts for at least six months. With regard to publicity, he added, cooperation among two or more parishes in the production of posters, etc. might help towards publicising enquiry classes. Some were in favour of a uniform length of

time for catechesis in the diocese, with the various steps in the process clearly programmed, so that if a catechumen moved house he could continue receiving catechesis easily in his new parish. However, it was objected that catechumens differ with regard to ability, educational background, etc. and hence will progress at different rates.

A further suggestion was the setting up of special catechumenate centres. These would bring together small groups of catechumens from several parishes and ensure that they would be entrusted into the hands of competent catechists. Catechumens would, of course, return to their parishes for baptism. Another suggestion urged that enquiry classes should be held in places other than parish rooms. Would the enquirers would be happier on neutral ground where attendance would not appear to commit them to anything.

Towards the end of the meeting a certain ambiguity crept into the discussion. Some speakers made a distinction between pre-catechesis and enquiry classes—a distinction which was not apparent to many others. A speaker who supported the distinction explained that an enquiry class aimed at nothing more than intellectual knowledge; pre-catechesis added the further element of a rudimentary commitment.

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EDUCATION

The members of Group 3 continued their discussions on primary education at a meeting on May 27. On the question of the medium of instruction the draft document quotes approvingly a statement of the 4th Asian Regional Conference of the IOCE: "Even where parents may favour a foreign language for reasons of better educational and economic advancement, Catholic schools should support the national language." A speaker said that little discussion was needed here; the real question was how to teach Chinese in an up-to-date, attractive way. Another drew attention to the problem arising from parental pressure: primary schools in Hong Kong tend to be rated in accordance with the amount of time they give to the study of English. In Anglo-Chinese primary schools, especially, parents urge their children to write and speak English as much as possible. Should Catholic schools follow this trend? Another problem, particularly for NT schools, arose from the different dialects that are spoken. Was the solution to opt for Mandarin?

In Anglo-Chinese primary schools, it was claimed, many of

the classes in which various subjects are taught, are in fact little more than English lessons. Someone remarked that the policy of Government is to subsidize vernacular primary schools only. One speaker brought up the problem of catering for the needs of Portuguese and Eurasian children. Another pointed out that the most important thing is to teach the child a deep respect for the local language. Finally a resolution was passed "that the use of the mother tongue should be given its proper place in primary education; a foreign language can and should be included in the curriculum but never as a medium of instruction."

Discussion then moved on to the "happy and cheerful atmosphere" that should prevail in primary schools. A delegate remarked that in his experience primary children always seemed to be really enjoying themselves. Another thought that Government should be asked to provide better buildings for primary schools. The speaker was reminded, however, that children can be happy no matter how poor the buildings are. Another cautioned against providing too splendid buildings, especially for Resettlement Estate primary schools: a problem might arise if too stark a contrast were created between school and home conditions. But if habits of cleanliness and order were developed at school in spacious and beautiful surroundings, the children might bring these back to their homes. More important than all this, another speaker maintained, is the attitude of the teachers; on them depends almost entirely the presence or absence of a happy and cheerful atmosphere.

The next point debated was how to lighten the burden of primary students. One delegate admitted that sitting through a two-hour Convention meeting put a heavy strain on his powers of endurance! This made him sympathise with the captive audiences of the primary classrooms. Another speaker pointed out that primary pupils should not be kept sitting "listening to lectures"; class periods should be a judicious mixture of work and play. The secret is to keep the children constantly on the move! Two other suggestions were: keep the less demanding periods (e.g. music, art, PT) until towards the end of the day, and take full advantage of the recess periods. Here practical difficulties were brought up: it is impossible to have all the children take art or music or PT at the same time, towards the end of the day: to fit in all the classes in turn, some must take PT, for example, first period in the morning. Then in schools with 1,000 children and one stairway is hard to exploit a 10-minute recess to the full.

A delegate maintained that 35 periods weekly are too many for young children; we should re-

Programme for of Forthcoming Meetings

Liturgy and Sacraments	Monday, June 8
Religious Instruction	Tuesday, June 9
Education	Wednesday, June 10
Laity	Thursday, June 11
Priestly Life	Friday, June 12

Place: Caritas Centre, Boundary Street, Kowloon.
Time: 8-10 p.m.