

Convention News

PRIESTLY LIFE

THE draft document on priestly life urges priests to concern themselves with "the deepening of religious knowledge in those who have been baptized." How this should be done was the first topic discussed at the last meeting of Group 5 (July 10). Speakers pointed out that hitherto little had been done in this regard, chiefly because of the difficulty in getting those just baptized to come back for further instruction: they feel that to have received baptism is a sign that they know everything already. Some parishes organize seminars and courses for young people, for members of associations, etc. These have proved successful and could be imitated. But in order to reach the widest possible audience, the Sunday liturgy should be availed of: it should not be too difficult to arrange a series of sermons which in time would cover the more important principles of the faith.

A lay delegate felt the first thing to do was to convince people that what they learn before baptism or at school is not sufficient for life. Their appreciation of the faith is an on-going process, something that should grow deeper and more mature as they grow older and gain more experience of life. Perhaps adults are reluctant to return for further instruction because they do not feel the necessity. Other means suggested for deepening the faith of the baptized were visits to the homes, articles in the Catholic weeklies, membership of parish associations.

The next section of the draft document deals with the priest as minister of the Eucharist and the other sacraments (§14). A number of speakers hoped that the section could be reworded to bring out more emphatically that this is the priest's most important work. One delegate remarked that the old and the sick of the parish would welcome the opportunity to receive Holy Communion in their homes: some invalids complain that they are never visited. A priest pointed out that this is usually because these people do not inform the parish priest of their illness; if he is told about their desire to receive the sacraments he will certainly see to it that they have the opportunity of receiving Holy Communion.

More than one of the lay delegates present stressed that this aspect of priestly life should get top priority and no other work, such as supervising a school, should be allowed to interfere with this ministry. It was pointed out that some years ago the priest's role as minister of the sacraments would not have needed stressing; but today this role is seriously questioned, together with the importance of saying Mass daily for the faithful. Mass since the Vatican Council has become a wonderful experience for many but in making the Mass the centre of the lives of the faithful, much still depends on the attitude of the priest. How many priests urge the faithful to attend daily Mass? Some priests are satisfied with the minimum from their parishioners; few help the laity to grow in appreciation of the Eucharist. The way the priest says Mass, a lay delegate stated, has an important effect on the faithful. They will find it hard to grow in appreciation of the Mass if the priest conveys by his voice and gestures at Mass that he is

hurrying through a routine task.

The sacrament of penance was also discussed. Some lay speakers remarked that it is difficult to get confession during the week; a number were opposed to the practice of hearing confessions during Sunday Masses; the faithful should acquire the habit of coming for confession on Saturdays. Times for hearing confessions should be clearly stated at church doors. Perhaps each Deanery could decide when confessions should be heard in their area and where and then give wide publicity to this information. As against this it was pointed out that many people in resettlement areas would find it extremely difficult to make a special journey to the church for confession.

In the course of the discussions other points were raised: e.g. the use priests make of their time; the laity expect a priest above all to be "priestly"—if he is, they will respond to him on this level; priests attach much importance to their sestas!

SOCIAL MISSION

AT the previous two meetings of Group 7, when the question of wages for industrial workers was being aired, various terms were brought into the discussion: a basic or minimum wage, a just wage, a generous wage and a wage in an affluent society. It was hoped at the last meeting of this Group (July 14) to arrive at some decision as to which of these concepts should be adopted in the revised document.

During the meeting many interesting points were raised. One speaker, after quoting Labour Department figures concerning increases in wages and in productivity in recent years, went on to advocate that wages should bear a close relationship to the total wealth of Hong Kong. Unless this were so, he argued, there would be no incentive for management to improve methods of production. Another speaker remarked that to say that the level of wages should be closely linked to the wealth of Hong Kong sounds very well, but is unrealistic; during the past two thousand years workers have never been paid generous wages. As long as capitalists, who only want to increase their wealth, are in command, workers will never get more than basic wages.

The figures quoted by an earlier speaker regarding the wages of industrial workers probably present a more optimistic picture than the reality, since they were compiled on information gathered from employers: this was the view of another delegate, who added that the four wage concepts under discussion mean the same thing. When the Pope advocates a just wage, he said, this means one on which the worker can live decently, and this standard will be higher in an affluent society than in a less prosperous one.

A worker pointed out that workers in England get good wages because they are strongly organized and can put pressure on employers by the threat of strikes. Workers, he added, would also get fair wages if employers would only look on them as human beings not as animals, and respect their human dignity. An employee of a business firm suggested that any wage structure should be flexible; when a worker joins a new firm he can hope for only

a fair wage, but he expects his wage packet to increase as the prosperity of the firm increases; hence wage scales should pass from a minimum wage to a just wage to a generous wage. He proposed that management should hold regular meetings with their employees to discuss improvements in wages and productivity.

It is a great indignity that the level of wages in Hong Kong should be at the mercy of forces outside our control, like trade quotas, etc.: this was the view expressed by a speaker who stated that we should tackle the problem where we could influence it ourselves, namely by increasing our productivity. It is a shame, he added, that the average rate of increase in productivity over the years has been in the region of only 1%. Another speaker urged the need to be realistic. Hong Kong has many problems: a large population with little prospect of emigration, the need to create many new jobs every year, no natural resources, dependence on overseas markets for our continuing prosperity. These facts must be borne in mind; it is to this situation that we must apply our principles in order to formulate concrete solutions.

A priest suggested that during the summer recess it might be a good thing to conduct a survey of Catholic-run institutions to discover what wages are paid to minor staff. It would be embarrassing, he said, if we were to call attention to the shortcomings of industrialists without doing anything to set our own house in order. It was pointed out that this was a very good idea but might exceed the scope of the Working

Group. However, a speaker at an earlier meeting had proposed the establishment of a research centre and such a survey as this might be recommended as a priority to such a centre. A Sister then revealed that lately the H.K. Catholic Social Welfare Conference, long dormant, had been revived and that it is hoped to incorporate a research unit into this restructured organization. A profile of the industrial worker of Hong Kong is at present being prepared and a report will be published in the near future.

At this stage of the meeting the chairman expressed the hope that some decision on the wage concept the Group was to adopt could be arrived at. A delegate proposed recommending "a just and equitable wage", a term used in recent papal writings. As a result of a vote it was decided to use this term in the Group's recommendation regarding wages for industrial workers.

A worker, referring to the picture of Hong Kong's concrete situation as outlined by a previous speaker, asked whether we could not change this situation. We shall always have an ideal which will differ from the reality and our task must be to find ways and means of lessening the gap between these two. He strongly advocated the need for negotiations between management and workers with a view to improving working conditions. Such a scheme is particularly needed in Hong Kong, he said, because of the large number of small factories. The last speaker of the evening hoped that the welfare of farmers and fishermen would not be forgotten.

N.B. — There will be no further meetings of the Diocesan Convention until August 17.