

Convention News

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

The first item on the agenda of the last meeting of Group 2 (September 29) was voting on the newly revised version of Chapter 1, Section A: Formation of Christians. This did not take place without a certain amount of preliminary discussion. Delegates wanted to know exactly what was implied in voting in favour of the new version: did it mean approval of the contents or simply recognition of the fact that the redrafting committee had revised the draft faithfully, in accordance with the views expressed at the meetings? This latter view prevailed and a motion in these terms was passed without opposition.

The Group then moved on to discuss chapter II of the draft: Religious Instruction in the Family. Interest centred chiefly around the section entitled: Pre-Cana Conferences. A delegate urged that parish priests should strongly advise young couples who come to him to arrange for their marriage to attend a pre-marriage course, and where one of the parties is not a Catholic the norms recently issued by the Vatican should be carefully explained. Another delegate said that the CMAC sends speakers to secondary schools to talk to the senior students on matters concerning human relationships between the sexes: these have proved a great help, he said.

Cana lectures should not be given only by parish priests, another speaker stated; lay persons should also be called on. He further suggested that these pre-marriage courses should not be confined to the diocesan level but should be organised on the parish level. Four courses annually are not enough, said another delegate, who went on to suggest that three or four parishes might well collaborate in providing a course each month. A member of the CMAC explained that the organisation suffers from a shortage of personnel; for instance, he said, in the education section there are only five volunteer members. During the summer a special seminar for teachers took place but this gained only 10 new recruits for the CMAC. In conclusion the speaker requested parish priests to urge their parishioners to volunteer their services for this

worthwhile work.

Another delegate, taking up this point, suggested that each parish should be responsible for finding one volunteer to join; meanwhile it might be a good idea for the CMAC to publish handbooks to help both those running such courses in the parishes and those attending them.

The reason why there are only four courses annually is low attendance, a delegate pointed out. Many young couples, he said, do not know about these courses or do not understand their importance or are simply not interested. He regretted the fact that the CMAC gets so little support from the parishes. Another delegate spoke in favour of parish-level courses, since these provide young couples with an opportunity of getting to know their parish priests and the activities of the parish. However, there is a difficulty in this whole matter, he pointed out: young couples usually do not approach the parish priest about their marriage until they are officially engaged; but by then there is not enough time to attend a pre-marriage course.

A delegate who was married last year said that as soon as he had given notice to the City Hall of his intended marriage, he received many letters from restaurants, photographers, etc., but not a word from any Church organisation. He himself had made a retreat shortly before his wedding, but regretted not having had a more intense spiritual preparation. Marriage, he said, is not a less important sacrament than baptism or confirmation; but for these latter an intense spiritual preparation is required of adult candidates.

To meet some of the difficulties brought out by previous speakers, a delegate suggested organising teams of married couples in the parishes who would meet engaged couples a few times before their marriage. Such informal friendly conversations, he said, can often be more useful than more highly organised pre-marriage courses. Towards the end of the meeting a motion to make attendance at a pre-marriage course obligatory for engaged couples was defeated.

EDUCATION

The last meeting of Group 3 (September 30) was chaired by Mr. Andrew Wong. Other members of the Group will be called on to chair subsequent meetings. Before discussion of the draft document began, the Group was informed that the Convenor, Mr. Geoffrey Mui, had tendered his resignation. This decision had been prompted by the appearance in print of a report on a previous meeting which seemed to imply that the Group had lost confidence in the Convenor. Speakers protested that this was not so and a vote of confidence in the Convenor was proposed and passed by acclaim. The Convenor, to everyone's satisfaction, agreed to withdraw his resignation.

Discussion then started on section IV of chapter 3: The Teaching of Mandarin in Chinese Middle Schools. A delegate wanted to know what is meant by Mandarin: is it the language spoken in Peking or the Mandarin spoken in other parts of China? If we mean this latter, the speaker said, he accepted the recommendation which urges that it should be

taught in Hong Kong Middle Schools. In reply it was pointed out that there is only one form of Mandarin; the language spoken in and around Peking is a dialect and cannot be called "Peking Mandarin."

At this point a delegate said that there was little profit in discussing the points brought up in the section under debate: we should accept them with the rider that the policy of teaching Mandarin and of conducting the class in Chinese literature through the medium of Mandarin should be put into effect as soon as practicable. The utility of the contents of the section was queried by another speaker. The ED, he said, knows very well the pros and cons of this problem; if it does not change the policy of schools with regard to Mandarin, can the Catholic schools go it alone? A nun-teacher pointed out that already several schools are carrying out a policy of teaching all Chinese subjects through Mandarin and had encountered no difficulty with the ED.

The following sections of the draft deal with other items on the curriculum of Chinese Middle Schools, e.g. practical subjects, English, music, art, etc. One speaker said it is hardly the task of the Convention to enter into such detail; nor is it the job of the Group to tell teachers how to teach. He hoped that the revised draft will be a good deal shorter than the present document: those who wish for background information to the revised document can be referred to the original draft. Another speaker proposed moving on at once to the next chapter since little purpose would be served by discussing unnecessary detail or principles already accepted by the ED.

Before the Group left chapter 3, however, a delegate regretted that no mention is made of science or of the new maths. This might give the impression, he said, that the Church is uneasy in the presence of science; he then reminded the Group that the Chinese University will change over to the new maths in 1972. The silence of the draft on the social sciences, economics and political affairs, was also noted.

One further point was discussed: the draft mentions the suggestion "that separate examinations for the Hong Kong Certificate of Education be abolished and that there be just one examination." A member of the drafting commission explained that this had been included in the draft to warn schools that such a proposal was in the air, in the hope that it would not be pushed through without the schools being prepared to put forward their views. A delegate proposed omitting this paragraph as unnecessary since, it was claimed, the ED will give the schools plenty of notice on this question. However, it was stated that the ED had in fact already given notice and steps are being

taken at present to implement this policy.

PRIESTLY LIFE

GROUP 5 at its last meeting (October 1) continued its discussions on the spiritual life of the priest. There was an interesting exchange of views on the section in the draft that deals with some practical aspects of priestly poverty and obedience. To some delegates the document seemed to confuse the poverty professed by religious and that expected of diocesan priests. There is need, it was pointed out, to inform the faithful that canon law does not demand poverty of the secular priests. This last observation was countered by a lay delegate who said that it is the Gospel that demands poverty of all and especially of priests. This delegate went on to say that the example of a life of simplicity led by a priest was very impressive, but warned against going into too much concrete detail in the draft: the section should make its point in a positive way and not be just a collection of prohibitions.

Another delegate stated that we must distinguish between the necessary and the superfluous. A priest might well need a motor car, he said, but must it always be the very latest model? The same applies to a camera and to many other similar things. The paragraph under discussion, it was said, was composed as a result of the letters received from the faithful, many of whom are not aware of the difference between religious and secular priests, but instinctively feel that all priests should be poor. It was suggested, therefore to leave aside the distinction between religious and diocesan priests and concentrate on the poverty of the priest as such.

One speaker felt that the word *poverty* was inappropriate. Presumably the poverty recommended by the Council for bishops and priests should bear some proportion to the general standard of living of the community. Was it honest, this speaker asked, to talk of the poverty of priests given the economic situation in Hong Kong? How many thousands of the population would be only too happy to enjoy the standard of living enjoyed by the average priest here! Perhaps a more accurate term would be *simplicity*. Another speaker proposed using the word *simplicity* in the title of the section but keeping the consecrated term *poverty* in the body of the paragraph.

A priest-delegate said that the Church in Hong Kong, with its big buildings, churches, schools, gives the impression of great wealth. No matter what priests do, he added, they will never convince people that they are poor.

As a result of the discussion it was decided to propose the ideal of poverty, with a reference to the example of Christ and the Gospel spirit, and not to spell out any definite stand-

ard, which quickly becomes out of date.

Among the views expressed on the question of obedience were: the relationship of a bishop to his priests should first of all be that of one friend to another and only secondly that of superior-inferior; the draft should point out that obedience has a redemptive value, and should speak of obedience to the Church's directives rather than to its teaching, though of course faith is a form of obedience; some priests should be urged to adapt themselves to recent changes in the Church and others should be told not to go beyond what is at present permitted.

Another view was expressed by the delegate who said that often in the past it was through a kind of charismatic disobedience that progress was made in the Church; hence it is the spirit of obedience rather than literal obedience that should be stressed. Another delegate termed this viewpoint as "dangerous in its consequences and disputable in its basis"; progress, he stated, was due not to disobedience but to a recognition by the authorities that circumstances had changed; at most, disobedience was responsible for an accelerated rate of change; but, he maintained, the real authors of progress are those who obey, not those who present superiors with a *fait accompli*.

It was agreed to ask the redrafting committee to rewrite the paragraph stressing the need for an active, intelligent obedience, which, as a speaker pointed out, includes the right, and often the duty, to make representations in face of what seem the unwise decisions of authority.

Programme of Working Group Meetings during coming week

Liturgy and Sacraments	Monday, October 12
Religious Instruction	Tuesday, October 13
Education	Wednesday, October 14
Laiety	Thursday, October 15
Priestly Life	Friday, October 16

Place: Caritas Centre, Boundary Street, Kowloon.

Time: 8 p.m. — 10 p.m.