

Convention News

THE Bishop has requested that on next Sunday (October 25), Mission Sunday, the attention of the faithful be called to the Diocesan Convention in the homilies preached at Mass. It is to be hoped that this timely reminder will renew interest in the Convention and will result in a more satisfactory attendance at the Group meetings on the part both of delegates and non-delegates alike.

LITURGY

THE first topic discussed at the last meeting of Group 1 (October 12) was a recommendation in the draft document that manual Communion "should be gradually introduced for those who wish" and that for a start, it should be allowed on an optional basis "in religious communities and in small group celebrations." Some speakers were opposed to the idea: we should not change for the sake of change; change should come from below, in response to the desires of the majority and not be imposed from above; the criterion for introducing change should be: does it help the faithful? Since in this instance the matter is open to doubt, we should not encourage this innovation in Hong Kong; the majority of the bishops in the Church are not keen on it; the special permissions given by Rome are so hedged with restrictions as to indicate official lack of enthusiasm; the traditional practice corresponds better to Chinese feelings of reverence.

Those in favour of the recommendation emphasised two points: liberty to accept the Most Manually if one's devotion is thereby helped (a young lady denied that the happiness she experienced at a Mass where Communion was received manually was purely emotional: she stated that she and her companions had experienced a genuine sense of intimacy and reverence) and proper preparation of the faithful. These two points, it was stated, correspond with the directives issued by the French episcopacy, which stress the need for adequate preparation of the faithful and for leaving the option always with the communicant, not with the priest. A nun disagreed with those who were inclined to dismiss enthusiasm for manual Communion as purely emotional. The emotions, she said, play an important part in human life and can be of great help to worship and the spiritual life.

The draft also recommends that the bishop seek the necessary permission for the faithful to receive Holy Communion under both species on certain big occasions, e.g. Holy Thursday, Paschal Vigil, Parish Feast-Day, etc. This proposal was accepted with the amendment that the words "where practicable" be added to the latter part of the recommendation.

The next point discussed was the hearing of confession during Sunday Mass. The draft assumes that this practice is not the ideal one and proposes

several possible solutions. After a certain amount of debate, these different alternatives were put to the vote with the following results: (1) abolish the hearing of confession during Sunday Masses all over the diocese: 8 for, 20 against; (2) discourage this practice for all, especially for children and students: 23 for, 2 against; (3) space out Masses to leave time for confessions before and after Masses: 18 for, 7 against; (4) "consider the possibility of a general absolution at the beginning of Mass, with the obligation for these who have committed grave sins to confess them at their earliest convenience": 17 for, 9 against.

The draft deals next with the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. A delegate stressed that the faithful should be brought to realise that it is not the sacrament of the nearly-dead but of the sick; this would be a step towards encouraging Catholics to summon a priest in good time to the sick beds of their relatives.

"The greatest solemnity should be given to the celebration of the Sacrament of matrimony without any distinction of 'classes'." While all were opposed to invidious distinctions, no easy solution was forthcoming for the practical difficulties raised by this issue. In connection with a recommendation urging a greater role for relatives and friends in the marriage rite, a suggestion was made to investigate the possibility of celebrating the actual marriage at the wedding banquet and in accordance with Chinese traditional rites. In this way the nuptial Mass would be held the next day or at a later date, and Catholic friends and relatives invited to attend.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

THE draft document, in the chapter entitled Religious Instruction in the Family, suggests the publishing of "a very short and simple manual" to help parents convey to their children "in their ordinary conversation . . . the most basic ideas of Christianity, such as the presence and providence of God, God's love for us as it is manifested in Christ, the Saviour and our mother Mary, etc." Such a booklet "could be easily composed and distributed to all the spouses."

This was the first topic to be discussed at the last meeting of Group 2 (October 13). The opening speaker was in favour of the proposed manual, but felt that more is required. He suggested in addition arranging seminars for parents, e.g. on the feast of the Holy Family; he also thought that priests in their sermons could give parents more help in this matter. A layman supported this idea, since, he maintained, few people ever read guidelines of any sort! A young man considered that the recommended manual would be useful provided it was not too abstract but included examples taken from daily life. Another delegate thought that such a manual should include much of the material dealt with in the pre-

marriage courses, adding that it is important to put before young married couples the whole question of the regulation of births. A final suggestion urged better use of the mass communications media: through these, by means of the story form, we could present our ideas to a wide audience in an easily assimilable and palatable way.

The following section of the draft appeals for greater attention to the fact that the family is a unit. "Family retreats, family gatherings, family picnics, etc. could be organised for families taken as units." The Christian Family Movement is also commended in this context. The chapter ends with a proposal for existing women's associations: they "could sponsor meetings, courses, visits to spouses and families, always seen as units."

A delegate from Chaiwan described family retreats (i.e. for husbands and wives) which have been organised in his parish. Picnics for families (including the in-laws) are regularly arranged, he said. His parish is the only one in the diocese which has a Chinese-speaking branch of the Christian Family Movement. Another delegate thought that the presence of young and restless children at a retreat would only be a source of distraction; moreover, a nun pointed out, parents do not like to be told off or have their weaknesses exposed in front of their older children. In reply it was said that baby-sitters could solve the problem of restless children (as in Chaiwan, thanks to cooperative Legionaries); mothers' minds are set at ease if they know their children are near at hand and if they can see them from time to time during the day. With regard to the other objection, a social worker stated that she saw no objection to the peccadillos of parents being pointed out in front of their children. The children are already aware of these, she said; it is better to bring them out into the open so that the children can be helped to accept their parents as they are.

A priest spoke of the possibility of making better use of Fathers' and Mothers' Day. He recommended that the celebration of these occasions should be made more of a parish affair; they provide a good opportunity, he suggested, for articles and essays in newspapers, parish bulletins, etc. to get across sound ideas on family life. Another delegate referred to certain Chinese family customs, such as the party celebrating the first complete month after a child's birth, the celebration when a member of the family gets a job, etc. At present, she said, these celebrations have no connection with Catholic life; she therefore suggested the composing of a blessing that the father of a family could give on such occasions, and another that the parents could give their children on their wedding day.

Other suggestions brought up in the discussions were: the draft should somewhere mention the generation gap that is so apparent nowadays and seems to be getting wider; we should say something about Christian charity and mutual love in the family; a family can appear on the outside to be united when in reality very little genuine love exists; only through such genuine love and tolerance can we hope to bridge the generation gap; much is said

today of family responsibility: most of it however concerns that of parents towards their children: the draft should say something also about the responsibility of children towards their parents and younger siblings.

The last half-hour of the meeting was devoted to a discussion on how best to proceed with the next two chapters of the document which deal with religious instruction in primary and secondary schools respectively. The suggestion was made to divide the delegates into two sub-groups to deal separately with these two topics. A vote taken at the end of the debate indicated however that a very large majority was opposed to splitting up in this way.

LAIITY

THE first item on the agenda of the last meeting of Group 4 (October 15) was the election of two members to the redrafting committee to fill vacancies that had recently occurred. As the result of a secret ballot, Mr. John T. S. Chen and Miss Agnes Sham were chosen.

Discussion then began on para. 44 of the draft document: the christianizing of certain festive days as a means of "harmonizing our religious and secular lives." The first speaker was opposed to any mention of Fathers' and Mothers' Day, which, he felt, had become irredeemably commercialised. A parish priest did not agree, saying that in his parish much is made of these two days, with very positive results. In a vote, the majority took this view.

The next paragraph discussed deals with the question of godparents. A speaker thought this problem should be left to other Groups, e.g. the Liturgy or Religious Instruction Group. Another criticised the tone of the opening sentence of the paragraph ("the function of godparents is often abused or rendered ineffective . . .") as hardly likely to encourage Catholics to take on this important responsibility. A third speaker suggested that godparents should be considered a part of the extended Catholic family.

A delegate suggested giving special stress to the role of godparents where one only, or neither of the parents is a Catholic. The common practice of appointing one person as godparent of a whole group of candidates for baptism was deprecated. To avoid this frequent occurrence it was suggested that candidates themselves should choose their own godparents (but what of those who come to the Church as total strangers? it was asked); godparents should not be chosen at the last moment; if necessary they should be introduced to their godchildren long before baptism. One delegate wanted to know what a parishioner is to do when pressed by the parish priest to act as godparent to many candidates. At the end of the debate it was agreed to accept the paragraph in general, stressing the idea of the Christian enrichment of parents by the godparents of their children.

The next large section of the document deals with the problems of the young. The first paragraph attempts an analysis of the situation of youth in society today. Some speakers thought the treatment a little too general, but admitted their inability to suggest how to im-

prove it. Others thought that some of the points mentioned were more applicable to the situation overseas than to that obtaining on Hong Kong. Another comment suggested that the paragraph seemed to reflect the views of adults looking at youth and to adopt a patronising tone. The paragraph, it was suggested, should give the other side of the picture, youth's view of themselves, including their desire for a greater and more responsible role in society.

A motion to omit the paragraph altogether was defeated and so discussion on it will continue at the Group's next meeting.

Programme of Working Group Meetings during coming week

Liturgy and Sacraments	Monday, October 26
Religious Instruction	Tuesday, October 27
Education	Wednesday, October 28
Laiity	Thursday, October 29
Priestly Life	Friday, October 30

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