

Convention News

THE newly rewritten draft document on Religious has just been completed and copies of it have been sent to the members of Working Group 6. Thus after a five-month suspension of meetings, this Group will come together again on Monday, November 16. It is to be hoped that the delegates will cooperate with the chairman of the meetings and debate the document in a business like way, remembering that, since time is short, they will not be able to discuss every point as exhaustively as would have, perhaps, in other circumstances, been possible and desirable.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

AT the last meeting of Group 2 (October 27) the recommendations common to the two sections of the draft, religious instruction in primary school (c. III) and in secondary schools (c. IV), were discussed.

It was pointed out that RK teachers have the duty and obligation to prepare themselves to carry out their task in a competent way. In some schools non-Christians teach RK because Catholic teachers are either unable or unwilling to teach this subject. There are courses available for teachers of religion, but many hesitate before attending the course provided by the Diocesan Catechetical Commission: they are afraid that they will be unable to pass the examination at the end of the course. A member of the Commission explained that in the last two years this examination had been replaced by a requirement to submit, within a period of six months, a paper on a chosen subject. Some speakers were of the opinion that an examination at the end of the course is essential.

An alternative form of this examination was suggested: during the course or at the end of it, the trainee-teachers should be required to teach a class in front of examiners from the Catechetical Commission: this is the system adopted by the Northcote College of Education for those taking the course in the teaching of RK.

How are teachers to be encouraged to enrol for the training courses? Besides ensuring that after doing the course they are given RK classes to teach (something not to be taken for granted!), it is important that the salary received be commensurate with the teachers' qualifications. Nowadays, a nun pointed out, we show how we value a thing by the price we are willing to pay for it: we must show how we value a trained RK teacher by being prepared to pay adequately for his services. But where is the money for higher salaries to come from? In subsidized schools the salary scales are laid down by the ED: any increases would have to come from the private resources of the school; in non-subsidized schools the present salary bill is already more than the schools can cope with.

The practice of some schools of requiring every form-master to teach his form RK was

criticised. It was suggested that each school should choose two or three teachers to take RK classes throughout the school. But to oblige a teacher to take up to 36 or 38 periods of RK a week would be too much. The problem could perhaps, be solved by asking for volunteers to take RK and dividing the classes among these in such a way that the volunteer teachers would be given some other subjects besides RK to teach by way of variety.

A delegate thought that the document pays too much attention to the students of Catholic schools and ignores the plight of Catholics in non-Catholic schools. In reply it was said that this problem should be dealt with in the chapter on religious instruction in the parish. Another delegate suggested adding a few paragraphs with some recommendations regarding this matter, e.g. the setting up of OCD classes for these children. Should some Sisters be detached from their present schools and asked to teach RK in other schools? One nun said that such a proposal sounds good but would not be easy to carry out. She gave the example of her convent school where in the primary section there are two Sisters (and 52 lay-teachers) and in the secondary section only one Sister (and 30 lay-teachers).

Two other suggestions were made: the diocese should set up an institute, attached to the seminary, similar to the Manila-based EAPI (it is difficult for Chinese Sisters to obtain a visa for the Philippines); there should be regular obligatory meetings of the RK teachers in given areas or parishes.

EDUCATION

EDUCATION in the New Territories was the topic discussed at the last meeting of Group 3 (October 28). The draft document contains five "comments" on this subject: these were debated in turn.

There was little opposition to the suggestion that "the Catholic Education Council and other Catholic educational organisations should broaden their urban vision." A delegate asked whether there is a representative from the NT on the CEC. It was explained that the composition of this body is not based on geographical representation: it consists of members of the different religious congregations engaged in teaching in Hong Kong. It was explained that this comment was included in the draft in view of the large number of Communist schools being opened in the NT.

The second "comment" states that schools in remote areas should not be neglected in the allocation of diocesan funds. A delegate felt that any suggestion that the NT schools were being financially neglected was unjust. He said that the Church had pioneered the setting up of schools there even before the area had become part of the Colony. At present, he said, there are 25-30 Catholic schools in the NT. He then went on to describe the difficulties en-

countered with the ED in trying to obtain government subsidies. Up to recent years the Government's policy had been not to build secondary schools in the NT; at present they are ready to subsidize new schools, but not those already built. In spite of these difficulties, however, and at the cost of much sacrifice, the diocese has made and continues to make a notable contribution to education in the NT. In this connection a delegate remarked that since education is the primary responsibility of Government, the Church should not rush in to the building of private schools, but should agree to build subsidized ones only.

The third statement of the draft deals with the Catholic schools' lack of funds for helping needy pupils and their families, as opposed to the various non-Catholic bodies which have access to such funds. It was pointed out that this problem is not confined to NT schools only, but exists equally for urban schools. A delegate suggested that perhaps we could enquire into the sources of the funds available to the non-Catholic bodies mentioned and see whether we too could tap these or similar sources. Another delegate maintained that it is inaccurate to suggest that the heads of Catholic schools have no funds of this nature. He gave figures regarding the number of free places available in NT Catholic schools and stated that the diocese, through Caritas or the Bishop, does support, where necessary, the families of needy pupils.

The fourth point speaks of the urgent need for suitable RK textbooks in Chinese and

English. Here again it was pointed out that this problem is not confined to the NT. However, because of the generally lower standard of comprehension of NT students and because non-Catholics in the New Territories have normally very little contact with the faith as compared with urban non-Catholics, NT schools have special problems in the matter of RK textbooks. It was decided to bring this problem to the attention of the Working Group concerned with religious instruction (Group 2).

The fifth comment suggests that "it might be a good idea for a nun, priest or brother to teach full-time in some of the NT non-Catholic schools." A delegate said that this suggestion is particularly applicable to the NT since the people there have so few opportunities for contact with priests and religious. Another speaker said that this would be a good suggestion if there were sufficient religious in the diocese; he also brought up the point that many people today question the role of priests in teaching positions, saying that teaching should be left to lay people. The point was also made that non-Catholic schools would hardly allow a teacher to teach RK only, and that if a school did permit this it was already religiously-oriented. A member of the committee that drew up the report under discussion explained that the idea behind the comment was that of giving witness, somewhat in the manner of the Little Sisters of Jesus.

An extra recommendation was proposed and accepted by the Group to the effect that religious congregations with urban schools should extend their educational work to the NT.

Programme of Working Group Meeting

During Coming Week:

Liturgy and Sacraments	Monday, November 9
Religious Instruction	Tuesday, November 10
Education	Wednesday, November 11
Lay Life	Thursday, November 12
Priestly Life	Friday, November 13

Place: Catholic Centre, Hong Kong

Time: 8 p.m. — 10 p.m.