

Convention News

LITURGY

AT the beginning of the last meeting of Group 1 (November 9) a new, more logical order of chapters for the revised draft document was presented by the Redrafting Committee and accepted without opposition by the delegates present.

The first item on the agenda for discussion was chapter IV: Active Participation in the Liturgy. A member of the original drafting committee gave a short introduction explaining the main points contained in the chapter. He said the ideas had been taken from official documents: our task was to see whether they could be applied usefully to our particular situation. The text stresses the sign nature of external participation; responses, hymns, psalms, gestures and silence are indications of, and helps to fostering, internal participation, without which the liturgy would be reduced to mere formalism. Our document, the speaker added, should avoid going into specific details; this was said in reply to a delegate who felt we should suggest norms to ensure that new churches be designed to facilitate the active participation of the faithful. It was agreed that such questions as the position of the tabernacle, or the provision of a back door to admit late-comers without disturbing the congregation, could well be left to the Diocesan or Parish Liturgical Commissions.

The delegates present approved in general of the contents of the chapter. Suggestions for improvement were few. A couple of speakers thought the paragraphs concerning the proclamation of the word of God should be transferred to the chapter dealing with the Liturgy and Holy Scripture. It was pointed out, however, that what is said in the section under discussion pertains not to Scripture in itself but rather to its external proclamation. The recommendations aim at ensuring that celebrant, readers, commentators, choir, etc. shall be carefully prepared for their functions, and the loudspeaker system so arranged that the faithful shall be able to hear clearly as the first prerequisite to understanding the word of God.

The next item for discussion was chapter VI: Liturgy and Holy Scripture. The Group decided to debate each of the 11 recommendations of this chapter in turn. The first proposes that "before each Mass a short introduction to the scripture readings should be given." Several speakers asked for clarifications: does *before Mass* mean before the priest appears at the altar? does the recommendation refer to Sundays only? who should give this introduction? could such a short explanation be included on the Adventiat sheet? It was decided to leave aside details such as: when? by whom? and simply recommend the usefulness of a short introduction to the readings.

The second recommendation calls for the publication of a

Chinese translation of the Sunday lectionary with brief commentaries. The purpose of a booklet of this sort would be to help the faithful to discover for themselves the main themes running through the three Sunday readings. This proposal was accepted without opposition.

Likewise, nobody objected to the third proposal, namely that "the clergy especially should study and meditate on the Sunday lectionary very seriously."

The fourth recommendation was very favourably received by the lay delegates present. It urges the celebrant "to draw the contents of his homily from scriptural and liturgical sources"; it suggests that the homily should be carefully prepared "together with other priests and lay people"; it should not be a detailed exposition of the scripture texts but should concentrate rather on the message the readings contain, showing how this can be applied to daily life. Finally preachers are urged not to speak for too long; ideally the homily should last from 10 to 15 minutes. This recommendation in all its parts was unanimously accepted.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

AT its last meeting (November 10) Group 2 continued its discussions on the draft document's recommendations concerning religious instruction in our Catholic schools. The first recommendation discussed urges special classes for Catholic students in addition to the general RK classes given to the whole form. As a nun explained, it is a question not of passing on information, but of building up the faith, which becomes next to impossible if a large proportion of those present are non-Christians. Would such a proposal give non-Catholics the feeling that they were being discriminated against, or—more likely—give Catholics the feeling that an extra burden was being imposed on them? Such misunderstandings will be avoided if the non-Catholics have at the same time a parallel class dealing with some aspect of what is taught in the general RK classes. The draft seems to imply that non-Catholics ought not be allowed attend these supplementary classes for Catholics: this was generally felt to be too rigid an attitude.

Some speakers seemed to give the impression that the general RK periods would be classes in ethics. Hence the objection was raised: shall we not bear a heavy responsibility if we allow students to study in our schools for upwards of ten years without ever giving them the opportunity of hearing the message of the Gospel? In clarification it was stated that in the general classes of RK the Gospel message is announced; the idea of the supplementary classes is to give the catechist the chance of speaking to Catholics in a more intimate way about their faith.

At this point some delegates, feeling that they were not being given sufficient opportunity

to voice their opinions, objected to an arbitrary time limit being imposed on discussion of any item on the agenda. In deference to this objection the Group agreed to discuss separately the three different issues that compose the next recommendation (n. 6, Ch. 4).

With little debate the first of the points was accepted, namely: in order to lessen the possibility of conflicts between parents and children seeking instruction and baptism, parents should be given an opportunity, indeed encouraged, to meet a priest or catechist to learn more clearly what their children are doing.

The second point deals with parish-school relationships. A parish priest said that a few lines should be added here to urge strongly that pupils preparing for baptism should be introduced to their home parish; for this, he said, a personal visit is essential, an introduction by letter being wholly inadequate. A nun suggested that the parish priest should come to the schools occasionally to take the instruction classes; it is not enough, she maintained, for him to appear for the first time when coming to examine the catechumens on their readiness for baptism. Here a slight confusion regarding the meaning of *parish* became apparent: some were referring to the home parish of the candidates while others were talking about the parish in which the school is situated.

Another nun stated that the kernel of the problem is the follow-up of the newly baptised: all our proposals are no more than means to ensure this. In this context the example was quoted of a boy who, six months after his baptism, did not yet know how to make his confession.

Who should decide when the candidate is ready for baptism? The draft document says bluntly that it should be the catechist, not the parish priest. A delegate proposed that this be changed to state that the parish priest should ask for and respect the teacher's opinion, implying that the final decision rests with the priest. This amendment was accepted by the Group.

Another suggested amendment was that we strongly urge candidates to be given "a real and effective" introduction to the life of their parish; though it was pointed out that schools can do only a limited amount in this matter; it is up to the parishes to integrate the newly baptised into parish life.

The third idea contained in the recommendation asks for greater communication between schools and parishes as a means of counteracting "anything that tends to tie the student's faith to his school." This proposal was passed on the understanding that the redrafting committee enlarge a little on the ways in which this greater communication can be achieved.

In the closing minutes of the meeting the proposal that "children of primary school age not be baptised when parents are not" was discussed. Since it soon became apparent that there was a radical difference of opinion among the delegates on this point, the Group agreed to discuss this important issue more fully at the next meeting.

EDUCATION

GROUP 3 at its last meeting (November 11) discussed a number of points raised in chapter VII of the draft docu-

ment, which deals with extra-curricular activities, counselling and career guidance.

It was necessary at first to clear up a certain confusion as to the respective roles of counsellor and career vocational guidance officer. The consensus of the meeting seemed to be that these have a very important part to play in the schools; that there are practical difficulties in the way of their appointment (where, for instance, are the extra salaries to come from?); that nevertheless the recommendation urging serious consideration of their necessity should be included in the document to show the ED that this need is felt in the schools.

A speaker said that no mention is made of guidance in the matter of further studies, especially after F. 5. It was pointed out that this surely would be part of the role of counsellor or vocational guidance official. This led to the discussion of a charge made by a delegate that some schools force F.6 students to remain on for two years. Pressure, it was alleged, is brought to bear either by the signing of a contract or by the refusal to give letters of recommendation to students leaving after only one year in F. 6. This practice was denounced vigorously by a number of speakers. Sympathy was expressed for students who, for security sake, apply simultaneously to several schools for admittance to F. 6 and to several U.S. universities.

During the last few minutes of the meeting a suggestion was put forward that before each meeting the redrafting committee should draw up a list of the more important practical recommendations contained in the next chapter to be discussed, and that these should form the agenda for the subsequent meeting. The suggestion aimed both at avoiding the block acceptance of whole sections of the draft without any real discussion and wasting time debating points of relatively minor importance. However, the suggestion was strongly opposed by a spokesman for the redrafting committee and when a vote was called for, the motion was defeated.

The Group will discuss the report on the Apostolate of Higher Education at its next meeting.

Programme of Working Group Meetings during Coming Week

Liturgy and Sacraments	Monday, November 23
Religious Instruction	Tuesday, November 24
Education	Wednesday, November 25
Laity	Thursday, November 26
Priestly Life	Friday, November 27
Evangelisation	Saturday, November 28

Place: Catholic Centre
Time: 8 p.m. — 10 p.m.