

Convention News

RELIGIOUS

GROUP 6 resumed its meeting on November 16. The chairman of the drafting committee introduced the newly written draft document, explaining how it came to and giving an outline of the main ideas contained in chapter II: Religious Life, the first section to be debated. (Chapter I, which serves as an Introduction to the document, was discussed before the decision was taken last May to suspend meetings until the entire draft had been completed.)

The first speaker remarked that the text, in describing the religious life as a consecration, makes no mention of the perfection of the individual religious, an element that is mentioned in probably all papal bulls establishing religious congregations. Other delegates considered that this is understood either in the reference to the special nature of the consecration which the religious make of their life and "which is deeply rooted in their baptismal consecration" or in the statement that "religious should have only one thing in their mind: the Heavenly Father and the service of their fellowmen." A lay delegate asked for a more specific definition of the aim of religious life, since the laity also strive to glorify God and serve their neighbour.

The third paragraph — the contents of which are summarised in a subtitle as: Religious consecration makes a man free, brave, happy — came in for some comment. It was thought to paint too idealistic a picture: does religious consecration in these times which are characterised by crises of faith, in fact make people free, brave, happy? Are not courage and happiness free gifts of God? Should we not rather say that religious consecration "is capable of making a man free, brave, happy"? Objections were also made to a statement that "the religious are free from all anxieties of the world." It was asked whether this is an ideal religious should be striving for: does it not conflict with the opening sentence of *The Church in the Modern World*? Is it not time to get rid of the idea of the religious life as a walled-in garden? A nun thought that we should not give the impression of religious seeking to live their lives apart from the ordinary person's day-to-day struggle to survive. If our ideal is the image of the religious returning each evening to the comfortable, protected life of the religious house, it is hard to answer the objection: what do you know about raising a family on \$450 a month?

In reply it was said that the remark about freedom from anxieties must be understood in its context. Religious life should liberate the individual religious from preoccupations that prevent him from serving God and the neighbour. Moreover, if the religious lives his life according to his rules, that is, according to the Gospel, he will be happy;

if not, he will be fearful and anxious. The important thing, another speaker said, is to know the circumstances in which people live their lives: but it is not necessary that this knowledge should derive from shared experiences.

A number of other points were raised. The text states that religious should have compassion "for those who are in danger of losing their souls." But which of us knows who, in fact, are in such a danger? Some other phrase should be used.

Does the statement: "Man is overwhelmed by physical comfort and tends to forget spiritual values," reflect the real situation of the people of Hong Kong? Would it not be more accurate to say that people's neglect of spiritual values arises perhaps from a desire of sharing in physical comforts which they now lack?

A layman expressed dissatisfaction with the text where it declares that religious "show to the world that true happiness can only be found in the service of God and the neighbour." Surely, he said, true happiness is found also in the married state.

SOCIAL DIMENSION OF THE CHURCH

THE first item on the agenda of the last meeting of Group 7 (November 17) was the arrival at a decision on two points concerning rent control: (a) should we omit a plea for the control of rents of domestic premises in the public as distinct from the private sector? (b) should we recommend the extension of existing legislation to include protection for commercial and industrial premises?

Speakers to the first point felt a reference to rent control in the public sector was unnecessary, since experience shows there have been no unreasonable increases here over the years. Moreover how effective would rent control legislation be if Government was bent on increasing the rent of premises in Resettlement Estates and Low Cost Housing Areas? Others, and the majority, as the voting showed, felt it would be better to recommend control also in the public sector as a means of providing a sense of security for tenants in public housing.

With regard to the other question, some delegates thought it was a technical matter on which the Group was unqualified to express an opinion and that hence it should be passed over. But, it was objected, in what way is this question any more technical than that of rents of domestic premises which had been discussed earlier? To this it was replied that the level of rents of domestic premises is something that affects everyone and our interest in social justice demands our speaking out on this point. Others however felt that the rent charged for industrial and commercial premises also affects

the public: rent increases are passed on to the customer and are reflected in the form of higher commodity prices; workers, moreover, are liable to be thrown out of work because increased costs, occasioned by unreasonable rent increases, leave factories no choice but to close down or to economise on the size of their labour force. This last point, it was said, is particularly pertinent to Hong Kong where so many of the factories are very small.

At the end of a lengthy discussion, the Group, influenced chiefly by the examples of unreasonable rent increases affecting industrial and commercial premises quoted by some delegates, decided to ask for an extension of legislation to afford businessmen some protection from greedy landlords.

After the customary five-minute break, the Group moved on to discuss corruption, the first topic dealt with in the section entitled Moral Environment.

The first speaker expressed his satisfaction with the text where it describes the situation existing in Hong Kong in regard to corruption. The second speaker found fault with the statement that the average citizen "feels he is powerless to do anything about corruption" and so must go along with the practice. This delegate was convinced there is much that the ordinary person can do: he should know what is due him by legal right; he should report cases of corruption that come to his attention; above all he himself should refrain from offering a bribe, since without his cooperation there could be no corruption. A priest remarked that we are all guilty in various ways of corrupt practices. He gave as examples the school which is ready to make room for the child who has been recommended by well-to-do friends, but not for the unrecommended child of poor parents. Another delegate thought that this matter should receive priority attention from the Diocesan (or Ecumenical) Anti-Corruption Bureau whose establishment is recommended in the document.

A propos of this proposed Diocesan Bureau, another delegate felt its function should be to assist people to present their case to the police and to ensure that complaints were acted on. He would be strongly opposed, he said, to a Bureau which would seem to be in competition with the existing Anti-Corruption Bureau: our document, in which we proclaim our readiness to cooperate with any group trying to tackle the problem of corruption, should say nothing which would tend to undermine public confidence in the Anti-Corruption Bureau; we should try to put our case for the separation of the Anti-Corruption Bureau from the police in a responsible and constructive way.

Another delegate thought that

corruption should not be the first problem treated in the section, Moral Environment. He thought the practice was not so peculiar to Hong Kong as to warrant such emphasis. He felt the most relevant factor brought out by the text as contributing to corruption was contained in *Situation*, n. 4: "The Oriental custom of gift-bringing leaves the door open to various forms of indirect bribery."

COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA

THE discussion at the last meeting of Group 8 (November 18) was on films. The draft document suggests that "it is time we should have our own man on the board of film censors." This was opposed by several speakers. Besides the fact that in Hong Kong the censorship of any film is carried out by individuals not by a board, it was pointed out that, even if we could provide an expert whom Government would be willing to appoint, we should be unwise to get involved in something that earns only opprobrium. Instead, it was suggested, our document should protest at the way the showing of films here is tied to crass commercial interests to the detriment of the public, and should deplore the low standard—moral, aesthetic, educational and even from the entertainment point of view — of locally-made films.

A delegate said that we shall have to accept the fact that films portraying violence and scenes of explicit sex are here to stay: we should therefore lay much stress on the need to educate our young people to value such films at their true worth and help them develop a taste for better-class fare.

Perhaps the greatest danger to which young film-goers are exposed, this delegate added, is the gradual acceptance of the crude materialistic values portrayed in the vast majority of films. This work of education, another speaker suggested, could best be done through students' film clubs and the thoughtful analysis of current films in the diocesan weeklies. Lay people, this speaker continued, must be given every encouragement to do this sort of writing; surely there must be many people in the diocese with the talent and ability to supply the diocesan papers with a regular column of this kind. In America, another speaker pointed out, universities provide summer courses in film appreciation; it is to be hoped that here extra-mural lectures might be arranged to help prepare teachers to organize film appreciation classes in our schools.

Two other suggestions found in the draft document were also discussed: the possibility of a diocesan-run cinema to show good films as a means of stimulating a demand for these among the cinema-going public; and an "invitation to professionals to shoot historical, educative and artistic documentary films for television or for lending from a film library." The first of these proposals was rejected as unwise and impractical; the other was likewise thought to be too far removed from present realities. It was suggested instead that the diocese, together with other Christian bodies, should investigate what could be done to maintain decent standards in locally-produced films, for example, by offering an annual award for the best film of the year.

Programme of Working Group Meetings during Coming Week

Place: Catholic Centre	Time: 8 p.m. — 10 p.m.
Religious	Monday, November 30
Place: Caritas Centre, Boundary Street, Kowloon.	
	8 p.m. — 10 p.m.
Social Mission of Church	Tuesday, December 1
Communications Media	Wednesday, December 2
Ecumenism	Thursday, December 3
Government of Diocese	(No Meeting)

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