

# Convention News

## LITURGY

THE first proposal discussed at the last meeting of Group 1 (December 7) urged "that a simple breviary for lay people should be compiled and the faithful should be encouraged to recite it individually or, whenever possible, in groups." A number of knowledgeable delegates spoke of simplified breviaries brought out in England and in France; it is this kind of breviary that ought to be translated into Chinese: there is no need to compile a special one for the laity of Hong Kong. If the breviary in its new, shortened form, consists of a prayer, a hymn, a psalm and a short reading, how will its recitation in public differ from a bible service? This question, put by a priest-delegate, remained unanswered.

There was wide agreement that the laity ought to be encouraged to recite the breviary without, of course, being under any obligation to do so: when they pray, they are to be recommended to use the breviary, which is the Church's official prayer, in accordance with the mind of Vatican II. The Council, as a lay delegate pointed out, insisted that holiness is for all; thus the breviary, a unique source of holiness, should not be the prerogative of any one group in the Church. It is to be hoped that a breviary for the laity will include the Sunday

vespers and compline that are used elsewhere in the Church, in order to give users the sense of being at one in their prayers with other Catholics throughout the world-wide Church.

The Group next discussed a series of recommendations on music in a liturgical celebration. The first speaker had hard things to say about church choirs. The situation, he asserted, has got worse and worse over the last few years; choirs take up their position far apart from the congregation and seem gradually to have cornered all the singing for themselves! Moreover they are always switching to new hymns before the congregation has had the chance to learn the old ones. He concluded by suggesting that all church choirs be suspended for a period of twelve months. A number of other speakers rallied to the defence of choirs, explaining that they have their own special function in a liturgical celebration, namely, the singing of more difficult pieces and helping the congregation to fulfil its own role by leading the singing of the parts to be sung by all. Another speaker suggested that the Group should not enter into too much detail about how to promote greater community participation in singing at Mass; (e.g. providing hymn books in benches, announcing the number of the hymns, having the choir-master stand near the altar to conduct choir and congregation simultaneously); the Diocesan Liturgical Commission ought to be asked to provide concrete suggestions for the parishes. When delegates stressed the need for new Cantonese texts and melodies for the diocese, a parish priest hoped that this would be for the future: choirs and congregation, he thought, have enough new hymns to learn at present to be going on with!

"The language used in singing should be the same as that of the celebration. On special occasions, however, singing in Latin or English could be allowed." This proposal gave rise to some discussion. Exception was taken to the restrictions the recommendation seemed to put on the congregation's liberty to use whatever language was found most appropriate. In the end the recommendation was amended to read: For pastoral reasons (i.e. to promote greater participation of the faithful) the language used in singing should normally be the same as that of the celebration. However, on occasion, singing in other languages could be allowed."

What about singing in Mandarin? A young lady was opposed to the suggestion: the local congregations, she said, are composed of Cantonese, few of whom understand Mandarin; to use this language in hymns would only further lower the standard of hymn-singing and most people wouldn't know what they were singing. Others, however, referred to the popularity of Mandarin pop songs and felt that what the recommendation was saying is that in the absence of good Cantonese hymns, Mandarin hymns are preferable to English ones as being more in keeping with the local culture. Another point stressed was the sense of unity the use of Mandarin could provide when local Catholics go to Taiwan, or Singapore or Malaysia; this sense was provided formerly by the use of Latin.

A further recommendation

emphasised the responsibility of schools and parish associations for seeing that their students and members are prepared to take an active part in congregational singing at Mass and other liturgical occasions (e.g. marriages and funerals). A final proposal dealt with the use of tape-recorders, etc. in churches. A delegate spoke of hearing in a church in Malaysia a recording of a Requiem Mass in Gregorian chant. The fact that it was on the occasion of a wedding did nothing to diminish the congregation's obvious enjoyment of the singing. Another delegate felt that recorded music should be a last resort and thought it would be a pity if it provided parishes with an easy excuse for not making every effort to form and train a choir.

## RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

"BEING in a situation where the possibility to proclaim the Good News exists, people in Hong Kong Catholic primary schools are convinced that they have a natural right to spread the fullness of truth which they believe present only in the Christian religion and that the school is the proper and suitable place to do so." There was much discussion on this statement of the draft document at the last meeting of Group 2 (December 8).

The first speaker felt that before presuming to teach the Catholic religion to primary school children, the school authorities should seek the consent of the parents. A nun thought that this would be too troublesome as well as unnecessary. The parents' consent, she said, is implicit in their freely entrusting their children to Catholic educators; in her experience, she added, she had never heard complaints, but was often begged by parents to teach their children to be good. She concluded by saying that if parents spontaneously object to their children being taught Catholic doctrine, there is no problem; but why go looking for trouble by putting ideas into their heads?

A priest-delegate maintained that we must respect the freedom of children and parents as laid down in the documents of the Vatican Council, and that Hong Kong parents of modest means who want a good education for their children are not completely free in their choice of school. Moreover, he said, Government-aided schools should scrupulously attend to the regulations drawn up by the ED for safeguarding religious liberty. This same delegate reminded the Group that no free country in Asia permits Catholic educators to teach religion in school; the Church in those territories previously took advantage of the privilege granted them under colonial administrations; but the end of colonialism marked the withdrawal of this privilege.

At the end of the debate a motion was passed stating that "in order to show that we respect the parents' right to educate their children according to their beliefs, every child's parents should be asked at the beginning of the school year if they object to their child's attending religion classes."

It was pointed out that this motion did not intend to exclude from our schools the teaching of morality and natural religion; all pupils should get classes in basic ethics. But

before we can put this programme into operation much work remains to be done in drawing up courses and preparing textbooks suited to primary school pupils.

Further discussion of textbooks was postponed until a later section of the draft in which this topic is explicitly dealt with.

The Group was dissatisfied with the paragraph of the draft which sets out the aim of our religion classes. One speaker felt that the text had Catholic children only in mind, whereas our situation is quite different. It was agreed that the text should be entirely rewritten. The new version which will clearly distinguish our objectives with regard to Catholic and non-Catholic pupils will be discussed at the next meeting.

The next section of the document aims at elaborating a programme for religion lessons in primary schools. Speakers criticised both the content and the form of the section: the content for being too detailed when only general outlines are called for; and the form for consisting chiefly of long quotations from modern works on catechetics, written with the needs of French Catholic children in mind. After a few half-hearted attempts to save the section, a motion to delete it completely was unanimously approved.

The next section, entitled: How to Proceed, nearly met a similar fate. But after some discussion it was decided to have the section rewritten, replacing the quotations taken from books on catechetics with pertinent statements from the Vatican Council and taking into account the different needs of Catholic and non-Catholic pupils.

## PRIESTLY LIFE

THREE rather controversial questions were on the agenda for discussion at the last meeting of Group 5 (December 11): should Hong Kong have (a) a lay presbyterate, (b) permanent married deacons, (c) worker priests?

The debate opened with the question: are there enough priests in Hong Kong? One speaker said that there are more than 300 priests working in the diocese: if these were all doing full-time priestly work they would be quite sufficient

to look after the Catholics and preach the Gospel to non-Christians. A second speaker thought that no diocese will easily admit to having enough priests; but, in fact, in God's economy a sufficient number of people are called; however not enough respond to the call. A third speaker mentioned the difficulty of finding priests to look after Legion praesidia, especially if the Legionaries can meet only on Sunday. The need for more Sunday Masses to cater for small groups was also brought up.

A delegate spoke of the shortage of priests that might be created if at a future date foreign-born priests had to leave Hong Kong. In such changed circumstances, he added, people chosen from among the local community to work as part-time priests might well make all the difference. Another delegate argued that, in view of these possible circumstances ensuring a very well prepared laity would be preferable to recruiting a second class priesthood. The example of the Philippines was quoted in this context. Before the Spanish missionaries left, they ordained many boys in country districts. These priests tended to lower the esteem of the people for the clergy, with the result that there were even fewer vocations. The example of Japan was also brought up where the faith had been preserved for three centuries without priests. Anyway, it was suggested, a regime bent on suppressing religion is unlikely to distinguish between prominent leaders of religious communities and treat part-time priests any differently from full-time ones.

In support of a lay presbyterate (admittedly an ill-chosen term) it was urged that we do not know when God calls a man to be a priest. Is it necessary that he be always called before the age of 20 or that he should be unmarried? We should leave God free to call whom He wishes; hence if any lay person desires to serve God as a priest we should take care to nurture his vocation irrespective of his age or marital status. Another speaker pointed out that there is much that a parish priest has not time to do in Hong Kong. Genuine pastoral care, he affirmed, requires a great deal of time. It takes several hours to give real assistance to a sick

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person facing the all-important act of dying. Similarly young people with problems about the faith need lengthy guidance sessions. There is great need for shepherds taken from among the flock, who have an intimate knowledge of the life of the people from actively sharing in it. Men of 40-50, it was claimed, are natural community leaders. But at present we are giving people young men of 25 and saying: Here is your leader. The example of aboriginal villages was mentioned, where one natural leader assembles the people, another preaches, while yet a third counsels. We should do all we can to help develop natural leaders in the community to lead their people effec-

tively.

Not all accepted these points. One speaker thought that those who spoke of long hours of counselling were talking about full-time and not part-time priests. Another speaker pointed out that in Hong Kong when people marry they seem no longer to have time for the activities they had previously supported with much enthusiasm. With regard to forming lay leaders who might subsequently be presented for ordination, he said that he had found it impossible to persuade young lay people to go for a special course of training in Manila; and that lengthy theology courses offered to the laity in Hong Kong had met with little response.

At the end of a prolonged debate which was energetic at

times and not infrequently wandered off the point to weigh the pros and cons of a non-celibate clergy, two motions were put to the vote. The first, that Hong Kong needs part-time priests, ended in a tie. An alternative motion, that Hong Kong remain open to the possibility of ordaining as priests people chosen from among the community, whether married or not, even if they wish to continue with their secular occupations, was passed.

There was little time left for hearing the delegates' views on the other two topics of the agenda. A motion that Hong Kong needs permanent (married) deacons was passed. The question of worker-priests will be brought up for a more leisurely airing at the next meeting of the Group.

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