

Convention News

RELIGION

AT the last meeting of Group 6 (December 14) the sections of the draft document on obedience and poverty were discussed.

The first speaker referred to a sentence of the text which reads: "Although the vow of chastity seems the characteristic of the religious life, it is obedience which involves the most complete gift of oneself to God." Comparisons, he said, between the relative importance of the vows are odious and, what's more, highly controversial. The documents of the Vatican Council, departing from the traditional order of the three vows, pointedly speak of chastity, obedience and poverty.

Criticism was also voiced of the statement: "It is by obedience that the religious reproduces throughout a whole life time the very life of Christ who said: 'My food is to do the will of the One who sent Me.'" This seemed to some to be an exaggeration: much in the life of the religious is not touched by obedience. Moreover the scriptural quotation deals with Christ's obedience to His Father, not with voluntary obedience to a man.

A subsequent paragraph of this chapter on obedience states: "It is quite true that the superior can make mistakes, though the dialogue eliminates most of the chances; however it is also true that the saving mission of Christ is a mystery by itself: the sin of the first parents became a 'happy fault' A delegate felt that this seemed too much like elevating the stupidities of superiors into part of Christ's saving mission: mistakes are always mistakes, and should be seen and acknowledged as such.

Are religious always *duty-bound* to make representations to their superiors, as the text declares? Some thought not. Silent obedience might on occasion be more virtuous. Others felt that, without dialogue, obedience would not be intelligent nor, therefore, human.

"True obedience is not passive but active and seeks to second the superior's zeal in view of the smooth functioning of things." One speaker thought that we would weaken the whole concept of obedience by equating it to cooperation with the superior.

A delegate expressed the view that the three recommendations at the end of the chapter were pious exhortations rather than recommendations. He suggested instead a few brief statements urging some practical steps to ensure a practice of obedience in conformity with the spirit of the Vatican Council.

Towards the end of the meeting the Group moved on to treat of poverty. The text mentions some criticisms heard today concerning the practice of poverty. It then goes on to state that some of these criticisms are "mere over-simplifications and aggressive generalisations."

A delegate felt that putting the two sides of the question was proper in a document that was intended as a basis for discussion; but the Group should now decide which of these opposing views was the more acceptable and include it alone in the revised document.

The following paragraphs of the draft treat of Christ's teaching on poverty both by

word and example. A delegate thought that the scripture quotations referred to the ordinary Christian asceticism demanded of all. He suggested that perhaps we ought to take Christ's statement: He who does not renounce all he possesses cannot be my disciple, in somewhat the same way as the saying: He who does not hate father, mother . . . cannot be my disciple. After all, Lazarus and his sisters were not asked to strip themselves of their belongings as a condition of discipleship.

Group 6 will hold its next meeting on January 11th 1971.

SOCIAL DIMENSION OF CHURCH

THE delegates attending the last meeting of Group 7 (December 15) discussed the sections of the draft document dealing with prostitution, youth gangs and western influence.

The first speaker pointed out that the draft contains no recommendation that directly concerns prostitution. There is a proposal urging that "respectable forms of recreation with approved women escorts should be arranged for servicemen and tourists." To whom, this delegate asked, are we addressing this proposal: to the Government? the diocese? the army and navy authorities? tourist agencies? A proposal addressed to everybody in general and nobody in particular is not likely to produce results.

In the course of the subsequent discussion on prostitution, several suggestions were made for inclusion as recommendations in the draft. One speaker proposed that a White Paper on the subject should be prepared: unless people know the size of the problem there will be no strong public outcry for positive steps to do something about it. Who should undertake the preparation of the White Paper? There were a number of suggestions: some thought the diocese (either through an *ad hoc* committee or through the recently resuscitated Catholic Conference for Social Service or the Research Bureau recommended in another part of the draft document); others thought it should be an ecumenical effort and also include non-Christians; another felt the Government would have to be involved, else the finished study would have little influence.

A nun with much experience in dealing with the problem of prostitution told the Group that not enough is being done to prevent young girls from taking up this way of life. In her experience older professional ladies do not want to quit; they just don't care any more. Hence our efforts will be far more usefully directed towards helping young girls to avoid being enticed into a life of prostitution.

A social worker, speaking from her experience in job-placement for the "socially handicapped," appealed to Christians and others of good will to give a chance of employment to those wishing to give up living as prostitutes. These women and girls have often been rejected by their families and have no one to turn to but their former colleagues. This speaker said that we all need a change of heart, a readiness to give people a second chance. Often, she said, the most disappointing response comes from Catholic employers; when asking the assistance of the job-placement

bureau in filling their vacancies, they too often specify: "but no socially handicapped, please."

The next problem discussed was youth gangs. These, the draft assures us, are recruited mainly from drop-outs from schools. In this connection criticism was voiced of the policy of many schools which allow themselves to be too easily infected with exam fever; this leads them to keep the successful and to get rid of students of excellent character who fail to measure up to the academic standards which the school demands. Another speaker mentioned the danger of young people being taken in by the false picture of life portrayed in films; he also made a plea for the introduction of a system of film classification that would include an "X" certificate, barring entry to unaccompanied children under 16. Another speaker stated that a new TV Code is being introduced and perhaps its standards in matters of violence and explicit sex may be extended to the cinema.

On the question of western influence much was said about existing gaps — the generation gap, the cultural gap, the gap between the old world and the new. One speaker pointed out that the ideas of Hong Kong's youth are much more influenced by what is happening in the western world than by eastern cultural patterns. Another reported that many of her Chinese friends had told her that in the moral training they received in schools managed by missionary congregations, the morally good is simply equated with what is considered important in the west and not enough attention is paid to nurturing Chinese moral values.

A delegate pointed out that only the negative aspects of western influence are mentioned in the text; he felt that this gives the false impression that all western influence is evil. Another delegate maintained that it is an exaggeration to say of the English press in Hong Kong that it "often carries campaigns to introduce . . . practices and movements popular in western countries which are . . . immoral."

Among the many other points raised in the course of the discussions were: teachers must instruct by their example: it's little use for a teacher to tell the pupil not to gamble as he heads towards the local mahjong school; we should tell our pupils what to

do when one of their companions is accosted by thugs and made hand over watch, fountain-pen, etc.: if they must run away it should be in the direction of the nearest phone to dial 999; much attention should be given to educating people how to use their leisure: with the introduction of shorter working hours, this has become a worldwide problem, made more difficult in Hong Kong because of overcrowding: those who start work after primary school are most in need of this education; parents and adults generally need their attitudes towards the young updated: they must be told, for instance, that long hair, however aesthetically unpleasing, does not denote moral depravity; schools and church premises should be made available for 'moderately supervised' dance parties: young people will dance: much better they do so in wholesome surroundings.

COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA

AT a meeting of Group 8 on December 16 the topic for discussion was the Diocesan Public Relations Office.

Father Marazzi, a member of the Working Group, described the responsibilities of the diocesan PRO. He said the work consists partly in answering queries from press, radio and TV and partly in handing out press releases whenever the importance of the occasion warrants these. Father Marazzi disagreed with the suggestion in the draft document that the diocesan spokesman labours under unnecessary difficulties. He acknowledged the help and co-operation he receives from the diocesan authorities and spoke of the easy access he has to them for any information he needs.

What qualities should the PR Officer have? Father Marazzi said that besides being fully trained he should be bilingual, that is, should be able to speak both Chinese and English fluently and write one of these languages correctly. It should be a full-time job, he added, held preferably by a priest, since a priest need not be paid too high a salary and would have a more intimate knowledge of things ecclesiastical than a lay person. The PRO, it was recommended, should be the spokesman not only for the diocese but also for the various diocesan bureaux, such as Caritas, the Lay Apostolate Office, the Catholic Education Council. He should

maintain close contact with the diocesan authorities and with the news media, both local and international.

One delegate wanted to know why the PRO should not also be the spokesman for the religious congregations in the diocese. It was pointed out in reply that this would demand too much of one person; to attempt it, another delegate said, would be a short cut to insanity! Ideally in the PR office there should be a director with several others helping him. The PRO would answer questions of an ordinary theological or technical nature; but if particular information were requested about, for example, Caritas, it would be the PRO's job to refer the enquirer to the person in Caritas with the necessary information.

A speaker felt that the diocese provides a satisfactory information service as far as the local English and international news media are concerned, but thought that more attention could perhaps be paid to the local Chinese press, radio and TV.

The Group was rather dissatisfied with the document's treatment of the PRO and asked for a complete revision of the text. A clear distinction should be made between an official diocesan spokesman, a public relations officer and the existing Diocesan Press Bureau. If official spokesman and PRO are merely different aspects of the one office, this should be brought out clearly.