

Convention News

RELIGIOUS

MAKING up for lost time, Group 6 is getting through its draft document at a cracking pace. At their last meeting (January 11) the delegates attached to this Group discussed the section on poverty and made a start on the sections dealing with community life.

The draft describes poverty as the vow whereby the individual "commits himself to live in community, that is, to make himself available to others, to give all he has, to share his ideas and views in a spirit of collaboration . . ." The first speaker was of the opinion that this description omits the essential obligation of poverty, namely, the putting aside of one's possessions to follow Christ. The text then goes on to recommend to religious to place their confidence in God and "accept with generosity the lack of certain comforts and . . . necessities." A delegate felt that this seems to reflect too passive an attitude; he thought religious should be urged rather to seek out opportunities of practising poverty, instead of merely waiting for them to come their way.

The section on community poverty was found satisfactory; a few suggestions to improve the order of the material were accepted.

The chapter on poverty ends with a few recommendations, suggestions and reminders. In the debate on these practical points a number of ideas were especially stressed: we should distinguish between poverty as an evil which mankind today is trying hard to eradicate and the evangelical virtue which has traditionally been called poverty: living among the poor and identifying themselves closely with the kind of life led by the poor is the special charism of a small number of religious orders: we should have nothing but the highest esteem for these religious, but at the same time we must realise that this is not the living standard to be aimed at by all congregations.

The section on community life consists of a quotation from a well-known writer on the religious life. One delegate, however, was dissatisfied with certain turns of phrase with which the author compares the community life of religious with the inner life of the Trinity. He considered that the text in some places bordered on the heretical. Not all present agreed with this contention, but it was decided nevertheless to condense and simplify the paragraph and to clarify one or two of the offending expressions.

Some delegates felt that there was too much repetition in the five recommendations which follow this section of the draft and so it was agreed to omit three of them. The group approved of the remaining proposals, which suggest ways of

creating a "community of continual evangelical conversion," such as the "celebration of meaningful liturgies and frequent reflection on the word of God, creative employment of communication and discussion and in-service education so that all members may more fully participate in community renewal"—although the meaning locked up in this last phrase was not immediately evident to all.

SOCIAL MISSION OF THE CHURCH

THE section of the draft document dealing with gambling was discussed at the last meeting of Group 7 (January 12). The first speaker pointed out that the draft treats of gambling in a rather unnuanced fashion. It speaks of it as a "vice" and an "evil" but it is not clear whether the condemnation refers to gambling as such or to illegal gambling or merely to immoderate gambling.

The document deplores the amount of publicity given in the mass media to racing tips and to the results from Happy Valley as well as from the Macao canidrome. A delegate remarked that we could hardly consider seriously recommending to Government to interfere in an area so sensitive as the freedom of the press. Moreover, news sheets wholly devoted to racing sell because people are interested in that kind of thing; their suppression would only lead to the appearance of illegal sheets. Far better that the matter be kept in the open and subjected to the ordinary control of society.

The question of the legalisation of gambling was inevitably brought up. First of all the present position of the law was explained. A legal expert informed the Group that wagering or gambling in private is not against the law. What is illegal is betting in the street or keeping a common gambling house—that is, a place habitually used for games of chance at which the house takes a percentage. The difficulties in procuring evidence of offences that will secure conviction in the courts was mentioned. The law on gambling, the expert said, is complicated and perhaps stands in need of revision.

A delegate observed that Government lotteries are very popular and serve the useful purpose of accumulating funds for social welfare. If they were more frequent, he said, it might help to direct people's urge to gamble into well-regulated and useful channels.

Another delegate wanted to know what advantage would accrue to the ordinary man in the street if gambling were legalised. Was it likely, he asked, that legalised gambling would drive out illegal gambling? The onus of proof that a change in the law would be in

the long-term interests of society rests on those who advocate such a change, he said.

Some speakers were of the opinion that a Church document such as ours is not the place to propose the legalisation of off-course betting and of other forms of gambling. One delegate maintained that a recommendation of this kind might be misunderstood by readers and undercut the efforts of parish priests to impress on the faithful the dangers involved in the habit of gambling.

As against this it was urged that the issue of legalised gambling is an important one in Hong Kong, since whatever decision is finally adopted will have important social effects, it is a question which we cannot ignore. A number of speakers underlined the complexity of the problem and were agreed that the present Group could not be expected to come up with an answer. It was decided therefore to recommend that somebody in the diocese undertake a careful study of every aspect of the problem as a means of helping people to make up their minds on the issue.

In the course of the debate it was stressed more than once that no law however well framed is going to put an end to habits of excessive gambling. It is a question of personal responsibility; it must be the task of our schools to help our youngsters to become mature adults, able to stop betting when they know they should. For this reason the document should recommend that young people in schools be alerted to the risks involved in abusive gambling and to the ease with which people can become gambling addicts.

After the Lunar New Year Group 7 will come together weekly, on Tuesday evenings, in an effort to meet the Easter deadline. The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, February 2, in Caritas Centre, Boundary Street, Kowloon.

EVANGELIZATION

GROUP 11 met on January 16 to discuss the theological principles relating to the proclamation of the Good News, which is the subject of the third and last division of the draft document on evangelisation.

In the debate on the text a number of points were emphasised: there is a valid distinction between what is termed "the silent testimony" of the Church ("The Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God and of the unity of all mankind") and the proclamation of the word: while stressing this latter idea the former notion ought not to be overlooked; that "the Church stands at the service of God's word" is indubitably true as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough: the Church has other functions besides, and mention should be made of these also; the expression "preaching the word of God" is much used, but not everybody clearly understands what the term "word" means in this context: some clarification is therefore called for to show how the word is a sacrament, since "it is powerful in itself, works salvation, gives supernatural life and effects reconciliation"

A delegate pointed out that the life of the Church is based on revelation: its very existence is revelation in word and ac-

tion. Christ still continues to reveal the Father through the Church, and himself remains in the Church prolonging his vital presence and salvific action down through the ages. The Group was pleased with this approach and requested the speaker to prepare a short paragraph on revelation incorporating these ideas for insertion at this point of the document.

The proclamation of the word of God needs to be encouraged in Hong Kong, a delegate noted. He went on to say that we lack the confidence and the boldness in preaching the gospel that were marked characteristics of the early Church. Another was of the opinion that in proclaiming the word we tend to favour an approach that smacks too much of apologetics, as if we felt obliged constantly to forestall objections that might be raised.

The Group has decided to hold a day-long meeting on Thursday, January 28, in order to speed up the discussion of the draft document. It will be held at the Maryknoll Fathers' house in Stanley. To facilitate those attending, transport will be available at the Wanchai Ferry Pier at 9.30 that morning.

Programme of Working Group Meetings during Coming Week

Place: Catholic Centre, Hong. Time: 8-10 p.m.
 Religious Monday, January 25
 Evangelisation Thursday, January 28
 (10 a.m.-6 p.m.) at
 Maryknoll Father's House
 (Stanley)

Lunar New Year Holiday

Place: Caritas Centre, Boundary Street, Kowloon.
 Time: 8 p.m. — 10 p.m.
 Social Mission of Church Tuesday, February 2
 Communications Media (No Meeting)
 Ecumenism Thursday, February 4
 Government of Diocese Friday, February 5