

Convention News

LITURGY

"LITURGY and Ecumenism" was appropriately enough the topic for discussion at the meeting of Group 1 on January 18, the first day of the week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

Father Diederich of the Diocesan Ecumenical Commission was invited to express his opinion on the treatment of this topic in the draft document. He thought that the approach of the opening paragraphs should be more positive; the Convention document on ecumenism already deals adequately with the scandal of divisions among Christians. He would prefer, he said, to have a statement on the need for a true understanding of the meaning of the liturgy and of the importance for the work of promoting Christian unity of the common celebration of liturgical functions. In the liturgy Christ continues his work of the salvation of mankind; his prayer that all may be one is inseparable from the eucharistic sacrifice, and the celebration of the liturgy invites all participants to make this prayer of Christ their own. The local community represents Christ the head with his whole body, that is, all the baptized, even though separated from one another. We must therefore become aware of our fundamental unity with all whom Christ numbers among his brothers. The Eucharist, the sacrament of unity, not only signifies but also produces the grace of unity through an increase of charity.

These more positive ideas pleased the members of the Group, although one delegate felt that the document instead of giving an all-out commendation of ecumenical practices, should first stress the need for educating the faithful in the meaning of ecumenism.

Father Diederich also proposed three recommendations, which were then discussed. He first urged the more frequent inclusion in the Sunday Prayers of the Faithful of petitions for Christian unity, to remind all of the urgent need and importance of this intention. The second recommendation invites all the faithful to attend joint services with other Christians when held in our churches, not only during the annual week of prayer for unity but on feastdays throughout the year when we celebrate the more important mysteries of our salvation. These two proposals were accepted without difficulty.

The third recommendation caused some debate. It points out that the faith of a Church is expressed in its celebration of the liturgy; therefore Catholics, and especially the Catholic partners of mixed marriages are encouraged occasionally to attend the services of other Christians to understand their spiritual and religious life. (In a mixed marriage there ought to be a certain amount of give and take in this matter). Some delegates expressed reservations, pointing to the unpreparedness of the majority of the faithful for acting on such a suggestion and the confusion it might lead to. The document should therefore rather stress the means of forming the faithful in ecumenism. In reply, a delegate remarked that we should not be afraid of following what the universal Church recommends; deeper instruction will certainly be necessary, and there will be some risk involved in what we are proposing, but the possible dangers are far outweighed by the undoubt-

ed advantages that will accrue. If the faith of our Catholics is in danger, this certainly does not originate from other Christians.

After some discussion a compromise solution was arrived at: the recommendation was accepted on condition that a phrase such as "with due caution" be inserted.

The draft document contains five short paragraphs dealing with mixed marriages. After much debate it was decided to retain three of these: a suggestion to invite the minister of the non-Catholic partner to take part in the marriage celebration, during which he could pronounce a blessing; a reminder that a Catholic may act as witness, bridesmaid or best man at marriages celebrated in the churches of other Christians; and a note on how to proceed when the non-Catholic party expresses the wish to receive Holy Communion during the marriage ceremony.

The remaining two original proposals were reduced to a directive urging the Diocesan Liturgical and Ecumenical Commissions in conjunction to study the possibility of preparing an ecumenical marriage (and burial) service, in agreement with some, if not immediately with all, other Christian Churches. Here the grave difficulty regarding differences in the use of certain religious terms in Chinese was mentioned.

The last recommendation discussed at the meeting encourages Catholics, both lay and clerical, to take an interest in the "liturgical celebrations of the major Christian Churches." Is this practical, seeing what an uphill struggle it is to interest many of the laity in our own liturgical celebrations? In spite of this obvious objection, it was decided to retain the proposal.

At the next meeting of the Group (February 8) two proposals concerning the ecumenical aspects of the administration of baptism will be discussed.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

AT a meeting on January 19 the delegates of Group 2 finished their discussions on religious instruction in primary schools and made good headway in the next (and penultimate) chapter, religious instruction in secondary schools.

The delegates first considered a recommendation to the effect that "priests be more available to our Catholic schools and better prepared to deal with young children". To some this was too vague; to others it was not at all clear: did it mean that insufficient priests are involved in education, or that those who are involved are not doing their duty or what? On a vote the recommendation was dropped.

As an alternative recommendation a Sister suggested urging parish priests to visit the schools within their territory three or four times a year, around the more important feasts, so that the pupils may have the chance to meet a priest and have dialogue with him. To this it was objected that such visits would achieve little in schools of over 1,000 pupils, and anyway comparatively few priests feel at home with young children. In reply it was observed that even a few visits are better than nothing; that by this means pupils will have a chance of learning to feel at home with priests and the way will thus be left open to developing closer contacts later.

As another alternative it was suggested to urge priests and religious in schools "to be more

attentive to the spiritual needs of the pupils by giving less of their time and talents to administration." A nun pointed out that it is not impossible to find teachers who pay no attention to the spiritual care of their pupils and supervisors who do. Another nun suggested that Religious exercise most influence by their personal contacts; there is no need for them to teach only RK, particularly if they have been specially trained to teach other subjects; some of them perhaps might not even be able to teach RK properly. A parish priest felt differently: he thought that the first duty of a religious is to teach RK; anyone, he claimed, can deal with biology; religious should do the first task given them by God, to lead others directly to Him, not indirectly through profane subjects. He added that many religious teach merely for the sake of the salary paid them, by means of which other works of their Congregation are supported.

A nun countered this by reminding the Group of the European experience where Sisters unqualified for teaching profane subjects were therefore entrusted with the RK classes; this did not escape the notice of the pupils, who quickly identified RK with priests and nuns and concluded that though religion might be good for these, it was strictly not for them. A layman considered that in the proposed recommendation the phrase "spiritual needs of the pupils" was sufficiently broad to embrace that most important function of the teacher, the formation of Christian character in whichever of the various ways this can be achieved. This view contented both sides and the recommendation was accepted.

The last recommendation concerning primary schools to be discussed suggests that "participation in the liturgy and reception of sacraments be for Catholic children not a question of age but of maturity and religious development (within the limitations of the child's capacity)". This proposal was slightly amended. In the form in which it was accepted it stipulates that the criteria should not be just age and class, but also maturity and religious development.

Nearly seven pages of the background material in the chapter on religious instruction in secondary schools were found satisfactory and quickly passed by the meeting. However there was one paragraph that the delegates were not happy about. The text asserts that "the recent success of youth clubs and organizations, summer camps, pop-in and parish dances here in Hong Kong, attests to the fact that our young people want to find small communities where they can be themselves and participate actively in and express the things that are most important and meaningful to them." This paragraph serves as an introduction to a plea for specially prepared liturgical services for small groups of secondary students.

It was objected that the para-

graph was untrue, irrelevant and contained a non-sequitur. A priest questioned the success of the enterprises named; he said that the young like parish clubs as long as no rules inhibit their freedom to do their thing; but their interest wanes in direct proportion to an increase in demands for some kind of order. A nun maintained that teenagers' interest in organized activities showed only a desire to have a bit of fun with their peers and not any predilection for small groups as such. But if this is true, as another nun pointed out, the paragraph as an introduction to a plea for small group liturgies becomes meaningless and irrelevant. It was agreed therefore to delete the offending passage.

Some of the recommendations contained in this chapter were discussed at earlier meetings. The remaining ones (nos. 4, 5, 7, 8) will be dealt with at the Group's next meeting (February 9).

EDUCATION

THE pros and cons of setting up a "committee for post-secondary education," a recommendation in the draft document's chapter on the Apostolate of Higher Education, was the first point discussed by the members of Group 3 at their meeting on January 20.

To some there seemed not a little confusion in the text: did the framers of the proposal intend a committee to deal with questions of a strictly educational nature or with the spiritual needs of Catholic post-secondary students? Other delegates thought that the committee should be set up and left to work out its own terms of reference. But, it was objected, unless we know what kind of issues the committee members will be asked to discuss, how can an intelligent choice of committee members be made?

How would such a committee fit in with the various other bodies in the diocese concerned with education? The delegates thought it better to leave this point vague and agreed to state merely that it should occupy "a prominent place in the educational structures of the diocese."

At the conclusion of the debate on this point it was decided to recommend the setting up of such a committee and to entrust to it a study of the question of a Catholic post-secondary college in Hong Kong. (A whole section of the text takes up this latter issue; but the meeting agreed that any useful discussion of so complicated a problem would consume a disproportionate amount of its time.)

Five remarks on ecumenism among post-secondary students were then considered. They were found unobjectionable, though one delegate queried their relevance in a document concerned with general education, and another asked that they be condensed into three statements.

A short section on student unrest was discussed next. A delegate felt that this problem concerns only the students themselves and that whatever

Programme of Working Group Meetings during Coming Week

Social Mission of Church	Tuesday, February 2
Communications Media	(No Meeting)
Ecumenism	Thursday, February 4
Government of Diocese	Friday, February 5
Evangelisation	Saturday, February 6
Place: Caritas Centre, Boundary Street, Kowloon.	
Time: 8 p.m.—10 p.m.	

unrest exists among students in Hong Kong derives from their taking sides in other people's disputes. This was countered by a speaker who maintained that student unrest is also society's problem; it is one the community will have to face sooner or later — and better that it be sooner.

The text urges that students should be allowed to participate in the administration of post-secondary colleges (already a fact in some, though not all, such colleges in Hong Kong). A Sister suggested that what students really want is a structure by means of which their grievances, proposals, etc. can be channeled to the appropriate authorities and be given a sympathetic hearing. Perhaps, she said, student representatives on an administrative board is not necessarily the best way to achieve this: it would certainly entail sitting through a great number of uninteresting staff meetings. But another delegate thought that the notion of participation in the administration should be maintained, and that the purpose behind such participation, as described by the previous speaker, should be explained.

It was also agreed to add another short paragraph to the text at this point expressing the Church's confidence in and support for youth.

Towards the end of the meeting the Convener asked the Group to suggest ways of speeding up the discussions in order to finish by Easter. (So far only half of the long document—and the less controversial half at that—has been debated.)

Two proposals were made:

to send by post to each delegate of Group 3 the recommendations contained in the remaining chapters for their approval or rejection. Any point raised in the replies by two or more delegates will be taken up at the subsequent meetings. The other proposal suggested asking someone to formulate the three or four most important recommendations in the chapters yet to be studied: these alone would be considered at future meetings. Thus some at least of the larger issues of the remaining chapters would be discussed.

However as the number of delegates present was so small, it was felt impossible to take any firm decision on so important a question at the meeting.