

# Convention News

## RELIGIOUS

**GROUP 6** delegates at their latest meeting (February 15) discussed the third section of the draft document, Adaptation of the Religious Life in Hong Kong.

The introductory paragraphs of the section deal with themes such as the theological basis for, and historical background to adaptation. These were found generally satisfactory and provoked little discussion before being accepted by the Group.

Two series of suggestions directed at foreign missionaries then follow. The first series lists six reasons to support the proposal that "whenever feasible, it is to be hoped that foreign missionaries be educated in the land where their future apostolate will be exercised"—the reference is to the six or seven years of major seminary or corresponding formation.

The first speaker stated that some Congregations had in the past adopted the policy of sending very young religious overseas: this had resulted in numerous losses. Consequently a reaction set in and superiors began to send older people (e.g. after ordination), who were a good deal less adaptable. Another speaker felt that we should consider the advantages to be gained in having foreign missionaries do their studies in their home countries. They would have, for instance the, advantage of well prepared teachers, a greater variety of educational opportunities and the possibility of a wider interchange of views. Moreover, those who come to the land where their future apostolate will be exercised at a more mature age will not be subjected to such a great psychological strain — a strain which might in part explain the heavy losses mentioned above.

As against this it was suggested that it is through the local language that one most readily assimilates the local culture; hence the need to send people overseas while still at an age in which they will find it easier to get a good grasp of the language.

At the end of the discussion it was decided to list the advantages of sending religious overseas at an early age and to note that religious superiors in deciding a policy for their own congregation should give these advantages serious consideration.

The second series of suggestions offered to foreign missionaries contains eight proposals for their actual apostolate. One speaker pointed out that there are many opportunities for doing splendid work for the Church here without a knowledge of the local language. The diocese, he said, needs specialists; if these can do their work through English we should not close the door on them by imposing a knowledge of the local language. A nun added that the ability to mix well with the local clergy and laity comes more from a desire to cultivate the spirit of brotherhood and from an innate respect for the dignity

of others than from a fluent knowledge of the language.

The usefulness of the other points mentioned in the series of suggestions was acknowledged. The list however was found to be rather repetitious and it was felt that some ideas were too obvious to need mentioning.

The next two sections of the text contain suggestions for local religious and for the formation of local vocations. Much of the matter found in the first section is repeated in the second. It was therefore decided to reduce both lists of proposals rather drastically and to combine them into one.

Only one of these recommendations provoked comment among the delegates. "They should be told to avoid discussions of a political nature, particularly with confreres from abroad. Politics can have a very divisive effect on community life and the apostolate". A priest-delegate felt that this was too negative and thought it would be better to urge religious to cultivate a tolerant attitude towards the political ideas of others. We should be able to discuss politics without heat, he said: that political discussions should be outlawed only if they in fact do prove to be divisive. Another priest, drawing, as he confessed, on his experience of living in a community with four or five other nationalities, considered that all such discussions do more harm than good and should be avoided. The Group, however, took a more optimistic view of human nature!

## GOVERNMENT OF DIOCESE

"ALL things considered, we suggest that a five-year tenure of office for a parish priest henceforth be considered the general norm." This suggestion of the draft document was discussed by the delegates of Group 10 when they met on February 19.

A priest-delegate felt that the determining of a parish priest's tenure of office should be left entirely to the bishop; we should not, he said, make any suggestion that might seem to tie his hands; and he added that leaving the matter to episcopal discretion fits in better with the ideas of Vatican II, which gave more power to bishops. A lay delegate thought it unwise to specify any definite number of years for a parish priest; the bishop often has his reasons for wishing to change a parish priest; a fixed term of, say, five years (as the draft recommends) might well create in priest and people an expectancy which would make action by the bishop before the end of the five years extremely difficult.

Another lay delegate was of the opinion that the long tenure of a parish priest has a good psychological effect on the parish, providing a sense of stability and continuity. The danger of a parish priest, known to be approaching the end of his term, being ignored or overlooked by the parishion-

ers, and the possibility of a parish priest similarly placed banding his flock together to resist his coming removal, were also mentioned. The mind of another delegate boggled at the mere thought of the practical difficulties involved in inter-parochial musical chairs at the end of every five years.

Other delegates put forward reasons in favour of a relatively short term of office: it opens the possibility of priests being put in charge of a parish while still comparatively young and active; after a certain number of years at any job a person runs out of ideas and has nothing new to offer; a flexible system whereby the bishop can extend the term beyond the stated figure provides him with the possibility of removing incompetent parish priests without loss of face, while at the same time keeping on successful ones.

How long should the term of office be? A priest suggested three years with the possibility of confirmation for a further three-year period. Most delegates thought three years too short a time for a parish priest to get to know his parishioners and prove himself, and were inclined to consider five years as the proper length of time. They were opposed to a delegate's suggestion that the possibility of a further extension of five years be expressly mentioned, fearing that in this way a ten-year term would in practice become the norm.

Another view was that a change attitude is far more important than fixing a period of years in office. A parish priest, a delegate said, should be ready at any moment to lay down the reins of office and accept a posting to another parish. He should be content moreover to return to the ranks and work as an assistant priest. When in office he should be eager to delegate authority, to spread parochial responsibilities among his assistants, forming one team with them. The faithful on their part should realise that it is not always necessary to go to the parish priest for everything; the assistant priest may be just as well able to satisfy their needs.

How long should an assistant priest be left in a parish? Older men who through age or ill-health have laid down heavier responsibilities to become assistants might well be left where they are indefinitely. But there is much to be said for changing younger men rather frequently. It was considered sufficient to recommend in the document for these latter a shorter term than the five years suggested for parish priests.

What about the term of office of those whose work demands special skills, knowledge and training? The impossibility of making any uniform recommendation in these cases was recognised. It was agreed there-

fore to follow the draft document's approach of not determining any length in office for these important diocesan officials. However, the need for setting up a system of apprenticeship whereby younger men might learn these difficult trades was brought up; but it was felt that, important though the matter is, it is not quite relevant to this part of the document.

At the next meeting the question of an arbitration and conciliation board for the diocese will be discussed.

## Programme of Working Group Meetings during Coming Week

Religious	(No Meeting)
Social Mission of Church	Tuesday, March 2
Evangelisation	Wednesday, March 3
Ecumenism	(No Meeting)
Government of Diocese	Friday, March 5

Place: Catholic Centre, Hong Kong  
Time: 8 p.m. — 10 p.m.