

Convention News

SOCIAL MISSION OF CHURCH

At a meeting on March 16, the delegates of Group 7 discussed the last section of their draft document, General Recommendations. The first of these recommendations urges the setting up on the diocesan level of "a small group that will be both dynamic and knowledgeable in fields of social concern . . . The group will function in an advisory capacity and also act as catalyst and stimulant by feeding current social events, problems and concerns to the parish-level social concern groups. It will make provision for training groups on local level. This group will also take an official stand on issues of social concern and may act as coordinator of social concern groups in times of crisis".

The delegates seemed agreed on the usefulness of such a group and the discussion centred on how it should be structured. What relationship would it have with the newly revived Catholic Council of Social Service? The Vatican has urged the establishment of Justice and Peace Commissions at diocesan level: is this the kind of thing the recommendation has in mind? As a result of the SODEPAX meeting in Japan last year, an ecumenical Community Development Committee has been founded in Hong Kong: would this committee fulfil the functions set out in the recommendation?

From the debate it emerged that the delegates considered that none of these bodies is precisely the organization the draft document proposes. What they wanted, it appeared, is a small group that would above all be active and not get lost in endless, unprofitable discussions—a group that would enjoy a certain autonomy and act as the voice of the diocese in social matters. Ideally it should be a diocesan commission for social policy and action analogous to the Diocesan Liturgical or Ecumenical Commissions.

One delegate urged that the proposed group should be a truly ecumenical body and not a diocesan one to which persons of other denominations are invited, as the text of the draft seems to envisage. Another delegate suggested that some of its members should be paid, full-time staff. Should it then be part of Caritas which has already full-time salaried staff members? To this two objections were raised: a diocesan body of the type being proposed should be distinct from any of the individual socially active bodies in the diocese, and identification with a Government-subsidized body like Caritas might tend to restrict the group's freedom to criticize whatever seemed to them to need criticism.

In the end it was agreed to recommend the setting up of a diocesan body which would be active in the social field and would have authority to take an official stand on social issues. The delegates, as one of their number put it, should not try to fill in all the details of structure, membership, method of appointment, but should be content to leave something for future generations to decide!

The second and third recommendations of the section under discussion propose that "in each parish or Christian community, as a vital part of its structure,

there be set up a community action group committed to social concern"; a pilot group should be started in one parish and from this experimental body other parishes will learn what to do and what to avoid.

Again much of the discussion focussed on the structure of these parish units. Who would be in charge of them: the parish priests? the parish councils? the diocesan body already spoken of? Regarding the relationship of this diocesan body and the parish groups opinion was divided. Some saw the role of the parish groups as the carrying out of the general policy decided on at diocesan level. Others felt that the movement should be in the other direction: the initiative should lie with the parish groups since they alone are able to assess properly the different needs of each parish; where, however, there are found to be common problems or where advice or training facilities are needed, the diocesan body will step in.

It was urged once again that these parish level groups should be formed on an ecumenical basis and that their chief concern should be action and not discussion. Stress was put on the need for gaining the co-operation of parish priests: unless these are wholeheartedly behind the groups it will be very hard to get volunteers from the parishes to join them.

One delegate opposed the idea of ecumenical groups. He argued that we should first set our own house in order; then having made a start by ourselves we could expand the groups and open them to ecumenical membership. However the majority of the delegates present preferred an ecumenical structure from the beginning and favoured therefore avoiding specifically Catholic terms when naming or describing these local social action groups.

At the end of the discussion it was decided to reword the recommendations in the document so that the stress will now fall on what is expected of these social action groups. Hence the revised document will state the need for ecumenically composed local groups concerned with social action related to the particular problems of their own area; it will then recommend that such groups be set up, leaving their structure undetermined.

Group 7 will hold its next meeting on March 30. The topic for discussion will be either the section on Medical Care (at present being rewritten by a group of doctors) or the first part of pages 1-16 of the draft (also being rewritten for discussion), depending on which is ready first.

EVANGELIZATION

GROUP 11 delegates at their latest meeting (March 17) continued their discussion of the practical recommendations they propose to add to the second and third parts of their revised document.

The first recommendation debated states that "the Church's charitable works and institutions must show forth Christian concern as love and care, so that persons to be pre-evangelised will see and feel how the poor and needy, regardless of race or creed, are cared for and loved. Such charitable works as schools and hospitals should not be for financial profit and should even show where profit is used, if any".

Some speakers thought that this was too general and theoretical. What is needed is a recommendation of a strictly practical nature. Others felt that it is worth while stressing that what the Church aims at in her works and institutions is the exercise of charity and not propaganda work.

Schools and hospitals should not be for financial profit: some delegates insisted strongly on this point; others were not so strict, saying that such institutions will not last long if they do not make some profit, and that some parishes rely heavily on the parish school, so that the work of evangelization would be seriously affected if we were to insist that schools make no profit at all. The majority of those present at the meeting favoured recommending the publication of annual financial statements by schools and institutions: such a practice, they felt, would be a sign of our determination to take seriously the religious poverty we talk so much about.

The next recommendation suggests that "a small group of priests be set apart to preach the gospel to non-Christians". They should use all the modern means of communication and have lecture rooms on both sides of the harbour at their disposal. One speaker thought that the group should be divided into two sections: one section would make themselves available to those who come looking for information about the faith; the other section would be more active and would represent the Church's evangelical outreach.

A recommendation concerning kerygma and our schools brought up a problem that has been discussed by more than one Convention working group. The text proposes that any presentation of kerygma in schools should be done after school hours, "to emphasise that it is not enforced". The delegates agreed that pre-evangelization should be directed at all and catechesis only at Catholics. But kerygma? Some speakers felt strongly that before a student leaves a Catholic school (sometimes after 10 or 12 years) he should have heard the proclamation of the Church's essential doctrines. RK classes in the lower forms might well concentrate on pre-evangelization to dispel prejudices; but in the upper forms the approach should be kerygmatic. But should this approach be reserved to the upper forms? Would it not be better if each year, at the discretion of the teacher, some periods in all forms were

given to kerygma, adapted to the age and maturity of the students?

One delegate spoke of a superficial kind of kerygma that all should receive. The Christian religion, he maintained, has played an important part in forming the outlooks and shaping the culture of a sizeable proportion of the world: no one who lays claim to being educated could possibly remain ignorant of Christianity's basic tenets. These should be presented to all the students in an objective way, with the aim of imparting

information rather than the making of converts.

The consensus seemed to be that the recommendations should lay stress on religious freedom without specifying in detail how it is to be safeguarded. The teaching of ethics and human values to all students is also recommended in the text. But, as one delegate pointed out, this also raises problems: surely the same principles regarding religious freedom apply equally to the teaching of ethics. However this interesting point was not pursued any further.

Programme of Working Group Meetings during Coming Week

Social Mission of Church	Tuesday, March 30
Evangelization	Wednesday, March 31
Place: Catholic Centre, Hong Kong	
Time: 8 p.m.—10 p.m.	