

# Convention News

## LITURGY

FOR a number of weeks Liturgy easily outclassed its rivals for the distinction of producing the longest list of recommendations for voting on by the delegates of the Diocesan Convention. Then came Social Mission with 125 recommendations to leave Liturgy trailing by 11. But all this time a dark horse had been holding itself in for the home stretch. As delegates will soon learn, Education, with 133 recommendations, has romped home ahead of the field by several lengths.

The delegates showed their approval of the recommendations as a whole by the very large number of *yes* votes (which of course makes the writing of this short chronicle of the results no easier, since an unsensational series of *yes* votes does not make exciting reading). Only one or two delegates, after marking the last of their votes, had sufficient energy left to indulge in general comments. A priest thought the recommendations too many and too detailed. A nun felt a lot of them were unnecessary and many others had already been put into practice in the diocese. A layman found some of the proposals lacking in clarity of expression: "perhaps", he ventured, "some of the meaning managed to escape in the process of translation".

An overall view of the results of the voting seems to indicate that delegates were ready to accept without opposition the recommendations that do not affect them personally. When it came however to giving a verdict on proposals that appeared likely to affect their own habits of worship, many delegates — but always, it must be remembered, a small minority of the 149 who returned their voting papers — inclined to take a more critical attitude.

The possibility of general absolution at the beginning of Mass should be considered and, if deemed necessary, permission should be asked from the Holy See. "No", said 24 delegates, while 14 abstained and 9 had reservations. The remarks and reservations occasioned by this proposal dealt chiefly with the need for preparing the faithful, instructing them on, for example, the sacrament of penance, the Mass as atonement for sin and the need or not for personal confession after receiving general absolution. That confessors be still available for those who would prefer to make a private confession, was also stressed.

The most quotable reservation came from a priest voting on a recommendation (from the section on the Ecclesial-Communal Character of Liturgical Celebrations) that "whenever pastoral reasons do not require otherwise, concelebration be preferred." He wrote: "Yes, provided that the priests involved are not coerced and that the concelebration is truly religiously performed; i.e. not a distracting exercise for both priests and congregation, resembling more a rehearsal of an amateur theatre group or a lost band of tourists being shepherded by a tout, rather than a meaningful liturgi-

cal function. Too often concelebration can be disgracefully slipshod, as if the priests had never learned what their parts in the ceremony were".

"Confirmation for adults should be conferred together with baptism by the same minister (if this is approved by Rome)". Thirty-six delegates were opposed to this recommendation and twelve abstained. Few delegates commented or had reservations. Said one: "yes, in cases of emergency". "In special cases only", said another, "but not as a general rule". A third suggested that an interval of six months elapse between the reception of these two sacraments to give the newly baptised adult time to take his full part in the life of the Church, in the apostolate". A fourth proposed an interval of six months or a year to allow time for a deeper assimilation by the new Christian of the spirit of Catholicism.

Should the bishop be recommended "to allow all religious brothers and nuns to help in distributing Holy Communion during Mass or in hospitals and private homes"? And "for urgent reasons (to appoint) even a layman" for this purpose? Opinions varied all the way from one delegate who wanted the words *for urgent reasons* and *even* deleted from the second part of the recommendation, to a forthright *no* to both proposals. In between there were delegates who voted *yes* while insisting that there be a real need, or an extremely urgent need, to justify the permission, or that only some but not all nuns and brothers be granted this faculty. There were two rather blunt comments on this same subject: "In Hong Kong there are more priests than work available for them"; "the problem is not the shortage of priests, but the shortage of willing priests"; and, in a milder vein, "I agree only when no priest is available: the sick person will surely prefer to have a priest".

What about 'manual' Communion being "gradually introduced, starting from qualified and better prepared groups". Thirty-two delegates voted against this practice being introduced, twelve abstained and 4 had reservations. (A number of people were curious to know who exactly these mysterious "qualified and better prepared groups" were!) There were few comments. "Not now, maybe later", wrote one respondent. "I am a foreigner: this question should be decided by the Catholic laity of Hong Kong", said another, who refrained from voting. "Every group should always be free to receive either way", was a third opinion.

A series of recommendations dealt with Benediction. One of these proposed that this eucharistic devotion should be so arranged to include scripture readings, meditation and singing; while a second urged that

Vespers should not be recited at Benediction: this to more than one delegate seemed to involve a contradiction. A third recommendation proposed that "exposition of the Blessed Sacrament merely for the purpose of giving Benediction after Mass be forbidden". A priest who acknowledged himself to be a conservative thought that this was a typical example of his more progressive colleagues' readiness to invoke and enforce a law on others when it would favour their own pet ideas, while remaining equally ready themselves to ignore a law as soon as it begins to limit their freedom to do as they please!

An indication of the progress made by the spirit of ecumenism in the diocese was apparent from the relatively little opposition encountered by a number of recommendations in the section headed: Liturgy and Christian Unity, which not many years ago would undoubtedly have met with strong resistance. Only 5 delegates were opposed to inviting the minister of the non-Catholic party of a mixed marriage to take part in the ceremony and to pronounce a blessing. A somewhat larger number (18) voted against a recommendation which proposed that "in special circumstances, if the non-Catholic party ask to receive Holy Communion during the celebration, the case be referred to the Bishop for consideration". Only two failed to agree to a proposal "that the Liturgical and Ecumenical Commissions work together to promote cooperation with the different denominations concerning mixed marriages and faithful in this matter".