

COMMENTARY

THE USES OF INFORMATION. When Beaverbrook leader-writers have nothing else to say, they begin on—or, rather, continue with—the British Council. This occupational obsession with the cost of the information services and of the work of the Council in presenting British culture abroad, can hardly have any effect on serious opinion. But the sort of philistinism which conceals its real purpose behind a concern for saving the country's cash can always be sure of a rough-and-ready response in a native suspicion of the intangibles in international relations. How does an exhibition of British paintings in Montevideo assist our trade with South America? And do English classes in Yugoslavia keep Russian ambitions at bay in the Balkans? The answer of course is that you cannot estimate, on a short-term basis, the effect of such things. But if you happen to believe that international understanding demands much more than treaties and alliances if it is to endure, then the disinterested interpretation of one country's life and traditions to another is profoundly important. For the conception of political life in terms only of military necessity and economic advantage is a travesty of man's deepest needs, and it has become very evident that such noble projects as the Council of Europe have suffered because they have lacked the popular support that can only spring from a tradition of mutual information and respect between the peoples concerned.

Such abstractions as 'Free Europe' can be merely the political response to a cold war and can easily disappear when the crisis is past. The long-term work of international understanding demands much deeper consideration and much harder work than even the multiplication of those agencies of alphabetical obscurity which we have grown used to since the war. It may, for instance, in retrospect be one of the greatest achievements of M. René Massigli's recently-concluded mission in London that he did so much for French culture in Britain. Such institutions as the Lycée in South Kensington and the Maison Française in Oxford, as well as the extension of exchange visits between teachers and students, have done an immense amount for Anglo-French understanding at the intelligible level of ordinary human contacts, and their effect will last. So, too, the work of the British Council,

especially perhaps in the colonial territories (and among colonial students in this country), is building up a confidence and knowledge which cannot be estimated in terms of immediate advantage, but which are certainly the prerequisite for trust and ordered political growth.

The Catholic Church provides a perennial analogy of unity and diversity which has its meaning in the secular sphere. And although the divided world we know offers little immediate hope that international peace based on international understanding can be realized, yet any attempt to further it must be welcomed. To reach real agreement, whether it be called co-existence or by a more realistic name, with the Communist world may seem so far beyond imagination that even lesser ambitions may be pessimistically abandoned. It would be a tragedy to conclude that we can hope for nothing but the closely-guarded devices of military security. Learning to know our neighbours, and making it possible for our neighbours to know about us, is a valuable preliminary for the extension of that mutual human understanding, which a Christian must hope will one day encompass the world.

THE TWO FACES OF PERON. Argentina is a good example of a country where an observer's little knowledge can be a most dangerous thing. It was too easily supposed by some Catholics that an official interest in securing public recognition for the Church meant a real respect for the Church's mission in society. The provision of Christian instruction in the state schools was heralded as proof of the religious instincts of the Peronistic movement. Recent events have shown that as soon as the claims of the Church in education and in moulding opinion came into conflict with the absolutist ambitions of the régime, then the Church would be penalized as 'deviationist' and 'opposed to national unity'. Close examination of the school text-books used in Argentina for some years before the recent crisis would have revealed the true intentions of Peron. The mingling of religious and patriotic themes, the accommodation of biblical texts to the 'mission' of Evita Peron, the identification indeed of the 'justicialist' movement with the kingdom of God—all this showed clearly enough that religion was conceived as a political utility which would never be allowed its proper autonomy in the

national life. Once more it has been made plain that bearers of gifts—especially religious gifts—must be feared, for religion is not only persecuted when it is destroyed. It can be denied most effectively when it is patronized.

THE AQUINAS SOCIETY. A letter in another column draws attention to the London Aquinas Society's new programme, and it is to be hoped that readers of this journal (whom one may suppose to be in sympathy with its aims) will be glad to support it. Between the wars the revival of interest in Thomism was usefully reflected in the foundation of several Aquinas Societies in the provinces, but it appears that most of them have ceased to function. It may be that the novelty of 'Thomism for the ordinary person' has ceased to attract, and it is certainly true that other philosophical allegiances have since commanded more controversial attention, so that it has become almost necessary even for some Catholic philosophers to mention the Church's preferred system with but a measure of patronising acknowledgment. An Aquinas Society is not concerned to impede philosophical discussion but rather to foster it, under the normative influence of the *Doctor Universalis*, whose authority remains unassailed because it is rooted in so fundamental an understanding of reason's power—and of reason's limits too. It is to be hoped that Birmingham, Leicester, Oxford, and other places besides, will be inspired by London's example and will revive their societies, which were never more necessary than now.

In a similar connection we may perhaps draw our readers' attention to this year's programme at Spode House, Rugeley, Staffordshire, and in particular to the second 'Writers' Weekend', sponsored by BLACKFRIARS, to be held from July 1 to 4. Details of this, and of other arrangements, may be obtained from the Warden at Spode House.