

COMMENTARY

A COMMON TASK. It can be the specialist's misfortune that his work cuts him off from the community: absorbed in his particular task, he can exaggerate its autonomous importance and fail to accept a social responsibility that is certainly his. No doubt the research worker can only make an indirect contribution to the general problems of society: it is for others to apply the discoveries he provides. But where the work done, as in education and the social services, has an immediate effect on the community at large, it is a calamity that it should so often be done in isolation—as though the work of the schoolteacher could ultimately be separated from that of the health visitor or the probation officer or the club leader, and as though any of them could be cut off from the work of parents or priests.

In a review in this issue, Mrs Ruth Morrah, writing from a long experience as a Juvenile Court magistrate, pleads for a much wider understanding among Catholics of the scope of the social services and for the realization that the simple provision of 'Catholic schools' is far from meeting the real needs of our situation. Home, school, club, factory, the Forces: these are complementary and the impact of each is real and lasting. And yet too often in discussions on juvenile delinquency or the falling away from the Church of so many young Catholics, the solution proposed reflects the specialized experience (and even obsession) of the individual who has usually little enough knowledge of other spheres. And in education itself the limiting effect of a special experience is sadly apparent. One may speculate, for instance, on how great a contribution the English Benedictine tradition might have made to Catholic secondary education in the great cities. But here, with one exception, its influence has been nil, and the growth of a Catholic professional and middle class was undoubtedly long delayed by the poverty of the secondary education in the day schools of the cities where the overwhelming majority of Catholics were—and are—to be found.

Confronted by the multiple agencies of the Welfare State, with its statutory provision for children and young persons in health and sickness, at home or in the care of foster-parents or in an

approved school, Catholics may feel that the characteristic pattern of family life with its basic allegiances has been largely destroyed. But it is increasingly being realized by the most professional of social workers that the family remains foremost in any healthy society and that the social worker and the school teacher should direct their efforts to strengthening its function. Catholics, who find in the family so much more than a social unit, have a special responsibility to give more than lip-service to its vital importance. And that is why, as Mrs Morrah suggests, they should be sceptical of an excessive insistence on the school in isolation and should welcome the help that humane social services can bring to the family itself. The truth is that many parents are unable to cope with the problems of family life: ill-health, overcrowding, quarrelling, psychological disturbances cannot always be done away by a simple appeal to the sanctity of marriage or to the ideals of Nazareth. Help is needed, and it is help that may need to come from several quarters.

One would not wish to match secular bureaucracy with a Catholic 'system' of benevolent interference, but it is certain that there is a real need to correlate the various Catholic social agencies and so to deal with particular problems against the continuing background of the family and the community as a whole. The child at school is the national serviceman very soon: and the problems he has now are very much the concern of those who will know him later on. And for the priest in particular his mission can never be to a category, an age-group or a class. It is his influence, perhaps most of all, that should unify the works of many, which at every level of Christian experience are concerned to build up the members of Christ.

A TWENTIETH CENTURY OXFORD. Last February, *The Twentieth Century* devoted a special number to Cambridge: to match the month the intellectual weather proved damp and chilly. June saw Oxford's turn, and with it came some warmth and quite a lot of wisdom. It is a confident editor who supposes that even a university can be compassed in a hundred pages of print, and Mr W. W. Robson (to whom the Oxford number was entrusted) has no prefabricated plan of Oxford, no 'school' to proclaim. Instead he allows sixteen dons to speak of their own disciplines, within the general pattern of a place and a tradition which they serve. Perhaps the title of the

first article, 'The Queen of Sciences', best of all reflects the difference between the Oxford number and its Cambridge counterpart, and Dr Austin Farrer, while he can no longer claim for theology the normative function that was hers in the medieval university, at least can speak of God without embarrassment. (Lord David Cecil remarks later: 'When I read writers in the Cambridge number apparently showing pained surprise that distinguished intellectual persons should avow a belief in God, I cannot help reflecting that in Oxford this has never been unusual'.)

Throughout the number there is a humane and tolerant acceptance of intellectual differences. Even the brilliant symposium on Oxford philosophy, which provides twenty-seven pages of rigorous analysis in the most contemporary mode, reveals substantial varieties of opinion on the relationship of philosophy and beliefs, and the popular impression of a monolithic party-line among Oxford analytic philosophers is shown to be far from accurate. John Hale's charming essay on historical scholarship and James Joll's urbane discussion 'On Being an Intellectual' show the same ease and fundamental modesty.

But it is not to be supposed that this *Twentieth Century* Oxford is all elegance and agreement to differ. The final article is a comment on the anaemic 'reply' of some Cambridge Christians to the agnostic views of the Cambridge number. Here an 'Oxford Christian' demands much more than a 'matter of words' in identifying the concept of 'sin' which the Cambridge agnostics reject. "The notion of "sin" . . . matters only because without it we cannot make sense of a religion which teaches the redemption of man by the Son of God. . . . Christianity is a "self-consistent" and "total" explanation, or it is not worth having; and if it is self-consistent and total, no agreement with the Atheist Humanists to call the things we don't like, "sin", is worth having either. What we have to say to them is what we must say to ourselves also, in the privacy of our own hearts: *Grace was not wanting to thee, but thou wast wanting to grace. . . . God would never have abandoned thee, if thou hadst not abandoned him.*'