

darkness grows: the miracle which cleanses Ben Hur's mother and sister of their leprosy may fall a little flat, but that is how Lew Wallace wanted it and in that eerie light one was prepared to accept. Of the two other great moments—the chariot race and the sea fight—enough has already been written, but for myself the chariot race, nine times round a circuit with two Tattenham Corners per lap, was as exciting as a major classic at Epsom and my audience-participation was total.

Much could be cut with advantage from this film and more could be speeded up, but it is an honest piece of work and demands an honest response; even those opposed from experience to this kind of grandiose religious epic must agree that here there is an intelligence, sensitivity and lack of vulgarity that is quite exceptional. It is, in fact, so good that it almost forces one to judge it as a real work of cinematic art.

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### RELIGIOUS SOCIOLOGY

THE growing realization that so new an academic discipline as sociology can be of service to the Church is reflected in much Catholic discussion in Europe. In England, apart from the admirable work being undertaken by the Newman Demographic Survey, a scientific study of the special factors that affect the Church's mission in its social setting in England has as yet scarcely been attempted. Such questions as the welfare of immigrants (and especially those from Ireland), the incidence of crime among Catholics and the effect of Catholic education in terms of subsequent religious practice—which, among many other questions, are constantly debated—need that measure of simple information and interpretation of the known facts which must precede any useful exercise of the Church's social function.

An excellent example of the value of such a survey, in a necessarily limited field, can be found in the recently published proceedings of the international symposium on vocations to the priesthood, held at Vienna in October 1958. (*Die Europäische Priesterfrage: Le Problème Sacerdotal en Europe*), obtainable from the Newman Demographic Survey, 31 Portman Square, W.1, price 26s. Text in French and German, with some English communications.) The evidence from the various countries is impressively presented, and a discussion of general problems is followed by detailed discussions on such subjects as late vocations, the special difficulties of countries where Catholics are in a minority, preparation for the priesthood and, of course, some serious thinking about Italy and Spain and their traditional methods of recruitment and education. There are numerous maps, diagrams and statistical tables.

Of special interest to readers of this journal will be the contributions of Mgr Charles Tindall of Ushaw (on the situation in Great Britain) and Dr Jeremiah Newman of Maynooth (on Ireland). The British statistics show

once more the weakness of the official figures for of the Catholic population. Mgr Tindall estimates it at over five million, which would give the figure of one priest engaged in pastoral work for 1,214 of the Catholic population. (In another part of the report this figure is given as 746, which perhaps indicates the unsatisfactory basis of many Catholic statistics.) Mgr Tindall is not optimistic about the present rate of English vocations, and he points out that if all the students now in major seminaries persevere (which is unlikely), the figure is no better than that of twenty years ago. We learn that the working life of the average priest in Westminster is 27.1 years (in Birmingham he can hope to live two-and-a-half years longer). A special feature of the English picture is the relatively large number of late vocations (they account for 616 of 1,320 students entering major seminaries during 1948-1957) and the increasing number of future priests who go through an ordinary grammar school education.

Dr Newman's paper on Irish vocations is constantly on the defensive, and he admits that industrialization and social change are altering the traditional pattern of Irish vocations (overwhelmingly rural in origin). He finds the great increase in regular priests to be 'staggering', and suggests that many of them should be mobilized for work abroad. He admits that some of Ireland's domestic supply of secular priests could be loaned to help out countries where the shortage of priests is acute. Among interesting details in the Irish statistics are: the number of students in diocesan seminaries per 100,000 (75 in Ireland as compared with 20 for Italy); the number of priests ordained for English-speaking areas (England, U.S.A., etc.), which averages 87 a year (85 are ordained for Irish dioceses); the increase in Irish priests working in territories under Propaganda (385 in 1931, 2,162 in 1955).

The conclusions reached at the end of the Vienna symposium are important, because for the first time they express on an international scale the value of a scientific sociology for a vital area of the Church's work. Many practical proposals were put forward to hasten the programme of meeting the immediate needs of countries that are short of priests, and emphasis was laid on the place that statistical and sociological studies should hold in Catholic universities and colleges. The report is itself impressive evidence of the value of such studies, not merely as an academic exercise but as an essential part of the Church's perennial concern to see and judge before she acts.

I. E.