

## COMMENTARY

**C**ATHOLIC HIGHER STUDIES. In the field of higher education the Catholics of Great Britain, unlike those of the United States or Holland, have tacitly agreed to co-operate with their fellow citizens rather than stand apart and form separate universities for themselves. Hitherto the more domestic and defensive consequences of this choice have been emphasized, but it is becoming increasingly necessary to stress the positive responsibilities, on a national scale, to which it commits us. Hence our present use of the term 'co-operate'. Having chosen to co-operate in the nation's academic life, we must take our full share in it, both intellectually and in the sphere of administration. And since we can only do this if we know our own mind on the relevant problems, it is an excellent thing that Catholic university teachers have begun to hold conferences in order to discuss their common interests. This year's conference met at St Joseph's College, Upholland, in September, ostensibly to consider 'What are universities for?'; though in fact the matters debated were more concrete and practical than that rather abstract question might suggest. They arose from the fact, and an awareness of the fact among those present, that the rapidly expanding British universities are now at a critical turning point in their history; and the conference was fortunate in hearing a brilliant report from the Newman Demographic Survey, which offered a sound statistical basis on which to begin to assess the actual situation of the Catholic body in this expansion and its prospects for the next ten years or so.

But immediately the conference was naturally more concerned with the specific responsibilities of the university teacher. Interest largely centred on the question of specialization. What should we think of and do about the present trend towards specialization in the schools? Professor Parker of London and Professor Armstrong of Liverpool stood out as specialization's severest critics; but the former's proposals for broadening the culture of actual and prospective university students, though expressed with characteristic grace and lucidity, did not win general acceptance. It would have been too much to hope that anyone's proposals should be generally accepted; there was too much to discuss in too short a time. But the discussion did something to clear the ground; and all agreed with Dr Scott of Belfast on the need for building some sort of 'bridge' between the scientific disciplines and the 'arts' subjects, and between

both of these and theology. Someone suggested, with rather excessive timidity, that the true meeting place of minds was philosophy; with the implication that this too was where *sacra doctrina* herself might find a foothold. But the suggestion was not taken up very seriously. For Catholics philosophy suggests Scholasticism; and your educated British Catholic layman is not much less inclined than anyone else to associate Scholasticism with the antique and the incomprehensible. But this prejudice, though understandable, is certainly a hindrance to any bridge-building in the direction of theology. And our mental health as Catholics requires that it be inspected anew and critically assessed; a work in which priests and laymen can and should collaborate.

It is easy to say that theology is the crown and conclusion of all culture; it is extremely difficult to realize this ideal even to a modest degree. But the attempt must be made; and there could be no better theme for any future conference of Christian university teachers than the relations between theology and other branches of knowledge. And in this connection it is good news to hear that a Catholic Institute of Higher Studies is to be set up at St Edmund's House, Cambridge. In making this foundation the Hierarchy of England and Wales are giving effect to a long-felt desire which had found expression at the preceding conference of Catholic university teachers at Strawberry Hill in 1958. Little has so far been made public, perhaps little is yet decided, concerning the project. Its beginnings, we are assured, are to be modest; and it will be open to both clergy and laity. The idea is to provide every sort of relevant assistance to a body, at first a small body, of Catholic scholars and research workers; and the hope surely is that God the Holy Spirit, from whom comes *omne verum a quocumque dicatur*, may guide their labours towards a common vision.