

COMMENTARY

WHO ARE CATHOLICS? The Newman Association's announcement of a demographic survey of the Catholic community in England and Wales, to be conducted by a committee of its members, is encouraging evidence of the recognition of the value of modern techniques in the service of the Church. Two years ago an appeal was made in these columns for a positive acceptance by the growing body of Catholic professional men and women in this country of the special contribution they can make to the Church's mission. It was suggested that a statistical survey of the strength and weakness of the Catholic population must be a prerequisite for much of the work that needs to be done, and the composition of the Newman Association's committee, made up as it is of statisticians, economists and actuaries of unquestionable professional competence, guarantees an accurate and at the same time a humane approach to the survey that is now announced.

It should scarcely be necessary to insist on the need of a study of this sort, concerned as it is to establish the actual dimensions of the Catholic community and its economic and occupational features, the structure and development of the Catholic family, the incidence and influence of mixed marriages. Its value for official purposes will obviously be important; where negotiations (as with the B.B.C.) are so often decided on a statistical basis, it is necessary that accurate figures are available so that justice may be done. And, within the Church's own economy, an up to date and reliable picture of the existing Catholic community is essential for such matters as planning for future churches and schools or the establishment of new methods for the apostolate. The proved use of such Catholic surveys in other countries should anticipate any suspicion that the Church is now to be subjected to the sort of statistical regimentation that in the secular sphere can sometimes seem to be pursued for its own sake. And the present Pope's commendation (in an address to the Central Italian Institute of Statistics) of the statistician's work of description, arguing from the analogy of the physician's diagnosis which must precede the hope of cure, gives a special authority to the purpose of a survey such as that on which the Newman Association has now embarked.

The first stages of the survey must obviously be a matter of inspecting and analysing a great variety of statistical sources. It is a process of clinical neutrality, and demands a scientific accuracy of direction which we can be sure it will receive. But it is not too soon to think of the subsequent use to which its findings will be put, and here one may hope that the experts will be resolute in presenting their material for what it is. In no sphere can a superficial reading be so misleading as in that of statistics. The purpose of the survey is, one supposes, in no sense meant as additional apologetic ammunition. The mere size of the Catholic community is not necessarily a matter for congratulation. The quality of its spiritual life will evade even the subtlest of questionnaires, and the survey's importance will be in its unfolding of the complex social factors which so profoundly affect the practice of the Christian life within a society that is designed at so many points to make that practice difficult if not, humanly speaking, impossible.

One might hope that, *pari passu*, it could prove possible to have a representative survey of clerical opinion on the incidence of such factors as housing, mixed marriages, lack of religious instruction in schools, conditions of industrial work, in considering the actual fact of Catholic life in contemporary England and Wales. Such a survey would not of course be statistically significant, but the immense experience of parish priests, concerned day by day with ministering to the community that is now to be surveyed, might provide norms of interpretation when the merely numerical part of the survey is completed. It is essential that there should be valid criteria for the useful assessment of the information which the survey will provide. If it were possible to refer to the testimony of clerical experience, drawn as it would be from a great variety of social settings, the application of the survey's findings to the Church's mission would be greatly helped. Admittedly such an enquiry as this is beyond the present terms of reference of the Newman Association's survey, but the importance of having representative clerical opinion on the general situation that faces the Catholic community is not simply because it is the opinion of priests: the grace of ordination confers no special competence in statistical research. Its importance lies in the fact that the clergy should be in a unique position to assess the effect, on the people whom they are called to serve, of the very factors which the survey will necessarily reveal as determinants. And the experience

of priests should be available, as has been suggested, to provide the religious and moral norms of interpretation without which the survey can only be statistically significant.

In the meantime one may hope that all those qualified to assist in the survey's technical work will be willing to place their professional knowledge at its service. The growth of a Catholic professional and middle class (reflected as it is most particularly in the increasing Catholic representation in the universities) carries with it the responsibility of serving the Church through serving the community as a whole. Among other Christian bodies in this country the decline seems most acute in the very spheres in which the Catholic Church seems to be acquiring new strength. This is likely to be of increasing social significance as the years pass, and the Newman Association's survey must be counted as welcome evidence of a responsibility that is accepted.



THE CATHOLIC SOCIAL WORKER AND MODERN PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES. The subject of this year's summer school of the Guild of Catholic Professional Social Workers, to be held at Cherwell Edge, Oxford, from July 30 to August 6, is of particular importance and may be commended to those whose professional work confronts them so often with the conflict between the traditional moral teaching of the Church and the determinist theories of modern psychology.