

COMMENTARY

CATHOLIC REVIEWS AND CHRISTIAN OPINION. The second BLACKFRIARS week-end, held at Spode House in July, was concerned with the Catholic writer's responsibility in addressing those who do not share the premises which must be his. The question is therefore largely one of communication, of language and its use. Fr Ian Hislop, in the opening lecture of the Conference, spoke of the theologian's function: he must talk about God, but he must do so in terms of men's actual needs. 'If the Church is to survive intellectually, it must address itself to the world it finds.' The theologian is the witness to the Word of God and his standpoint is that of a man who declares that God has indeed spoken to the world. But there are limits to his intervention, and a wrong identification of the Church with particular political regimes, with temporary modes of culture or speech, can betray the perennial work of the theologian which is to lead men through intelligible signs to the acceptance of faith.

Renée Haynes spoke specifically of the difficulties of speech, of the dual discipline of the writer who must be faithful to the demands of his own special science and to the needs of a common tongue. And here was raised the fundamental problem of an imagery that can seem illegitimate, rooted as it often is in a culture that no longer commands any urgent meaning. Some indication of the actual structure of the community within which Catholics live and work was given by Anthony Spencer in describing the methods and first findings of the Newman Demographic Survey of the Catholic population of England and Wales. The statistical description of a society is a prerequisite for a writer who claims to interpret it, and the question 'Who are Catholics?' is most relevant to the communication of Catholic truth.

The evidence of history, too, is essential, and Roland Hill's account of Lord Acton's difficulties as the editor of Catholic reviews, with his unflinching defence of the absolute claims of truth and scholarship, was a pointed reminder that the problem is not new but must be faced afresh in every age. Paul Jennings, in a lecture that was more largely interrupted by appreciative laughter than any we have ever heard, spoke of the levels of

communication, of the problems created by the varying degrees of sophistication in the readers that are addressed and of the extraordinary results that can follow. A final lecture by the Editor of *The Catholic Herald* was a frank and informed discussion of an editor's responsibilities and brought together most of the problems that the week-end's lectures had aroused.

Some at least of the Spode House lectures will appear later in these pages so that the value of the Conference may have a more permanent record. It is certainly becoming daily more evident that Catholics need to realize the pressing need of intelligible speech: so many of the assumptions of a domestic tradition can be gravely misunderstood by those who do not share them. It is not ignorance or ill will, one must suppose, that enables an Anglican archbishop to describe the perennial teaching of the Church as a policy of *apartheid*. Some part of the misunderstanding is perhaps due to the reluctance of theologians to allow for the prejudices of those who have learned to speak a very different language from their own. That does not require the theologians to modify the essential truth of what they have to say, but it may mean that they cannot rely on the accepted formularies of a closed vocabulary if they wish to speak to the world beyond their lecture rooms. And for any Catholic writer who finds, as he should, the faith to be the final context of all that he writes, the need is no less real—not indeed to make of his writing a nude apologetic but to see in the values it presupposes a truth to be communicated at every level, and that in a language informed by a charity that will make it live and persuade.

THE AQUINAS SOCIETY. The annual Study Week-End of the London Aquinas Society is being given by Fr Gervase Mathew, O.P., at More House, S.W.7, on September 24-25. The subject is 'St Thomas Aquinas on the Nature of Man', and application should be made to the Secretary of the Aquinas Society, 476 Upper Richmond Road West, Richmond, Surrey.