

COMMENTARY

GLASGOW AND GRACE. Fr Vincent McNabb once summarised the dilemma of the Church's mission in an industrial society in a syllogism: To demand the regular practice of Christian life in a Glasgow slum is to expect heroic sanctity. But you cannot expect heroic sanctity of ordinary people. The conclusion must be that ordinary people cannot always, or often, lead a good Christian life in the circumstances by which they are bound.

That there are thousands of exceptions to so gloomy a conclusion is the experience of anyone who knows the generous faith of the poor in countless city slums. And since Glasgow is so often invoked as the symbol of industrial evil, with all its consequences of crime and immorality, it is not irrelevant to salute the open-hearted fortitude of its Catholics, crowded so often in dark tenements, submerged in a constant struggle for the basic decencies of family life. The publicists and the fashionable novelists who find Catholicism intellectually attractive or socially interesting would do well to consider a 'single-end' off the Gallowgate, for it is in fact a more faithful setting for the sacrifices a Catholic life can demand than most abstract questions of conscience.

The demand for Catholic education, the insistence that it should be a matter of justice and not of reluctant and partial concession by the State, must indeed be made. But the social evils of far too many industrial towns are equally, if not more urgently, a matter for Catholic indignation. The handsome school, with its guaranteed religious instruction, can be a deluded hope if its children continue to be brought up in a pagan world which the statutory catechism can do little to mitigate.

For housing is a moral question first of all, and it should be the concern of Christian opinion to demand priority for those conditions of elementary human dignity which family life requires. It is indeed only a secular optimism that will equate material conditions with human behaviour, and there is delinquency enough to be found in model estates as there is infinite virtue hidden in the slums. But the material setting of human life is not to be ignored by Christians because they

have on earth no abiding city and their hope lies beyond the world they know. To insist on the vocation of the Christian family when it has to be realised in a single room is to insist on the humanly impossible.

It may seem that one of the Church's greatest opportunities was missed when, between the Wars, much might have been done by sponsoring Catholic building associations which could by low-interest loans have built whole estates, Christian communities in intention with room enough for a natural family life. The restrictions and difficulties of our present economy must make such a proposal remote enough, but the time for it may come again and it is not too soon to consider even a distant future. In the meantime Catholic opinion should be to the fore in urging the moral implications of a matter that can too easily become a bargaining-counter for politicians.

CORPORAL PUNISHMENT. A newspaper campaign, unintentionally aided by the *obiter dicta* of High Court Judges, for the restoration, and indeed the extension, of corporal punishment for crimes of violence can too easily stampede a public opinion that is rightly alarmed at their incidence. If figures mean anything at all, there is little likelihood of eliminating such crimes merely by reintroducing the 'cat' and the birch. And it is notable that prison officials, who have the best right to speak of the effect of punishment on criminals, are far from convinced of the value of methods which the Act of 1948 abolished. Punishment should indeed be deterrent, but the rough-and-ready matching of criminal violence with legal violence might do much to undermine the new provisions of an Act which have as yet been scarcely tried. The reform even of the violent criminal can never ignore the purpose of punishment: not simply the vindictive sentence of a society that is outraged, but, too, the firm and disciplined rehabilitation of the offender. Quick solutions are so usually attractive that the longer view, which happens to be the Christian view, can fail to be seen.