

## COMMENTARY

TECHNIQUES AND THE TRUTH. In a society dominated by the dossier much can be learned about people while persons can be all but forgotten. Gallup polls and listener research, straw-votes and school record cards, mark a complex and increasing inquisitiveness which it is easy, but not always profitable, to deride. The methods of American management, indeed, with their detailed analysis of human investment—profit and loss, probable man-hours and budgeting for average fatigue—are a gross invasion of man's essential dignity if they go beyond the commercial guesswork which they presumably serve. Yet the techniques of sociological enquiry have value if their limitations are acknowledged and if they are governed by a realistic sense of the unpredictable, which is only to say a sense of human values. It would, for instance, be possible by such means to discover some of the factors that profoundly affect the Church's mission in the industrial society of modern England. The facts are known, it might be said: ask any parish priest or YCW leader and you will learn a great deal that will surprise you. But the information is scattered and often unavailable, and its value is little unless it be seriously analysed in terms of employment, housing, schools, in fact in terms of the elaborate pattern of life in the contemporary world. For the Christian view of man is that of man in a concrete setting: not a statistical cipher, nor even a disembodied 'soul'. A preliminary investigation into religious practice carried out recently in several parishes in Paris has shown that it is possible to conduct an enquiry, using the techniques that have grown familiar in other spheres, which can greatly assist the mission of the Church. The wood and the trees are perhaps never so confused as in the shifting crowds of city churches. There is a huge and anonymous army of Catholics, the product of a rootless society, which is largely outside the organised life of the parishes. They must be reached, but at present they are too often unreachable. The Paris experiment has shown that the use of an exact and carefully checked system of questionnaire and analysis can reveal a hitherto unsuspected picture. But more is required than an amateur census. There

are Catholics who are statisticians, who are engaged on every sort of sociological survey, and whose expert knowledge might well be employed in the computations of the society of Christ.

One field that urgently requires such an enquiry is that of Catholic schools, especially in view of the immense sacrifices that are going to be required of the Catholic community to ensure their survival. It would at least be interesting to know the subsequent history of children who have been educated in them: the careers they adopt, the number who are lost to the Church, the proportion who are to be found engaged in the lay apostolate. It would be more than interesting, indeed, for Catholic schools are not simply educational institutions with a religious bias: they are an essential part of the Church's structure, and it would immensely assist the work of their preservation and extension if more were known—and much more can be known—of what in fact their achievement has been. For this is not merely a local problem of finding funds. It is a reflection of the whole dilemma of the Church's work within a world that has so largely ceased to be Christian.

**SACRED AND SECULAR.** The publication earlier this year of an 'instruction' by the Congregation of the Holy Office on the subject of sacred art has, as is the way with official documents, been variously interpreted by the different parties to a dispute which, in France at least, had reached what might be politely called extreme enthusiasm. But it is important to recall that the instruction did not attempt to resolve an aesthetic debate; it laid down no canons of taste. Ordinaries are required to see that works of art conform to the usages of the Church and to Christian tradition. 'Abstract' art is not condemned, as seems to have been supposed. Indeed the principal severity of language is reserved for 'a disordered multiplicity of statues and images of feeble value, most often stereotyped in design'. The criterion must be dogmatic truth and liturgical propriety, and a plaster statue popularly admired may plainly offend against both much more than a modern mural.