

**COMMENTARY**

**C**HRISTIAN UNITY. The liturgical reforms which of recent years have so altered the familiar pattern of Catholic worship have this year produced the unexpected effect of eliminating the feast of St Peter's Chair in Rome, which each January 18 for more than fifty years has inaugurated the week of prayer for Christian unity. The disappearance of the feast does not of course mean any lessening of interest in a cause that transcends all others. On the contrary, 1961 opens with perhaps a deeper understanding of what is at stake than has ever been known before. Events themselves, of which the Archbishop of Canterbury's visit to the Pope was the most significant, have underlined the need for renewed prayer, and the example, at the highest level, of personal contact will surely have immensely valuable consequences.

It is a fresh realization of the nature and dimensions of the division between Catholics and Protestants that is, paradoxically, a principal gain in the new interest in the ecumenical movement. Professor Cullmann has remarked that 'the first condition for the bringing together of Catholics and Protestants is absolute openness on both sides. If we want to find a firm basis for mutual understanding, if we in truth want to come nearer to one another, then we must first of all speak to one another without mental reservations'. No longer are Protestants themselves inclined to see Christian unity as the term of a process of negotiation, and indeed Professor Cullmann has commented that 'it tends to separate us'. It separates, because it suggests that truth can itself be negotiated, whereas it can only be served—and accepted. The hope must now be that the 'absolute openness' of charity may mark the contacts between Catholics and Christians not subject to the Holy See which Rome itself envisages, and indeed encourages, subject to the conditions which her authority must necessarily impose, and which Catholics and non-Catholics alike are glad to respect.

**CRIME AND THE COMMUNITY.** The succession of white papers and Government reports on the prevention and treatment of crime, especially among young people, should not blind us to the limitations of legislation. It is certainly necessary that the status of the police in the community should be properly recognized—and rewarded, and the role of probation officers in particular needs

much more generous acknowledgment. Albemarle, Crowther, Ingleby, Willink—all the reports, whether they deal with crime directly or not, are concerned with a serious weakness in our social structure, namely that we have supposed that the maladies of an affluent society can be treated on the cheap and that cure can be accomplished by first-aid rather than by radical diagnosis and perhaps a severe piece of surgery.

Proposals for the effective punishment of juvenile offenders, for instance, have been made again and again, but detention centres scarcely exist, and the whole of London has only one remand centre to provide adequate facilities for preparing reports on children brought before the courts. At last there are signs that Government is awake to the need, but its very proper support of the Home Secretary's advisory council in its unanimous rejection of judicial corporal punishment will be of little avail unless a constructive alternative is provided as a matter of urgency.

And there remains a more intractable difficulty than the bureaucratic delays of Whitehall. It is the popular image of crime and criminals that is presented by some Sunday newspapers and fostered to a large extent by television and films. The truth of the matter is that the great majority of crime is contemptible and cowardly, but this is scarcely interesting to the mass media. An analysis of the treatment given to crime on any Sunday by three or four of the most popular papers (with a cumulative circulation of some fifteen millions) would show that the ingredients of a 'good' crime story necessarily include violence, sex and the likelihood that authority can be shown in a bad light. The Press Council, rejecting a suggestion that it should impose standards of conduct comparable to those accepted by other professions, pleaded that a free press was so precious that abuses must be accepted as part of the cost. No one would want to suggest the sort of censorship that would impede the free reporting of facts, but ghosted memoirs and sensational interviews are another matter. They serve only to amplify a false mythology of crime, creating a romantic obsession about prisons and prisoners, and making infinitely harder the work of those who must depend on public interest and support if they are effectively to turn back the mounting tide of criminality.

The recent Conference called by the National Union of Teachers to discuss the social responsibilities of the mass media of entertainment was a useful move in the direction of awakening public opinion—and those who feed it—to a greater sense of urgency. Attitudes can hardly be changed by decree, but responsible opinion can demand that they should at least not be corrupted for cash.