

## THE MAYNOOTH DEBATE

The Maynooth Union is saddened by the harmful publicity which the College has received in recent weeks. Media coverage has caused much pain and anxiety among people who think of Maynooth Seminary with thankfulness and pride. The Maynooth Union is grateful for the support for the College given by the Association of Catholic Priests, and by individual priests who on the public media gave an account of their experiences of life at Maynooth and in the ministry. Their contribution made clear how beneficial seminary formation proved for them personally and pastorally. We have no doubt that for great numbers of priests their time in Maynooth was enlivening and demanding, enriching and helpful, if also - inevitably - sometimes difficult, even painful. A life that included—prayer, study, pastoral practice, debate, sport, music, and drama, helped form a priest with a deepened love of God and an appreciation of the wonders of God's creation.

Of course conceptions of ministry and of preparation for priesthood are always influenced by current understandings of Church and Society. During the past fifty years the Irish Church and Irish Society have experienced great challenge and self questioning, and Maynooth has been immersed in this and influenced by it. In response, the College has continued to develop new courses and new forms of pastoral training. It has sought to integrate itself into a larger university context, and has welcomed thousands of students, lay and clerical, to its chapels, its theology programmes, its libraries and societies, its theatres and its sports fields. The number of students for the priesthood and the profile of those who come forward as candidates both have changed, and those charged with the task of education and formation for ministry have tried to adapt to these changes. The aim is always to form a priest strong in faith, hope and love, and ready to draw people to hear and live the gospel of Jesus Christ.

To be entrusted with this task makes enormous demands of staff and resources. Personal and faithful integrity, the insight to deal sensitively with the problems that arise, the wisdom to judge wisely and organise life are basic requirements. No system is perfect, and there is always need for re- thinking and reform, but this should be done with a generous acknowledgment of the College's achievements, past and present and without unnecessary pain and acrimony. The Maynooth Union offers its thanks to Maynooth, and wishes to

affirm strongly its continuing support for the President and staff in their mission of forming future priests.

The Maynooth Union Committee