As we all know, from its Latin origins, a university has as one of its functions the task of serving learning and scholarship. But in addition to this mission to humanity, it also has the task of more immediately serving the nation or nations in which it is set. Indeed, in the developing nations the task of the immediate sometimes crowds out the tasks of the infinite. On achieving independence many of the new nations faced stark shortages of middle and high-level manpower to sustain their often fragile economies. This is so with the three participant countries which nourish the development of the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland.

Setting

There are some common features in the histories of the three nations. They were all under the protection of a common metropolitan power, the United Kingdom, and this resulted in similar systems of government, civil administration and law. Such similarities remained after independence, with the fairly familiar Westminster pattern of political responsibility on the one hand and official execution on the other. But the peoples are different between and within each other. There is one Basotho nation and one Swazi nation, but Botswana possesses a number of differing peoples. Geographically they are all different, ranging from the searing sands of the Kalahari to the highland mists of Swaziland, to the snow-capped peaks of Lesotho.

There are common elements of administration inherited from the United Kingdom, but constitutionally the countries are different; two are kingdoms and one is a republic. Nor are the social systems common. As an example, all land tenure in the kingdom of Lesotho is ultimately vested in the monarchy, whereas in the kingdom of Swaziland and the republic of Botswana this is not the case. Different interpretations, too, are given to the Roman/Dutch legal system as it operates in the three countries.

Common services

There are, of course, examples, both in the pre- and post-colonial days, of countries working together and sharing common services. West Africa can be cited, and so can East Africa with its rather elaborate network of common services. The countries of Botswana, Lesotho and
Swaziland, however, are probably unique in that the only common service which they possess is their university. This is important for the present and, I forecast, even more for the future. The University Council, comprised of members of the three governments as well as academics, provides a forum where permanent secretaries of education and finance, and their advisers, can get together regularly for talks on matters which are of moment to the three countries. Indeed, the importance of the contact between the three countries through the University Council should not be underestimated. At the formal meetings of the council and its committees, and the many informal meetings associated with the Council, the three governments are able to contemplate their strategic roles in the further evolution of southern Africa. The University Grants Committee, an instrument of the three governments, provides like opportunities for the three governments to forge common aims in the provision of much needed manpower.

A university in the three countries

The university, founded originally at Roma in 1945 as a Catholic institution, Pius XII College, owes much of its initial inspiration to the Church. In 1964 it became an independent secular institution with the aim of serving the three southern African countries which were progressing towards independence, but one institution in one country, Lesotho, is hardly sufficient as tangible evidence of help to two other relatively distant countries. Hence the decision was taken that a university presence should also be established in Botswana and Swaziland. During the last three years this presence has emerged physically and academically as a potent force for the acceleration of development. Indeed, it is not likely that any other university has so many campuses in politically independent and separated nations. As an example, in the kingdom of Swaziland the university is responsible for five campuses on which professional officers are working.

At its opening Pius XII had four lecturers and five students; rather an ideal staff/student relationship as the Greeks would have seen it but not so for a present-day economist. Now, in our three countries, the teaching staff number's some 140 and the university has the record number of 1,100 full- and part-time students. The faculties established are in keeping with the identified needs of the three countries and the university's resources to sustain them. The faculties are: agriculture, education, humanities, social and economic studies, and science. The university gives prime consideration to the faculties of agriculture and education, but this does not mean that other disciplines are of lesser concern. As far as can be seen ahead, the majority of our peoples will be associated with the land in some way or other, and there is a necessary and proper commitment to education as a basic human right. In addition, to assist the three governments, funds have been sought and obtained to establish an Institute of Development Management. This is now functioning, and one of its aims is to assist governments to produce the Civil Service manpower without which no nation can be really independent.

Tasks of decision making

As is common with other universities, the final policy making authority is the University Council with government representatives sitting in council. The three governments have to approve physical, academic and professional developments in any one of the countries of the university. The fact that the governments consistently think regionally on university matters is of crucial importance to development and accelerated development.