

COMMENTARY

A NEW YEAR. For a review, as for any other record of human work, a New Year must always be a time, if not for resolution, then at least for taking stock. During the 36 years of its life, BLACKFRIARS has known varieties of fortune, but one may hope that it remains faithful to its original purpose, which was to interpret contemporary life in the light of traditional Christian principles, and especially these as understood by St Thomas Aquinas.

This has seemed an ambitious task. The complexity of modern life, the immense number of issues that increasingly call for Christian judgment can easily daunt the critic. And it is easy for Catholics in particular to resort to an attitude of negative unconcern, content with their own truth and dubious of the easy possibility of its communication to others. That can never be an authentic Christian attitude, for the Gospels are the proof that what is essential in Christianity has to be presented with courage and conviction to each generation: the truth remains one and indivisible, but the mode of its presentation may well need to be changed.

It is this problem of communication, to which we have drawn attention in several articles in recent issues of this review, that would seem pre-eminently important at this time. It is of little use to have strong convictions, or even important resources of scholarship or power, unless these can be transmitted to the world outside. And of all the issues which Catholics are concerned with, that of preserving freedom within the increasingly demanding welfare state is probably the most urgent. An insistence on the natural right to property, for instance, does not mean that its exercise must always be demanded. The very structure of our modern society is at many points designed to make much that is traditional and accepted in Catholic principle seem hard of realization. But that should not make Catholics pessimistic or incline them to long for a mythical 'Catholic order', which perhaps never was at any time. The world itself is wounded with the effects of original sin, and even the golden years of Paraguay were limited.

It is this tension between the kingdom of heaven and the sort of kingdom one may expect to establish on earth that can produce dismay, but in truth it should be a fruitful tension—one, that is to say, which will always prevent Catholics from being complacent, or from resting at their ease in a Zion too comfortably achieved.

In practice, the political action of Catholics is concerned with limited and determined ends. In this country obvious examples are the campaign to secure justice in education for Catholic children or the scrutiny of some of the provisions of a Health Service that can seem to accept secular assumptions much too readily. But Catholics are concerned with more than what may seem to be denominational peculiarities of their own. They are being increasingly left with the defence of radical human liberties because they have a consistent understanding of what man's function truly is, of what his freedom is for. It is not the principles that need to be changed but rather their application to a situation as it actually is, and this task is one which once more we ask our readers to share in through their interest and support.

THE MORALITY OF NUCLEAR WARFARE

A MEDIEVAL Disputation on this subject will be given by three Dominican Fathers, at the invitation of the National Peace Council, on Monday, January 30 at 8 p.m. at Caxton Hall, Westminster. Tickets (2s. each) may be obtained from the National Peace Council, 29 Great James Street, w.c.1.