

## COMMENTARY

**THE FUTURE OF BLACKFRIARS.** On the title page of next month's issue of this journal readers will notice a new address. While the editorial work will continue to be done at Blackfriars, Cambridge, the production and publication of BLACKFRIARS will be taken over in April by Blackfriars Publications, Ltd, 2 Serjeants' Inn, Fleet Street, E.C.4, a company recently set up by Eyre and Spottiswoode, Ltd, Her Majesty's Printers, in close co-operation with the English Dominican Province.

The new arrangements will have no effect at all on editorial policy, but it is hoped that, backed by the experience of the publishers, they will enable this review, and Dominican publications generally, to withstand the formidable difficulties that nowadays threaten journals of independent opinion.

'Independent' might at first seem an inappropriate epithet to apply to a review that, from its beginnings in 1920, has sought to apply a Catholic and Christian judgment to those issues in the contemporary world which are too often ignored or evaded. And fidelity to the principles of St Thomas Aquinas, implicit as it must be in any review of Dominican inspiration, must appear to be yet a further restriction. It is not the least of the calamities of our time that 'independence' has come so often to mean an anarchy and that any appeal to authority is thought necessarily to inhibit a free discussion.

The irony is that Christian opinion, which must be foremost in its respect for the rights of conscience, has so often been made to appear closed, unprepared to meet the needs of a time that can seem so alien to the inherited values of the Christian tradition. But those who have been most vehement in their criticism have themselves been no less restricted by the assumptions—marxist or materialist or merely indifferent—which inevitably they presuppose. Unless a debate is never to go beyond the foothills of semantic enquiry, it must proceed from some axioms of purpose: that the argument in fact is to establish some advance in our understanding and some stimulus to our application of its truth.

The Christian assumption is a large one: that there is a consistent account of the nature of man and of his need. It is the theologian's

work to explain it, as far as reason can. But its application, in terms of man's function in society, is the work of every sort of enquirer, of whom the most recent arrival, the sociologist, is not the least important. The freedom which the philosopher or the biologist or the critic of social structures demands is one which the Church very readily accords, so long as the radical truth of revelation in regard to man is not betrayed. The dilemma here can seem to be a crucial one, since the limits of theology are nowadays so imperfectly discerned and its classical directive role so largely rejected. That is why the need for a living theology is so urgent, one, that is to say, which will take into full account the true dimensions of a discipline that takes as its premiss the truths that God has made known to man but none the less has an informed respect for the autonomy of the natural sciences in their proper sphere.

It is in this sense that it may surely be claimed that a truly Christian opinion is 'independent', for it seeks no other end than the truth—which is independent of all the ambitions of party advantage and political manoeuvre which colour so much of the publicity of our time. It would be a tragedy if Christians were ever to make their service of the truth a cause for battle-honours. It has often been so in the past, and the rancours and divisions we know are the evidence of it.

A review such as this can only hope to serve the ends of truth and charity if its readers are themselves convinced of the worth of what is attempted and do all they can to further these ends—by their criticism, if need be, and certainly by their active interest. The need can hardly be less today than it was in 1920, but the essential means to meet it have become infinitely harder to marshal. It is a sad impoverishment of the intellectual and cultural life of our country that it should have seen the disappearance of so many independent reviews of opinion, submerged by the flood of commercialism and wholly unaided by the slightest gesture of help from a Government whose business it should be to recognize that disinterested criticism is a principal safeguard of a healthy society. The incidence of taxation falls much more hardly on those who have no excuse of commercial profit to manipulate what they have to say—and sell.

We look therefore to the good will of those who believe in the worth of what BLACKFRIARS has been attempting to do to renew their support and to make possible its expansion under its new auspices.