

COMMENTARY

MORALS AND PUBLIC POLICY. The American Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions has recently, with the help of Dr Norman St John-Stevas, been turning its attention to the problem of birth control and the law. The dilemma discussed in its report—should Catholics oppose legislation which sanctions a breach of the natural law, even though the great majority of opinion supports it?—is one which is going to become increasingly urgent, and Dr St John-Stevas's conclusion, 'whether such legislation is desirable is a jurisprudential rather than a theological question, which must be decided in relation to the conditions prevailing in a given community', seems a prudent, if pragmatic, one.

Catholic intervention in debates of this sort can sometimes seem unduly concerned with the technicalities of what is morally permissible—the crude arguments occasionally used to justify the marital use of low fertility as against artificial contraception are a case in point—and too little aware of the larger territory of the common good on which moral judgment should also fall. The weakness of the Catholic contribution to a serious scrutiny of the morality of nuclear warfare contrasts very vividly with the ferocity of Catholic publicists when personal morality is in question. And if it be argued that in the one case the issue is not clear, then it can surely be urged that the moralists should turn their energies to try to make it so. It is the particularization of so much moral judgment, with its isolation of single questions which can seem to be casuistical considerations of more or less, that bewilders a public opinion which in fact scarcely hears of the Catholic view unless its immediate interests are thought to be threatened. In the mixed society of this country or the United States there are obviously many arcas of moral debate in which Catholics must find themselves in a minority. But they will surely command a greater sympathy if they are seen to have an alert conscience about the tragic issues of our time—issues which affect even the very survival of the race—and which call urgently for understanding and judgment.

U.N.O. AND CRIME. The recent International Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders brought to London nearly a thousand delegates from over eighty countries, and any optimistic hope that so much talk could achieve anything

but a comprehensive exchange of opinion was bound to be disappointed. But it would be cynical to dismiss the activities of the Social Defence section of U.N.O. as useless. In a world that is so bitterly divided it is something that criminologists at least can survey a problem that transcends all frontiers. Perhaps the most valuable work of the Congress was done in the section devoted to the problems of criminality in those countries recently deemed underdeveloped but now emerging into independence and industrialization. It would be too simple a solution to the problem of crime to say that its increase is commensurate with such development. Paradoxically, until recently, the very opposite was the general view: get rid of poverty and crime will disappear. Unhappily the experience of this country at least has shown that the fact of full employment and an organized welfare state has by no means lessened the tendency to offend. The Church has a special interest in the new countries of Africa and Asia, for the breakdown of a traditional society can lead not only to new crime but to an indifference to the sanctions that keep a society whole. It is the apparent motivelessness of so much crime in so many countries—and the pattern spreads with infectious ease across new continents—that calls for the sort of research that the U.N.O. Conference has stimulated. The research will not end crime: there is a sense in which crime must be with us while human life remains. But greater knowledge of the social and economic and cultural factors at work in a fast-developing society can at least inspire more effective methods of prevention and treatment. And it was gratifying that the Catholic representation at the London Conference was fully aware of its larger responsibilities.

A NEW CATHEDRAL. It is too early to speak of the detailed plans for the new Cathedral at Liverpool: their precise nature has yet to be indicated. But the conception at least is alive, and the principle of a competitive award for a Catholic building, new as it is in the conservative and clerical atmosphere of our ecclesiastical patronage, is to be welcomed. Whether Mr Gibberd's design has the lasting qualities that are usually looked for in a cathedral must be doubtful. But the idea that one must build for eternity is usually the passport to academic mediocrity, and Liverpool will certainly get a cathedral that belongs to our time. Perhaps that is the best we deserve: it is in any case an encouraging change.