

COMMENTARY

THE NATURE OF TREASON. The immense advance of scientific knowledge, and of the techniques to make it effective, has tragically extended the territory of betrayal. The details of an atomic bomb can be handed over on a park bench in a few minutes of time, and the history we know is changed. So enormous now are the consequences of treason that a sense of helplessness can blunt a moral judgment: the traitor can seem to be merely hastening a destruction that is inherent in the ungoverned power of the technicians. Much recent discussion of the treacheries of atomic scientists—Nunn May, Fuchs, Pontecorvo—has reflected a common confusion about the nature of conscience. The horror evoked by betrayal on this scale, the scale proportionate to a marxist view of world politics, should be an enlargement of the dismay aroused by the daily distortions of right reason and the erroneous conscience that puts them into action. But when the sanctions of the natural law that in a Christian tradition govern the usual human duties are no longer much regarded, it is little wonder that there should be no criterion to meet the larger betrayals. To defend the loyalties of man as subject to God and to his design for the world he has created may appear old-fashioned to the contemporary moralist in his new bewilderment, but he has yet to find any other way out of his dilemma.

THE WRITER'S COMMITMENT. Of a new novelist, whose brilliant but negative genius has won much praise, a critic recently wrote: 'There is nothing he would like more than commitment to some as yet undiscovered creed'. The obsessional interest of so many writers in the capacity of man for evil, expressed as it commonly is with so much angry realism, can indeed be the reverse side of the Christian judgment: a world without grace. The writer as such is not required to be a moralist, and it would be unjust to suppose that a serious novelist chooses to write of wickedness because it is likely to be more interesting than virtue. The

critic's work grows therefore more urgent. Of books, as of so much else besides, it may be said that we get what we deserve. And the Christian has the obligation to do more than deplore: the values which give dimension and meaning to his world are too often a foreign land to men without much hope. He is the defender not merely of a closed system of moral prohibitions; he is the true interpreter of the savage territory that so fascinates writers who have seen how hollow were the easy optimisms, but have still to discover that evil itself is meaningless unless there be a good—and a God—to make its meaning plain.

FUNDAMENTAL EDUCATION. Among the many projects being undertaken by UNESCO, that of the 'fundamental education' of illiterate peoples seems the most ambitious. The rapid economic and social development of such areas as Tropical Africa and the Far East demands, it is claimed, a method of education which will provide 'the minimum of theoretical and practical knowledge necessary for an adequate standard of life'. It is intended to precede the formal education of the school, and its methods—direct and active, relating to the community as a whole—are to be adapted to the needs of adults and children alike. Six regional centres are planned (the first is already working in Mexico) where it is hoped to train a body of teachers who will return to their own countries to establish national centres of such instruction. So grandiose a scheme, revealing so plainly, as it may seem to do, the secular confidence of our age, has a special importance for the Church, entrusted as she is with a divine mission to all peoples, and not least to the pagan millions of Africa and Asia. The educational work of the Catholic missions (embracing as it does in the territories of the UNESCO plan more than 40,000 schools, served by 25,000 priests and 60,000 religious sisters) is 'fundamental education' of another order, and the International Catholic Centre for co-ordination with UNESCO, with offices in Paris, is alive to the need of keeping in close touch with a scheme which might so easily develop other aims than the reduction of illiteracy.