

## COMMENTARY

**THE HYDROGEN BOMB.** The decision to manufacture the Hydrogen Bomb in this country brings to an end the possibility of neutral unconcern. It was never really possible anyway, for the new situation created by nuclear warfare is that there can scarcely be local conflicts any more. Once the Hydrogen Bomb is used, once it is even manufactured, the possibilities of destruction as yet unguessed at affect all people everywhere. It is this terrifying power for destruction that is now put forward as a ground for hope. The deterrent force of the Bomb is such, it is suggested, that no country would ever risk a conflict which would involve its use. We may hope indeed that the argument is true, but the history of human folly in international affairs can provide no easy confidence. The divisions that separate the world today are no longer an affair of territorial advantage or of national prestige. They are global in their extent and universal in their claims, and have evolved military instruments to match their range.

In the meantime moral problems of the gravest complexity have arisen in the wake of the development of atomic power. They cannot be evaded by those who assume any responsibility for the instruction of the Christian conscience. And the recent utterances of Pope Pius XII provide an authoritative statement of the principles, unchanging as they are, which must govern men's conduct in the tragic dilemmas of a new situation.

In his Easter address of 1954 the Pope described the radical problem presented by the new weapons—their capacity to bring about 'a dangerous catastrophe for our entire planet'. For it is no longer a question of employing armaments of specifically limited range and power. The new weapons 'could cause the total extermination of all life, animal and vegetable, and of all the works of man over ever-widening regions. And now, these new weapons, because of artificial radio-active isotopes of extended average life, are capable of infecting for a long period of time even the very atmosphere, the world's surface, the ocean itself—and all this in areas far from the places directly hit by the nuclear explosives. As a consequence there now rises before the eyes of a terrified world the vision of destruction on a gigantic scale—the vision of vast territories rendered uninhabitable and useless to mankind.' The Pope goes

on to speak of the even graver biological consequences, as yet scarcely calculable, brought about by the use of thermo-nuclear weapons, 'either by the mutations effected in micro-organisms and cells, or by reason of the uncertain outcome which a prolonged radio-active stimulus could have on major organisms, not excluding man and his descendants'. There is the serious possibility of mutations which could affect the very hereditary constitution of man and which could be the cause of terrible diseases and monstrous deformities.

In his address to the Eighth International Assembly of the World Medical Association last September the Pope once more returned to the character of modern warfare. Having stated that to initiate a war except to redress 'evident, extremely grave and otherwise unavoidable injustice' would be a crime deserving the severest of sanctions, the Pope went on to state the crucial distinction on which moral judgment must depend. 'Should the evil consequences of adopting this method of warfare become so extensive as to pass *utterly beyond the control of man*, then indeed its use must be rejected as immoral. In that event, it would no longer be a question of defence against injustice and necessary protection of legitimate possessions, but of the annihilation, pure and simple, of all human life within the affected area. That is not lawful on any title.'

In this issue of *BLACKFRIARS* we begin the task of examining the implications of so serious a warning. It is not the moralist's business to provide a simple guide to permissible action. He is concerned with the principles, grounded as they are in the unalterable law of God, which the individual conscience must apply in a particular case. But he cannot be content with a mere rehearsal of traditional truths: he must take account of the new circumstances which can profoundly modify the application of the principles which are themselves not susceptible of change. And the new circumstance that overrides all others is the use of means that may be no longer within the area of responsible human control. It is here that the heart of the moral debate must lie, and, while its fearful implications must be honestly faced, at the same time the Christian can never begin to yield to the temptation of despair. No calamity can shake his hope, and it is nothing less than the peace of Christ, and the Christian's incorporation in Christ, that can be the context of all he has to say.