

WAR IN TRADITION AND TODAY

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SINCE the later middle ages the Church has commonly taught that five main conditions must be fulfilled before a war may be entered into with justice and therefore graciously. These conditions are that the war has to be undertaken only as a last resort when all other methods of retaining or achieving peace have failed; that there are serious prospects of success; that the war must be waged only for a grave and just cause proportionate to the evils of war; that it must be declared and prosecuted only by the legitimate authority; and that the whole prosecution of the war be guided by the right intention. There is no need to discuss this tradition; it is sufficiently well-known and in certain circles has been discussed at such length as to become wholly complex and unreal. What is urgently needed is an objective view of the application of the principles involved in this tradition to the modern scene of international strife; in other words, we need to discover the full stream of Christian life and thought as it meets the ocean of the present at this point.

Tradition teaches—and we will accept it without argument—that war may be undertaken only as the last resort. As things exist today we can say that if and when a country suffers armed aggression and she is forced into a defensive war, then war is permissible under this heading because there is no alternative; but that international politics are so complicated that it is often extremely difficult to discover who is the real aggressor. The state that declares war or fires the first shot is not necessarily the initiator of the war. Moreover, when armaments are built up on the large scale that they are today it becomes increasingly difficult to discover any other way out of international difficulties. There seems little chance of appealing to impartial judgment and peaceful settlements when the threats of immense armies and horrifying weapons form the background to every international movement. The idea of trying every other kind of means, before resorting to war, has become in fact rather meaningless, although there is an increasing desire to find some international authority, such as the League of Nations or U.N.O., which will be able to imple-

ment the other means of international settlement. To the Christian it appears evident that the World State to which men now look so desperately is impossible without the World Religion. The truly Catholic Christianity must be able to direct the policies of the peoples in so far as morality is concerned before there can be any hope of a series of effective means of establishing peace among the nations. In the future it may become possible; but at present the approach towards war takes little count of this condition of undertaking it only after every other means to gain justice has been tried. Armaments are built up, a war mentality is fostered by propaganda which often relies upon untruths, half-truths or suppressions of whole-truths. The development of the 'cold war' tends more and more to exclude the possibility of applying this element of the traditional teaching on war to the present time.

Tradition teaches that before a nation can enter into armed resistance against aggression there must be a reasonable hope that that evil of war will be surmounted by the peace for which it is fighting. It is not sufficient to have justice on one's side; if one has not the power to implement that justice it is useless and immoral to resist by fighting. Now in fact there could always be a glimmer of hope of success even in desperate conditions—as for example in England in the second half of 1940. But the state of modern warfare is such that success is hard to find and almost impossible to hope for. The smallest war now involves the whole world; the methods of warfare lead to world-wide devastation and ultimate stalemates. In Korea indeed the area of fighting was fairly small and there may have been plenty of hope of victory from the allied point of view when the war began. But the only effect was devastation of the country itself and a world-wide uneasiness while nations proceed to jockey for positions. In fact the whole world was implicated in the war in Korea and the only success that could be looked for and has in fact been accomplished was the cessation of the continual devastation. Success should mean victory and a true Christian peace, but the realist today could hardly expect to find those benefits in the unleashing of the vast powers of destruction that now lie to hand.

To come to the more central aspects of belligerency today, tradition once more teaches that the war may only be waged for a just cause, the gravity of which is proportionate to the evils

involved in the war. We can begin by saying that there are a great number of causes today that belong to the highest degree of seriousness. Without swallowing all the propaganda about affairs behind the Iron Curtain, we can be fairly certain that thousands of people are being deprived of their rights and even being unjustly done to death. We may also accept as certain the real threat that communism presents to the rights of nations and persons this side of the curtain. In earlier times there might have been in this situation a just occasion for a war, not of aggression, but of defence—to defend the lives and rights of the innocent being thus unjustly crushed. But already one French bishop has publicly declared that it would not be right for the French to join in a preventative (and to that extent defensive) war against the U.S.S.R. It seems clear that such a war against communism would be immoral on two counts.

Firstly, and this is a fundamental principle which applies to the whole theory of modern war, the existence of the sovereign secularist state in the place of what was at least intended to be an organized group of Christian nations inevitably tends to make each State the judge of its own cause, and that at once invalidates the justice of that cause. It is not for the one who is party to the dispute to judge whether rights have been seriously infringed. Also, the aims of the secularist state could only be incidentally (*per accidens*) just with the justice of Christ. In the case in point, the capitalist State which goes to war with the communist for fear of the threat to capitalism is simply pitting one state of injustice against another. It is not good logic to argue that if one party in dispute is acting unjustly, the other party must be acting justly. The Spanish civil war provided a clear example of this fallacy. Most people in those days seemed to think that if you did not support the Communists you must be a supporter of Franco; and *vice versa*, those who refused to accept the Franco *coup d'état* must certainly be in league with the Reds. Modern policies amid the sovereign and secularist states make it morally impossible for a clear-cut cause of justice to shine strongly and steadily enough to allow it to be deliberately defended by warfare.

A second reason why a war against communism, for example, is now bound to be immoral lies in the nature of modern warfare. The gravity of the cause must be in proportion to the gravity of the evils of war. Now the evils of war today are world-

wide and involve destruction and devastation such as has never before been conceived by man. Aerial warfare, atomic weapons and the like make it inevitable that large numbers of non-combatants are killed, maimed for life or left utterly destitute and uprooted. We have only to remember the continued existence of the effects of this sort that remain in the Christian centre of Japan at Nagasaki, or the hundreds of thousands of the dispossessed now existing—'living' would be too noble a term—in Europe today.

There are other elements too that make the evils of modern war quite disproportionate to any justice that might be established by this method. For example, the technique of lying, which has been developed to such a high and universal standard of efficiency in war propaganda, seriously undermines the moral characters of the people, besides making it impossible for them to form any informed and objective judgment about the declaration and prosecution of wars. Again, the fact that the nature of modern civilization makes any war inevitably a 'total' war tends to vitiate the whole idea of a just war in modern times and swamps the justice of any cause. It would therefore seem to be impossible to launch a just war against communism to protect the Christian world from that danger. The age of crusades has passed for ever.

The Catholic tradition further teaches that war may be declared and conducted in a just cause by legitimate authority alone. Such authority does not lie with the military authorities who are responsible for the effective prosecution of the war. The combatant is an official of the State and he is ultimately guided to the final purpose of the war—i.e. the securing of a just peace—by the authority of the State rather than by any Generalissimo, or Admiral or Air Chief. The military are directed in their final aim by the civil authority. But is the authority of a legitimately constituted State sufficient to justify the State going to war? Tradition here indicates some sort of international authority based upon international and natural law, adjudicating among peoples who recognize a common morality springing from a universal and invariable human nature in its turn issuing from the divine Logos.

As we have said, such an authority is still being sought, but at the present moment it seems very remote from any reality we know. If it were ever established we should have far greater

security in judging the justice of a cause. But even without it the authority of an individual nation may be sufficient for the members of that nation when it is clearly a case of defence against aggression. Where there is no choice except between resisting an unjust aggressor and being over-run, the Ruler has the authority; though as we have indicated, the modern propaganda machine makes it difficult for the individual members of the nation to distinguish a war of aggression from a defensive war. The Germans in 1939 were pretty well convinced that they were surrounded by aggressors—and perhaps they were.

Finally when the just war has been launched it must be continued right up to its successful conclusion, with the right intention. This means not only that during the course of a war justice may pass from one side to the other, or perhaps be obliterated altogether from both sides, by the change of intention on the part of the original defender of justice; it implies also that the means adopted in the course of the war must remain properly subjected to the just end. It rules out at once the use of evil means for the attainment of a possible good end, because in the use of evil means the just intention is changed, at least in the individual act, to an unjust intention. The inventions of the modern war machine therefore make this condition extremely hypothetical. Not that the intentions in themselves are evil, but that they cannot be used without directly evil results. It can be shown that the immense and inhuman destruction of atomic warfare could only be permitted in conditions which are scarcely conceivable, namely where the target is so removed from non-combatants and from fruitful soil (an important factor in face of modern world starvation) as to make it possible to direct the missile to its limited and appointed task of destroying a particular cell of war-activity. In general practice the use of atomic weapons is increasingly held to be immoral by Catholic theologians, so that a just war could in fact only be carried out today when the national authority is certainly determined not to use atomic or bacteriological weapons, nor to employ methods such as area-bombing which necessitate the certain and direct killing of non-combatants. It must be morally certain too that the general conduct of the war will not involve indiscriminate destruction or uncontrolled elimination of enemy personnel, for where the element of indiscrimination and uncontrolled activity enters the

human, wilful, element departs leaving behind a chaos of animality and barbarism.

I think that it is hardly necessary to elaborate these points further; a general survey of the bed of the traditional teaching on war as it finally reaches the ocean of the present seems to show a fairly clear channel through the delta. This declares that the five conditions which must be realized altogether in the concrete in order that a war should be justified, can scarcely, if at all, be realized in the modern setting. It is possible that one or other of these conditions may be realized, such as, for example, the just cause; but *in toto* the international situation of sovereign states that recognize no higher authority than themselves, and the methods generally employed in modern warfare, rule out the possibility of a declaration or prosecution of a just war. There is no question of denying the possibility of such a war in theory, but the concrete present renders such a possibility scarcely realizable.

NOTICE

The March issue of BLACKFRIARS will contain 'A Postscript to Moral Dilemmas', by Gerald Vann, O.P. The April issue will be a special number on Radio and Television, and orders for extra copies should be made as soon as possible.