

IS THERE A CHRISTIAN PACIFISM?

THE perusal of a copy of *The Christian Pacifist* which seems to have something of a Christian inspiration suggests the question 'Is there a Christian Pacifism?' The issue for May, 1944, written before the Second Front was an actuality, contained this passage: 'Through the deafening noise and blinding smoke let us try to see what is happening. What really are these brave events? Homes stricken desolate by grief! Children for ever rendered fatherless with all the thwarting and distorting consequences in character! The most precious creations of affection and long care smashed clumsily to formless fragments! God's noblest works defaced and fouled! The very life-blood of the family of nations poured out in mad and irremediable havoc? And a great heap of bitter hatred and lust for vengeance towering still higher than the material ruins! Here is fear exalted over faith; evil worshipped in the place of good.'

Though this apostrophe may have a tinge of that 'sentimental pacifism' which Pope Pius XI. warned us must not be confused with the 'Peace of Christ,' yet it has also some resemblance to papal exhortations themselves, especially those of our Holy Father Pope Pius XII. during the war. It even contains in brief his reasons for appealing for peace. But like all arguments that are not quite in tune with sound philosophy, it begs the question, and that in its concluding sentence.

It fails, in fact, to distinguish between physical and moral evil. It is true that it speaks of 'a great heap of bitter hatred and lust for vengeance,' but only as the apotheosis of the other evils, which are in reality on a different plane. And even if the whole passage were capable of a sound philosophical interpretation, it must be read in the light of the rest of the magazine, which is in line with the well-known pacifist arguments.

But how true it is that, in this war at least, fear is 'exalted over faith.' In this war, but not in all wars, and so a most unsound basis for the absolute pacifist theory. To impute fear as the motive for any recourse to arms is unsafe for the pacifist, for his refusal to bear them may, with more apparent reason, receive precisely the same imputation. Love of justice, and not fear, has probably far more often been responsible for defensive war, which the individual conscience applauds just as it would the defence of the home. To fight for one's country, moreover, is not necessarily to defend only one's own rights, but those of others. To die in defence of the

fatherland has been deemed glorious ever since society shaped itself. The poets from Homer onwards have testified to this, and it is the poets always who give emotional expression to normal human sentiments. The absolute pacifist must therefore not be offended if he be considered abnormal.

The pacifist is right, however, in seeing in this war the triumph of fear over faith. The cult of fear is the devil's attempt to destroy faith. By the infusion of fear and distrust he seeks to bring about the negation of the spirit of confidence and the 'Fear not' of the Scriptures. And, as the pacifist recognises, the cult of fear is linked up with to-day's orgy of destruction. Destroy your neighbour before he is sufficiently strong to destroy you. Threaten him; begin with a war of nerves; make him die with fright if you can before he has a chance of organising for retaliation. That has been Hitler's method ever since Warsaw.

But it has become our method, too; it is now everyone's method. Why is this? That great thinker, Nicolas Berdyaev, has hit the nail on the head, at least as far as this war is concerned, when he says that 'war is a mass hypnosis' (*Slavery and Freedom*; Geoffrey Bles). Berdyaev, unfortunately, is an absolute pacifist, and we cannot admit the universal truth of this statement. He is a philosopher who seems to reach conclusions which are not warranted by this process of reasoning; like the boy who gets most of his sums right even though his working is wrong.

Few would deny that Hitler created his colossal war machine only by first hypnotising the German nation. As Berdyaev says: 'War is a mass hypnosis, and it is only thanks to mass hypnosis that it is a possibility.' The corollary also cannot be predicated of all wars, but it is certainly true of to-day's. We are all involved in it. 'Even those who hate war,' Berdyaev goes on, 'and are of a pacific frame of mind are also under the influence of this hypnosis.'

We might examine in detail how each of the nations which are in principle opposed to all that the totalitarian system stands for came under an hypnotic spell. But to do so would be tedious, and foreign to our present enquiry. In passing, however, it is pertinent to observe that the Russian system is essentially totalitarian and so basically no different from the Prussian. We see, moreover, that total war demands national organisation on a totalitarian basis, and that the higher degree of organisation for war any State has achieved the more totalitarian it has become. That is to say, the greater is the degree of mass hypnosis in that nation.

But, the objectors will say, that is unavoidable in war-time. The nation that sets out to oppose Nazi aggression must put itself on

a parity with the war machine that started it all. That is exactly the point. You cannot have war to-day without mass hypnosis. The acute intellect of Berdyaev perceived this, though he has not troubled to look far enough as to see that all the wars of the past have not been totalitarian, and so have not demanded the dominating influence of a master hypnotist. Doubtless, any war of the future will require a far more intense mass hypnosis, preparing the way for Armageddon, which will issue in the triumph of good only because the forces of evil will play themselves out in a horrific grand finale of almost total material destruction.

The destructive function of modern war is obviously on an ascending scale. It can be secured only by an increasing passivity of the masses—what we may well term mass-passivity. The hypnotised subject to some extent places his will in the power of the operator, and receives his suggestions. The more often he consents to be hypnotised, the greater the determining tendency to carry out certain courses of action. The hypnotised masses to-day applaud the mass destruction of people, cities, towns, villages, buildings, sacred and profane, food, everything.

Who can say that this universal destruction is right? Who, on the other hand, can say it is wrong? We are in a dilemma. It is clearly wrong if we examine the question dispassionately and objectively. Those of us who are old enough to remember the first German air-raids on civilians in the first world-war know how horrified we were that the German high command had thereby abandoned all pretence to be ruled by even the most elementary moral principles. Fr. H. E. G. Rope shows, moreover, in his monumental work: 'Benedict XV,' that the Holy Father specifically condemned all such methods of warfare. On 27th May, 1915, Pope Benedict wrote to Cardinal Serafino Vannutelli: 'The war continues to stain Europe with blood, and there is no shrinking from the use, both by land and sea, of methods of attack contrary to the laws of humanity and to International Law.' And Fr. Rope's comment that 'the reference to air-raids by land could not be doubted' is all the more justified by the fact that 'in two letters to Italian Bishops during this year (1915), the Pope condemned the Austrian air-raids on undefended cities. Historic buildings also that were no military objectives had suffered severely in Venice.'

Such things to-day are mere commonplaces. The methods of 1915 were child's play to those of 1944. And the man or woman who denounces the game of total destruction is frowned upon as either a lunatic or a fifth columnist, though many of his hearers will agree with him in their hearts. What everyone possessing a sufficiently

enlightened conscience would denounce has become right. We are in a state of mass hypnosis. The world has been driven mad, and those things which in saner times would have been gross crimes are in the world's opinion no longer reprehensible, because it is not responsible for its actions.

Nor is the answer that we are nowadays all belligerents. If it were, we should at least have all been issued with steel helmets. But its falsity is shown in the large-scale evacuations that have taken place. Furthermore, much of the civilian warfare is claimed to be directed against those who have been organised to protect civilians against it. You may aim at a searchlight station, they say, forgetting that, but for the peril you bring, the searchlight station would not be needed. You may kill munition workers, but surely a good proportion of them is making munitions to defend civilians against attack, a perfectly legitimate object even if the war for them started unjustly. Moreover, as a letter-writer to a newspaper pointed out recently, the most certain and profitable way of destroying munitions is at the front where they are being used.

The whole process is a vicious circle. But it is at one with the vicious circle of industrial-capitalism in which we have all been caught up with a vengeance. Listen to Berdyaev again: 'The sovereignty of the state, nationalism, and capitalism which makes the production of munitions of war into an industry, inevitably lead to war.' You could not have total war without our industrial system, and—be it noted—our modern monetary system. This has been denied on the strength of the argument that you do not fight with money but munitions. Why then make such a feature of war savings? Why income tax at ten shillings in the pound? Why not scrap the system for the duration, and so simplify war production, and incidentally release a whole army of finance operators for more tangible work? There is more than one answer to those questions, but perhaps they resolve themselves really into one, though the reader will no doubt be able to supply it himself.

Just as the industrial-capitalism which made total war possible was already with us long before the war, so was the state of mass hypnosis, at least to some degree. Its influence has been gradual. The world has been playing into the devil's hands for so long. It has accepted one by one the advantages of so-called civilisation, not knowing it was selling itself slowly into slavery. 'The completely socialised and civilised man,' says Berdyaev, 'may be entirely impersonal; he may be a slave and not notice that he is,' a truth which is the echo of Belloc's thesis of the Servile State. Society has taken the line of least resistance, because that requires the least effort.

'Man is a slave,' again says Berdyaev, 'because freedom is difficult, whereas slavery is easy.'

But Berdyaev is not logician enough to see that the absolute pacifism he advocates is not only no remedy, but actually perpetuates the slavery he condemns. Pacifism, at least in theory, is nothing more than a quietistic acceptance. The 'Peace of Christ,' on the other hand, the true Christian pacifism, is a perpetual warfare; a fight against the conditions which make for mass hypnosis, and so make modern war possible. Berdyaev is right when he says: 'Human societies can perish as a result of a militarist psychology, of the endless piling up of armaments, of the will to war, and of the fear of war. It is in reality an atmosphere of increasing madness.' But he is wrong in thinking that we can escape the consequences of allowing ourselves to become mad.

There is, then, a Christian pacifism, but it is more fundamental than the acceptance of the injustice of totalitarianism. It is the waging of war against the power of monopoly and the encroachment of State bureaucracy. It is the defending of the home and the family unit against State planning. We cannot be pacifist about modern war, yet accept the conditions of modern 'peace.' Are we Christian enough to combat vigorously to secure the 'Peace of Christ' in social life, which only can make modern war impermissible because impracticable?

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W E L S H S A I N T S ¹

IN a real sense the history of the Church is the history of its saints. For the Church is a living society, and its life is made most manifest through those of its members who are honoured for the integrity of their faith and the holiness of their lives—the saints. If, then, as Leo XIII. said in a famous utterance, the Church has nothing to fear from a truly objective investigation of its history, the lives of

¹ *St. Illut*, by Canon Doble, D.D. (Welsh University Press; 5s.); *St. Teilo*, (2s. 6d.), *St. Dubritius* (1s. 6d.), *St. Paul of Léon* (2s. 6d.), *St. Oudoceus* (1s.); all by Canon Doble, and obtainable from him at Wendron Vicarage, Cornwall.