

Christianity and Violence: An Alternative Tradition

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During this Twentieth Century, more human lives have been lost as a result of warfare and political strife than have been taken by famine or any natural disaster. Not only have two world wars inflicted unmeasured misery and suffering upon millions of people, but also atrocities have been committed in the pursuit of political freedom or the protection of human rights throughout the five continents. In Vietnam, war was a fact of life for thirty years; relations between the countries of the Middle East are strained to the limit by violence and acts of war; in Northern Ireland, the deaths and injuries of the last five years, with the many who have been unjustly imprisoned or ill-treated, have ensured that it will be some considerable time before the hostility which has characterised the troubles finally disappears.

In this Holy Year, with its theme of reconciliation, Christians can use the Old Testament to discover the contribution they can make to a world which is desperately searching for peace. The Jewish understanding of peace is characterised by the prophet Isaiah, who looked forward to the Messianic Age as a time when the swords and spears of destruction would be converted into the ploughshares and pruning-hooks with which men could sustain life (Isaiah 2:4). Such a positive vision of peace inspired the composer of Psalm 72 to pray for the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom, where 'Justice will flourish, and peace, until the moon fails'. The poor and the weak will be freed from oppression and material well-being will characterise the times as corn 'is abundant in the land' and men flourish in the cities 'like grass on the earth'.

This rich description of life during the Messianic Age offers inspiration to those who proclaim that Jesus Christ is the Messiah promised by the Father, the one whose title is 'Prince of Peace' (Isaiah 9:6). When Jesus told his disciples 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you' (Jn. 14:27), he made it clear that he was the one sent by the Father, to promote reconciliation between God and men. Saint Paul realised that Jesus's mission of peacemaking had also put an end to divisions between men and he pointed out that the work of Christ had brought together Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:13-15). The task of preaching this peace to all men has been left to the disciples of Jesus. They are to show how the age of justice and peace has dawned by following the example of him who made peace by 'the blood of his cross' (Col. 1:20).

Christian Justification of Violence

Since the life of Jesus is the model on which his followers are expected to base their own lives, the case against Christians ever resorting to violence of any sort would appear to be beyond criticism. However, the problem of what Christians should do when faced with injustice has been a source of tension since the earliest days. The early rigidity, based on the new commandment of John 13:34, which forbade Christians the freedom to serve in the armed forces, never became the dominant strain in their religion. Indeed, it receded into the background as Christianity moved out of the sphere of Jewish culture and became more closely involved with the ideals of Roman society. Early Fathers were able to reconcile the Christian Message with the use of violence. Augustine put forward the theory of the just war, contending that whilst no Christian could kill in self-defence, rulers had the right to wage war in defence of peace and their subjects had a duty to support them. In the Thirteenth Century, his teaching was expanded and developed by Thomas Aquinas, who established three conditions which must be fulfilled if a war were to be just. The war must be raised by a legitimate authority, it must be raised in a just cause and the belligerents must have the aim of achieving some good or avoiding some evil (*Summa* 2.2ae, Q. 40, Art. 1). The theory of the just war received its classical formulation in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, when it was developed by Vitoria and Suarez. What appear to be stringent restrictions on the waging of war are set out; the war must be declared by a legitimate authority for a just cause. It must be fought as a last resort, with a right intention and without destruction of the innocent.

The just war theory represents the classical attempt to resolve the tension which faces the Christian who finds himself unable to defeat an evil force by non-violent methods. Although it is not feasible to discuss the merits of the just war theory here, it would appear that the development of sophisticated weaponry this century has rendered the theory less useful than it has been in the past. Nevertheless, the theology which lies behind it is still used by some Christians who justify the use of violence to defeat injustice and oppression. Indeed, in countries where the citizens are living under corrupt regimes, or where they are asserting their right to political and economic independence, it has become fashionable to preach the justification of violence. Camillo Torres was an example of those Christians whose frustration at their failure to defeat injustice by non-violent means has led them to conclude that they are justified in attempting to overthrow the instrument of oppression by force. They support their theology by appealing to the action of Jesus in cleansing the Temple (Mk. 11:15-18), and to such sayings as 'Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword' (Mt. 10:34). Their chief concern is to uphold the rights of the poor and weak who are being exploited by the rich and powerful. They base their action on the principle that there can be no reconciliation without liberation.

The Other Christian Tradition

The Scriptural basis for the tradition which has reconciled the Christian Message with the use of violence would appear to be of little significance when it is compared with the whole life and work of him who 'made peace by the blood of his cross'. Those who believe that Christians may never take up arms would appear to have a stronger case, based as it is on appeal to Jesus' own commandment, 'love one another as I have loved you; greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends' (John 15:12-13). Although this tradition, which emerged early in the life of the Church, has been dominated by the violent tradition, it has persisted throughout the ages and has been a limiting force on the use of violence. It has commended itself in the Twentieth Century to those Christians who have been impressed with the work done by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King to increase the standing of non-violence. They have shown that human rights can be protected by positive non-violent techniques, and their example has been an inspiration to many followers of Jesus.

If Christians are to involve themselves in the work of protecting human rights (and the fact that Jesus has entrusted his peace to their care would suggest they must) then they must ensure that they do more than use the gospel to reinforce their own political philosophy. Their political attitude will be something specifically Christian, in keeping with the command set forth in Leviticus 19:15, 'You shall do no injustice in judgement; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall judge your neighbour'. Non-violence would appear to be a useful contribution for Christians to make to the world in this century, which has probably been the bloodiest of all. By faithfully following the command to love to its ultimate conclusion, as their Master did, they can convince men that the time of Christ is truly a time when justice and peace reign supreme. Since both the exponents of violence and of passive resistance agree that all means of passive resistance should have been exhausted before more serious action is contemplated, the problem for Christians arises when all other means of redress have failed. At this point the two traditions diverge. Those who follow Augustine, Aquinas and Torres decide to take up arms. However, those who wish to practice non-violence without compromise see the self-imposed fast as the only appeal left open to them. Inspired by the traditions of their own cultures, Mahatma Gandhi and some Irish Republicans, notably Terence Mac Swiney, have used this technique of protest in the present century.

An Early Christian Example

The practice of abstaining from food for religious reasons has been a common occurrence since Old Testament times. King David fasted as a sign of his sorrow that the child of Bath-Sheba had fallen ill (2 Sam. 12:16). Moses fasted to prepare himself to receive a divine revelation (Ex. 34:28). Another type of fast was undertaken by the prophet Daniel, who abstained from food offered him by the King of Babylon rather than become defiled (Daniel 1:8f). Christ urged his disciples to

be sincere about their fasting and to do it in secret (Mt. 6 : 16). In the post-apostolic church, although Gentile Christians were asked to abstain from eating food which had been offered to idols (Acts 15 : 29), there is no mention of cultic fasting. It only occurs in union with prayer for Divine assistance in making an important decision (Acts 13 : 2 and 14 : 23).

A different type of fast, and one which is of immediate concern here, is the fast which was undertaken by Saint Eusebius, Bishop of Vercelli, in the Fourth Century. In 355 he helped to assemble the Council of Milan, at which problems related to the Arian controversy were to be discussed. When the Council opened, he refused to sign a motion condemning Athanasius and retorted that since there appeared to be some heretics present, all of the fathers should sign the Nicene Creed before condemning Athanasius. When he was sent for by the emperor, along with Dionysius of Milan and Lucifer of Cagliari, he ignored threats of death and proclaimed the innocence of Athanasius. He was eventually exiled to Scythopolis, in Palestine, and was put under the charge of the Arian bishop, Patrophilus. Not wishing to give any credibility to the Arian party, he lodged at the only orthodox house in the town. When his host, Joseph, died, Eusebius was dragged through the streets by the Arians in an effort to make him conform. Then he was locked in a room and his deacons were refused admission to him. In protest, he started a fast from food and water.

His attitude towards the fast, and his reasons for undertaking it are set out in a letter which he wrote 'to the presbyters and people of Italy'. There he gives an example of a letter which he had sent to Patrophilus and those who were holding him in gaol :

'God and the state know with what wholesale violence and fury you have dragged me through the land, and how sometimes you have carried me prostrate, my body naked, from these quarters. You gave them to me through men who were your agents in these matters, and I have never left them without violence on your part. You cannot deny it here or in the future. On that account, I commit my cause to God so that it may receive whatever end he ordains. Meanwhile, you should know that I have determined that, in these quarters in which you keep me confined, in which you thrust me back even more cruelly after carrying me off, and dared to carry me in the same way and throw me back into a single cell, I shall neither eat bread nor drink water until you promise me one by one, not just verbally but in writing, that you will not prevent my brethren, who so freely suffer these things with me for the sake of the faith, from bringing to me the food I need from the quarters in which they are staying. . . . I repeat, that unless you promise me verbally and in writing, you will become guilty of murder by your prohibition'. (Migne 'Patrologia Latina', Volume XII, page 950.)

By being prepared to refuse nourishment until he died of hunger, Eusebius was facing his persecutors with a serious moral issue. Only they could act to resolve it, either by releasing him or by allowing his deacons to bring him food. His fast, which carried his refusal to co-operate with

the Arians as far as he could take it, secured his release within three days. According to Saint Jerome, Eusebius was able to return to his see before his death in 371. His suffering for the faith has earned him the title of 'Martyr' in the Roman Martyrology, even though he did not actually die for the faith.

The remarkable way in which Eusebius triumphed over injustice is not one which has commended itself to Christians as a way of resisting injustice. In Europe, the practice has been regarded as something repulsive or uncivilised and has not been widely used. Instead the emphasis has been placed on laying down one's life for one's friend on the battlefield. Since the early Middle Ages, the glorification of military service has been characterised in such acts as the liturgical blessing of armies and the religious services which have marked the disbanding of regiments. Perhaps the fractious nature of European society today can be partly attributed to this mentality, which has persisted for so long.

The Irish Tradition

The only exception to the European tradition has been Ireland, which was never part of the Roman Empire, and where a tradition of coercive fasting can be traced back to the time of early Irish Christianity. In the lives of the Celtic saints, there are many examples of fasts being undertaken to bring moral pressure to bear on God. When the monks of Clonard Abbey had been robbed, they decided to fast in order to discover, by the grace of God, who was responsible for the crime.¹ The Abbot of Aranmore, Saint Enda, uttered the words 'jejunium meum non salvam donec tres petitiones a Deo meo obtineam', when he was seeking three favours from God.² It is difficult to say whether this curious use of fasting was inspired by a belief that asceticism was the most effective way of obtaining favours from God, or by a conviction that God could not leave his servant to die from fasting. What is interesting is that the religious practice was paralleled by an ancient legal institution. According to the 'Brehon Laws', a creditor who had tried all legal means of securing payment, without success, had only one course of action left open to him. He could stand before the door of his debtor and refuse to take food until the debt was paid. If the debtor allowed the person fasting to die of hunger, he was held morally responsible for the death. His debt was doubled and he had to pay a two-fold indemnity to the faster's family, based on the value of his body and on his social rank and family dignity. This practice of 'fasting against (or on) a person' could also be used to settle differences between individuals or to defeat a particularly difficult antagonist. Saint Malachy, Archbishop of Armagh, softened the heart of the local ruler when he and his priests fasted, whilst praying that the ruler would relent.³ The Welsh Saint, Cattwg of Llancarfen, fasted coercively against the leader of a band of enemies. The leader gave way very quickly.⁴ It would appear then, that

¹*Vitae Sanctae Hiberniae*, edited by C. Plummer, Vol. 1, p. 270.

²*Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 73.

³St Bernard, *Vita Malachiae*, XXVII 60.

⁴W. J. Rees, *Lives of Cambro-British Saints*, p. 94.

while, European thought was emphasising the right of men to take up arms in order to preserve the peace, Irish Christians had the human right of fasting to death in order to defeat injustice.

In recent times, this method of resistance has been used in the context of the Irish desire for political independence from Britain. In 1917, eighty-four Republicans, who had been gaoled for making 'speeches calculated to cause disaffection', went on hunger strike in Mountjoy Prison, Dublin. Their demand to be treated as political prisoners was conceded after one of them, Thomas Ashe, died as a result of being forcibly fed by prison warders.

The most remarkable and effective fast for the Irish cause was undertaken during the Summer of 1920 by Terence MacSwiney, who was in Brixton prison. He had been elected Lord Mayor of Cork, and on taking office, he pledged the allegiance of the city to Dáil Eireann, warning the citizens that there would be suffering before the Republican cause was won but saying: 'It is not those who can inflict the most, but those who can suffer the most who will conquer'. Five months later, he was arrested whilst attending a meeting at Cork City Hall and convicted by a military tribunal of possessing a seditious document (his inauguration speech) and of illegally possessing a police code. In protest, MacSwiney and those arrested along with him started a hunger strike. After a few days MacSwiney was transferred from Cork to Brixton. This attempt to deprive him of moral support did not succeed and as his condition worsened, public opinion increasingly favoured his release. The government, however, regarded MacSwiney's action as moral blackmail and determined not to release him. When the Bishop of Cork visited Brixton, the Lord Mayor told him: 'Your Lordship, my conscience is quite at ease about the course I am taking. I made a general confession this morning. I receive communion every morning. I might never again be so well prepared for death. I gladly make the sacrifice. They are trying to break the spirit of our people'.⁵ On September 19th, the Lord Mayor explained his attitude to the hunger strike in a message 'to the Irish People throughout the world':

'No natural reason can explain to me why I am myself still alive. I was brought here after a five-day fast and a twenty-four-hour journey in such a state of collapse that it was impossible to forcibly feed me. Yet, on Tuesday next, I shall have completed forty days without tasting food, and, though lying here helpless, my faculties are as clear as ever.

'I attribute this to the spiritual strength which I receive from my daily Communion bringing me bodily strength. . . . I believe in his mercy, God has intervened for our enemy's sake. It is incredible that the people of England will allow this cold-blooded murder to be pushed to its end. It is being done in their name and they will be held responsible. . . . But if their determination is to go on, our resolution is made from the beginning, we are prepared to die. Speaking for my comrades and myself, we feel singularly privileged in being made the instruments of God for evoking such a world-wide expression of support for the cause of Irish independence and the recognition of the Irish Republic.

⁵*Tablet*, Vol. civ, 1920, p. 308.

'We forgive all those who are compassing our death. This battle is being fought with a pure heart for our country. We have made our peace with God and bear ill-will to no man.

'I pray God's blessing on all you who have supported us by prayer. Between you and us it has been a veritable communion of prayer'.

The government resisted pressure to release MacSwiney to the end and he died on October 25th after a fast which had lasted seventy-four days. He had failed in his immediate aim of forcing the government to admit that he was being held unjustly, but his readiness to lay down his life on behalf of the Irish people had won support for the cause of Irish Republicanism, and robbed of all credibility the government claim that Republicans did not represent the wishes of the Irish people.

Mahatma Gandhi and Fasting

Gandhi has done more than any activist this century to promote the ideal of using only non-violence to combat injustice. He was firmly committed to the ideal that no cause could be served if violence were used to advance it. 'Non-violence in its positive aspect of benevolence (I do not use the word love as it has fallen into disrepute) is the greatest force, because of the limitless scope it affords for self-suffering, without causing or intending any physical or material injury to the wrongdoer. The object is always to evoke the best in him. Self-suffering is an appeal to his better nature, as retaliation is to his baser. Fasting under proper circumstances is an appeal par excellence'.⁶ Only those with courage could practice the positive techniques of non-violence. 'I do believe that where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence. But I believe non-violence is infinitely superior to violence, forgiveness is more manly than punishment'. For Gandhi, violence was something that belonged to the animals, which were only capable of understanding brute force, but men who had a spiritual nature should appeal to each other's higher instincts.

Gandhi believed that fasting from food was the ultimate exercise in passive resistance, because instead of trying to beat his enemy into submission by force, the faster tries to change the moral and spiritual attitudes of the one against whom the fast is undertaken. The most precious sacrifice any man can offer is his life, and when he has exhausted all other means of securing his aims, the student of non-violence has no other remedy but to offer to lay down his life, if he is to remain faithfully committed to passive resistance. Gandhi undertook many fasts during his lifetime. In 1918, when he fasted against the failure of the mill owners at Ahmedabad to reach agreement with their workers, a settlement was reached after he had refused food for three days. In 1939, after rioting had taken place in his own state of Rajvot, Gandhi started a fast to the death, saying that he would end his fast if democratic reforms were introduced. In the middle of the fast, he appealed to the Viceroy who intervened with the local ruler on his behalf, securing the reforms which Gandhi was after. The *London News Chronicle* described the settlement as 'not merely a personal triumph but a remarkable

⁶R. Duncan, *Selected Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 98.

victory for the method of passive resistance'. Gandhi, however, felt that he ought to have been prepared to die when he realised that his strike was not changing the attitude of the ruler.

In 1943, Gandhi was accused of being responsible for rioting which had taken place the previous August and he was detained by the British. He protested his innocence and threatened to begin a hunger strike. He began the fast on February 9th and declared his intention to finish it on March 2nd. The Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, declared that he regarded the use 'of a fast for political purposes as a form of moral blackmail for which there can be no justification'. In his reply, Gandhi told Linlithgow that he regarded this as an invitation to fast. 'You have left me no loophole for escaping from the ordeal I have set before myself. . . . Despite your description of it as a form of political blackmail, it is on my part meant to be an appeal, to the Highest Tribunal for justice, which I have failed to secure from you'.

Gandhi's final fast took place in 1948 as an appeal to the Hindu and Moslem peoples to live peaceably with one another in Delhi. He wrote in his diary for January 12th: 'There is a fast which a votary of non-violence sometimes feels impelled to undertake by way of protest against some wrong done by society and this he does when he, as a votary of "ahimsa" has no other remedy left. Such an occasion has come my way'. The fast began the next day and Gandhi stated that he would break it only if the two communities made up their differences and started to work for each other's well-being. He wrote in his diary: 'I am in God's hands. If he wants me to live I shall not die. I claim that God has inspired this fast and it will be broken only when and if he wishes it'. The fast finished on January 18th, when Gandhi had received assurances that there would be friendship between the Hindu, Sikh and Moslem peoples. He was satisfied that there had been a true cleansing of heart and that a lasting harmony had been achieved. The fasts undertaken by Gandhi differed from the fasts undertaken by Eusebius and Terence MacSwiney insofar as most of them took place outside of prison. Their effectiveness is attested by the fact that many of them were concluded within a few days.

The Ethical Aspect

The fasts of Eusebius, the Irish Tradition and Gandhi, adequately testify to the effectiveness of the fast as a weapon with which to fight injustice. However, if the fast is to be offered to Christians as a radical alternative to the use of brute force, it must be ethically in keeping with the Christian Message. No matter how good the end might be, it is never morally right to achieve it by using an evil means. The Irish hunger strikes of this century gave rise to a discussion among moralists about whether a faster was guilty of suicide or not. The most notable contention was conducted through the pages of the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* in 1918. After nine months of wrangling, the participants could only agree to differ.

It would appear that hunger strikers do not fulfil the conditions on which they could be judged to be guilty of suicide. Their intention is

not that they achieve their aims by taking their own lives, but rather, that by showing how they are prepared to accept death if it should come, they face the antagonist with a serious moral issue, on the assumption that he will not allow them to die. Their hope is that with public sympathy in their favour, it will prove difficult to refuse their demands. In the works of the classical moralists, Suarez and Lessius, there is teaching which would appear to cover the practice of fasting for political purposes. In *De Legibus* (Book 3, Ch. 30, n. 11), Suarez asserts that the precept of self-preservation involves two principles. The first forbids the taking of one's own life and is always binding. The second requires that steps be taken to preserve life and avoid death. This precept is not always binding and may, according to Suarez, sometimes be neglected, not only to observe a law, but also in the interest of friendship or other honourable causes. The taking of food was included in this category, and Suarez cited by way of example the case of the Carthusian who wished to keep the rule of his order intact. Lessius stated that whilst one may never kill oneself directly, it is lawful, with just reason, to do or omit something from which it is certainly foreseen that death will ensue indirectly, for it is not forbidden to a man ever to expose his life to danger. Charity allows one man to abstain from food in order that another may live. ('De Iustitia et Jure', Book 2, Ch. 9, Dubitatio 6, n. 27.)

Early this century, this teaching was used to justify the action of Captain Oates who, seeing that he was injured and there was insufficient food to go round, left Scott's expedition in the Antarctic and never returned. Later, Fr Henry Davis was able to accept that hunger-striking could be morally justified in certain circumstances.⁷ It would appear that by refusing to use violence against an aggressor, but instead, offering to lay down his life in a final act of self-suffering, the faster displays the greatest respect for human life. Unlike the soldier who accepts death if it should come whilst his army are trying to injure the enemy, the faster accepts death if it should come as a result of his refusal to harm the enemy. His fast is his only available means of obtaining justice, a weapon to be used when all other means of passive resistance have failed. Mahatma Gandhi warned his followers that fasting required a long training in discipline and self-suffering. In his diary for January 19th 1948 he wrote: 'Two severe qualifications are necessary—a living faith in God and a heartfelt peremptory call from Him. I am tempted to add a third but it is superfluous. A peremptory call from God within presupposes the rightness, timeliness and propriety of the cause for which the fast is undertaken. It follows that a long previous preparation is required. Let no one, therefore, lightly embark upon such a fast'.⁸

Violence and the Christian Message

The problem which faces Christians who are tempted to take up arms was raised in the garden when Judas led a band of soldiers to

⁷*Moral and Pastoral Theology Precepts*, H. Davis, p. 116.

⁸*Selected Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, R. Duncan, p. 209.

arrest his Master. The answer of Jesus: 'Put your sword back into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me' condemned the action of the disciple who had so readily sprung to his defence (Jn. 18 : 11 and synoptic parallels). It is a saying which must be seriously considered by all who claim to follow him. Some time earlier, Jesus had entrusted his peace to the keeping of his disciples, and in doing so, he not only offered them an understanding of what peace is but also a method of achieving it. Writing from his experience of persecution, the author of I Peter reminded Christians that 'one is approved if, mindful of God, he endures pain while suffering unjustly' (I Peter 2 : 19). When Christians suffer for doing right, they have the blessing of their Master, 'for to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly' (I Peter 2 : 21 and 23).

The Christian reaction to violence would appear to be one which will amount to more than a mere condemnation of those who would use violence to achieve political ends. After a bomb had exploded in Delhi in 1948, Gandhi told his followers: 'I would deserve a certificate only if I fell as a result of such an explosion and yet retained a smile on my face and no malice against the doer. What I want to say is that no one should look down upon the misguided youth who threw the bomb' (Delhi Diary, January 21st 1948). Those who resort to violence are often attempting to find salvation from injustice and oppression. They see in bloodshed a way of purifying the lives of those whom they represent. Writing in 1916, the Irish poet and revolutionary, Pádraig Pearse was able to glorify his own death in the poem 'The Mother':

'I do not grudge them : Lord, I do not grudge
My two strong sons that I have seen go out
To break their strength and die, they and a few,
In bloody protest for a glorious thing'.

Such sentiments belong to that tradition which has seen salvation in the laying down of life in violent conflict. They are similar to the ideas expressed by the Algerian doctor, Frantz Fanon. In his book *The Wretched of The Earth*, a classic apology for violent revolution, he quotes a passage from *Les Armes Miraculeuses* by Aimé Césaire, in order to illustrate the feelings of a native who achieves freedom by killing his master:

'We had attacked, we the slaves; we, the dung underfoot, we the animals with patient hooves.

We were running like madmen; shots rang out. . . .

We were striking. Blood and sweat cooled and refreshed us. . . . I struck and the blood spurted; that is the only baptism I remember today'.

Christians who believe that any action to protect human rights must follow the action of Jesus in his acceptance of self-suffering have a

special responsibility towards those who would glorify bloodshed, or use violence to reach salvation. By virtue of their baptism into the reconciliation won by Christ, they can offer a radical alternative to the use of armed force; an alternative which is firmly based on the new commandment. The unlimited fast, based upon the practice of those early Irish saints offers such an alternative. It does not carry the note of despair which is inherent to any recourse to armed force, but instead, always expresses the hope that violence is not necessary. When writing to the Christians at Rome, Saint Paul reminded them that 'while we were yet helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Why one will hardly die for a righteous man—though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die' (Romans 5 :6 and 7). By being prepared to lay down his life in a final act of self-suffering, rather than attempt to inflict harm on his adversary, a Christian is daring to die, not only for the gospel, but in order to save the wrongdoer. He is following the example of his Master, who 'while we were yet sinners, died for us' (Romans 5 :8).



The death of Cardinal Heenan makes a melancholy but appropriate occasion for me to withdraw a thoroughly unjustified aspersion that I very much regret casting on him in an editorial Comment recently, when I suggested that he might have done more to dissuade Nicholas Lash, amongst others, from applying for a dispensation to leave the priesthood. As Nicholas Lash himself writes : 'This seems grossly unfair; what could he possibly have done in view of the fact that he was not my Ordinary and that (so far as I know) he first knew of my decision through the press'? He adds that his own Ordinary 'at all times showed me a kindness and understanding which greatly helped me in the implementation of a complex personal decision'.

H.McC.