

## MORALITY IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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**B**EFORE 1914, the mass of the people in this country took little real interest in international affairs, which were commonly regarded as reserved to statesmen and their expert advisers. In Parliament, foreign affairs were looked on as a non-party matter, about which, save on rare occasions, basic agreement on policy was reached behind the scenes between the Government of the day and opposition leaders. This attitude was by no means confined to England. Since the end of the first World War, public interest in international affairs has grown steadily in all countries, though it may unfortunately be claimed that growth of the knowledge required to consider and weigh dispassionately the many complicated facts involved has not kept pace with the interest displayed.

This applies to Catholics and non-Catholics alike, but it is distressing to find that even among Catholics—and well-educated persons too—there is little realization that the proper conduct of international relations by Christians should be governed by as definite a code of Christian ethics and morality as that which should guide the private life of the individual Christian, and one which is indeed directly deduced from the same laws of personal morality as have been revealed by God in the Scriptures and are interpreted by his Church. A little thought will show that this must be so. All Catholics recognize the moral principles of the Natural Law, of the ten commandments given to Moses and of the supernatural extension of these laws declared by our Lord, upon which the Church bases her teaching of man's moral duties and obligations towards God, the family and himself, and towards others who are not of his immediate family. But all men are truly one family, whence similar principles apply to the relations of all men whatsoever; between man and man, family and family, between one group of families and another group, and thus, between nation and nation, sovereign state and sovereign state. It is no more justifiable for one state to rob another than it is for one man to steal; nor for one state to destroy another, than for one man to commit murder.

Nevertheless, as in the case of most moral problems, it is easier to state and give assent to the principles than it is to apply those principles to specific cases. The more complicated the circumstances surrounding the actual problem, the harder it is to see precisely what action should be taken or refrained from. In addition, in international as in domestic politics, there may be a fierce emotional element which tends to cloud dispassionate judgment; indeed the emotion is often more ensnaring in foreign than in home affairs. All must admit that to put the welfare of party above that of the state as a whole is wrong, but genuine patriotism, apart from the exaggerated variety favoured by dictators, is apt unduly to sway the most balanced mind.

Over a hundred years ago Taparelli d'Azeglio, an Italian Jesuit priest and philosopher of outstanding ability, composed a detailed study of the Natural Law.<sup>1</sup> The sixth book of this great work, which seems never to have been translated into English, though there is a French version, contains a complete theory of international society and of the moral and ethical laws which should govern it. Among many remarkable intellectual achievements, Taparelli foresaw the necessity for the eventual development of a supra-national authority, in an age when such a notion was inconceivable by contemporary statesmen, although he expected a delay of some centuries before political thought would have sufficiently evolved. The League of Nations and the United Nations Organization have begun thus early to fulfil Taparelli's prophecy, though the concept falls short of his major requirement, that their decisions and acts should be based wholly on the knowledge and acceptance of the standard and principles of Christian morality.

The application of God's unchangeable moral laws to the conduct of affairs between states and nations begins necessarily, not by the principles which must govern their relationship, but by those which delimit their right to exist. This is of great importance today when politicians representing all sorts of peoples are glibly talking of 'self-determination', the 'rights of minorities' and demanding 'self-government', while with other slogans they pour scorn and bring into hatred and contempt the 'brutal imperialists' who are apparently the cause of all the sorrows of the world.

In justice, both nations and sovereign states have their inalien-

1 *Saggio teoretico di diritto naturale*. By Taparelli d'Azeglio, S.J. (1793-1863).

able rights, but also their inescapable obligations. A nation, being a natural development more closely related to a family than is a state, which is a more artificial product, deserves, in some respects, greater consideration than does the political entity; but only given certain specific considerations and circumstances. A state consists of a territory, a population and a Government. No state today, however, can justly claim that its population is composed solely of one homogeneous nation, or that no national minority exists within its boundaries.

Before a nation or a group of people has the moral right to claim self-government, it must be capable of satisfying certain demands, of which the more important are that the overwhelming majority of the people concerned really desire the change, while possessing an adequate understanding of the obligations they would consequentially incur, and the ability corporately to fulfil those obligations. The obligations of statehood are great. A state must be capable of keeping peace and order within its territories by means of just laws and by the use of just methods; the people must be capable of producing and sustaining from among themselves a sufficiency of persons of character, intellect and moral stature to frame such laws and to ensure obedience to them. Also, and equally important, the proposed autonomous state must be potentially self-supporting economically (not necessarily internally) and capable of defending itself, either by its own power or with the help of willing neighbours, against external, unjustifiable aggression. Again, its coming into existence must not, *ipso facto*, destroy or endanger the just rights of other states.

Thus a student of history, even of recent history, must begin to wonder whether the creation of certain independent, sovereign states has always followed the principles of justice and Christian morality. He may begin to think that the leaders of those Great Powers proposing or agreeing to these creations were sometimes led to do so by motives of expediency rather than of justice. If so, however, he must not always condemn these statesmen out of hand, but is bound to recall the Church's teaching on tolerance, whereby, although no state nor other human authority nor individual has the right to give a positive order or positive authority to teach or to do what is contrary to religious truth or morality, nevertheless the toleration of error may be in specific circumstances a necessity and even a duty in order to ensure a greater

good such as peace and order in the community or the promotion of mutual charity.<sup>2</sup>

Even if a minority within a sovereign state—and this definition applies to colonial possessions of the state—cannot justify a claim for self-government under the above prerequisite conditions, the said minority, while remaining within the State, has very definite rights and obligations. It has the obligation, for example, of obeying the laws of the state, presuming them to be not contrary to morality, and of aiding the state to defend itself against attack. Its right is to retain its own identity, its own culture, and to develop that culture along its own lines, in so far as that culture, which includes religion as well as customs, is not abhorrent to the natural law and offers no danger nor open offence to the culture of other bodies tolerated in the state, or to that of the state itself.

The same principles would generally apply to the demand of a minority, not for self-government, but for secession from one sovereign state to another. So long as the state, under whose rule the minority subsists, does not unjustly exploit the minority, but allows it freely to exercise its cultural rights and—as is the bounden duty of a state towards a minority—assists it to develop towards a higher degree of civilization, through education and economic aid where necessary, secessionist claims have little or no moral justification. They have none whatever if their relations with the sovereign state are as described above, while the act of secession can be shown to endanger the economic or political stability of the state or its legitimate means of defence against aggression.

So far we have touched, albeit lightly, chiefly on the moral laws governing the right of a state to exist and the rights and obligations of minorities within a state. The same basic principles of morality and justice apply in the relations between one sovereign state and another, and between one sovereign state and the community of states which make up the world of men. Sovereign states regulate their relations with others by means of formal agreements and treaties. It must be obvious to all that to be just and moral, any treaty between states must have a moral and legitimate object; it must also confer on all contracting parties something which each considers to be a benefit to itself, while there must be a reasonable equality of benefit conferred on all partici-

<sup>2</sup> *Vide* Address by Pope Pius XII to Italian Catholic lawyers, VIth National Congress, 6th December, 1953.

pants. A treaty made under duress is as unjust and immoral as blackmail. The parties to an agreement must genuinely desire it and genuinely intend to keep each his part of the bargain.

Given all these conditions, it may nevertheless occur at some later date that, through changing world conditions, a party to an agreement either becomes literally unable to fulfil his obligations under the agreement, or can only do so at great loss to himself; a loss which could not reasonably have been foreseen when the agreement was accepted. In principle, a modification or denunciation of an agreement can morally take place only with the consent of all contracting parties. At the same time, the right of one party unilaterally to refuse to fulfil his obligations cannot, in certain circumstances, be denied. No state has the moral right to hold another to the letter of an agreement when events have rendered its continuance unworkable or excessively burdensome in a manner unanticipated at the time the agreement was reached. Equally, and perhaps even more obviously, no state has the right to introduce subtle wording into a proposed agreement, with the intention of eventually interpreting this wording in a manner which would never have been accepted by the other party, had it understood the implication later to be placed upon it.

Christian morality deals not only with right conduct in international affairs in peace, but also in war; recognizing war as one of the greatest misfortunes that can occur, but not intrinsically evil, even though its incidence may be provoked by evil done. The Church defines the nature and conditions of a just war, where war is unavoidable, for example, in self-defence against wholly unmerited aggression. It also lays down moral laws, all based on the law of God, for the conduct of the belligerents and governing rights of the victor. But in all such matters the principles of right action are alone defined, frequently with the mention of general circumstances which may modify the consequences of the action or of other principles of moral conduct, of which due account must be taken, according to the circumstances surrounding each case.

Thus it is clear that not only the relevant facts believed by interested parties must be known before judgment can be pronounced on the rights or wrongs of any particular situation, but, frequently, many other facts as well, which no interested party is perhaps anxious to make public. Justice can only be done in the

presence of all relevant facts. Human judgments can only be given on the evidence before the Court. The late Gilbert Chesterton, when his opinion was asked on the morality or otherwise of any international act after lecturing a mixed audience on these matters, used to say: 'I think I know some of the essential facts. I know I do not know enough. Perhaps you think you do. If so, the responsibility of judgment lies upon you.'

Who then is to judge and to decree what shall be done where dispute arises between states, or when things are done by a state which are in themselves unjust or are likely to lead to international disorder? No state should be a judge in its own cause, and there are few causes today in which no state feels wholly disinterested. In a truly Catholic world the answer would be obvious; the Pope would constitute appropriate machinery and would himself act as the universal arbiter. But before that happens, we seem to have some way yet to go.

First the League of Nations, and now U.N.O., aims in theory to judge international disputes, but its real ability always to do so, or to do so justly, can readily be called in question; nor is it by any means a body accepting, and imbued with, the Christian moral law. Still U.N.O. is the best the world assents to at the moment, is a step in the process of right order, and, as such, we must do our best with it. How important then become the statesmen upon whom each country relies to conduct its foreign and home affairs! How important is not only their natural integrity and sense of justice, but their individual belief in the justice of God and in the moral laws he has revealed for the right guidance of all men!