

Problems of Peace

JOHN P. MCWALTER evidently regards pacifism as essential to Christianity, and with his attitude I have much sympathy, but does he suppose that throughout the centuries the Catholic Church has failed to understand the teaching of our Lord—if any—in this controversial matter? If complete and unconditional repudiation of all violence were an integral element of Christianity, assuredly when baptizing the centurion Cornelius, St Peter would have required the new convert to abandon his way of life and the position would have been clear from the early days of the Church. The traditional distinction between counsel and precept is eminently reasonable and permits full scope for the practice of non-violence; pacifists should refrain from an endeavour to intrude their own ideals upon others, there are issues in which conscience must be the guide both for them and for opponents; outside the realm of dogma, Christianity is wide—*Latum mandatum tuum nimis*.

Does Mr McWalter really hold that 'Thou shalt not kill' is a plain universal command that requires no interpretation and admits of no exception? If an escaped lunatic runs amok brandishing a hatchet, may not a Christian employ violence in restraint, involving if necessary a bullet with possibly fatal results? May not a marauding tiger be shot, or a mosquito be killed? Is it wrong to take the life of vegetable or fruit for human sustenance? Some say that the Hebrew commandment is 'Thou shalt not murder', but in any case, interpretation seems involved. And your correspondent's final quotation is also unconvincing, for although 'those who take the sword' do sometimes perish by it, more frequently they do not. Interpretation again!

JOHN NIBB

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