

# The Pursuit of Peace

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by F. H. Drinkwater

A fact to begin with (from the *Birmingham Post* of 31 May 1966) about the new British Polaris submarine, due to be launched in September: 'Each submarine, with its 16 missiles, can unleash more destructive power, 2,800 miles from the target, than all the bombs dropped by all the air-forces of the last war. It is the most powerful weapon yet devised by man.' The crews know (adds the newspaper) that if ever they have to use this power 'they will have failed in their task – the maintenance of world peace'. Voices of criticism and protest seem to fade away in weariness, as the shadow of world-suicide creeps nearer. Of the statesmen and prelates who favour peace by nuclear deterrence, a few do stir uneasily as one fresh country after another 'proliferates' nuclear weapons of its own, or gets them from America. As for mere 'conventional' armaments, our own Government announces with pride its arrangements for selling them to pretty well all comers and nobody lifts an eyebrow. It is difficult not to agree with Fr Thomas Merton's sombre summing-up of our situation as a turning of man's creativity away from God to make a temple to man's own powers of destruction. 'The ultimate extreme of this process of degeneration is reached when all man's powers are directed to spoilage, rapine and destruction, and when his society is geared not only against God, but against the most fundamental natural interests of man himself.' (*The New Man*, p. 42.)

People who suffer from enthusiasm for peace will want to possess and make known an excellent compilation by Peter Mayer, called *The Pacifist Conscience: an Anthology* (Rupert Hart-Davis Ltd., pp. 447, price 42s.). Mr Mayer wants to rescue the word 'pacifist' from the absolute thou-shalt-not-kill school, which he regards as only the extreme wing of a deep and wide human tradition; the other extreme being the political school who hope to achieve world-peace through agreed disarmament and a world-government. Mr Mayer himself seems to lean to Thoreau rather than Tolstoy, but he thinks all should draw closer together, and his collection of fifty or so long quotations is chosen from all shades of conviction, from the rather Christ-like Motse (China, fourth century B.C.) and St Maximilianus (A.D. 295) to Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King. Mr Mayer's own introduction and biographical notes evoke the story-portrait of humanity's long peace movement, wars and all. Needless to say, his book is packed with valuable documents and quotations; William

James's level-headed lecture on the Moral Equivalents for War is alone worth the two guineas. The only demur one may feel to the editor's selection is that he gave the final concluding place to a teenage-like convulsive reaction written in 1947 by Albert Camus (but how that one could write!).

Incidentally, that piece is the only one in the anthology (except for some anti-militarist protest by the Dreyfusard Alain and his pupil Simone Weil) which comes from France. In so many things France has been ahead of the English-speaking world, yet in this blessed vision of Peace the French seem still centuries behind us. In their past history there is no Wycliffe, no George Fox or William Penn, no Society of Friends working for mankind, no conscientious objection recognised by law; no experience in having to cope with the civil-disobedience side of Sinn Fein or with Gandhian satyagraha. In all this the Anglo-Saxon world has been in the van; even Gandhi himself was English by training and literary inspiration. In our own day French Protestants have produced one or two doctrinaire Bible-pacifists, the Catholic Bishops made anti-nuclear pronouncement, and P. Lorson, s.J., has defended conscientious objection; but on the whole the French still take war for granted, as an occasion for glory or resigned endurance as the case may be.

All the more remarkable, therefore, is the case of Père Pie Régamey, O.P., whose book *Non-violence et conscience chrétienne* appeared eight years ago and has been regarded ever since almost as scripture by Catholic peace-workers in this country. Fr John Fitzsimons, for instance, writing in *Pax* of September 1961, said: 'In this matter what is needed is hard thought and the grace of God. The great value of Père Régamey's book is that it provokes the first and convinces one of the need of the second.' This judgment must be still more true of the fourth edition, which (the author tells us) has been much revised and augmented in response to comment and criticism. It is this fourth edition which has now at last been translated (excellently) into English and published by Darton Longman & Todd under the title of *Non-violence and the Christian Conscience* (pp. 272, price 25s.). It has a short preface by Thomas Merton, and a thoughtful foreword by Stanley Windass about the deep psychological roots of violence. 'The inter-weaving of force and justice' he says 'is part of the very texture of our individual and social lives, and to ignore this is to abdicate intelligence and responsibility . . . Violence and war are part of our natures, themselves to be redeemed'.

Père Régamey would agree with this, but his emphasis is all on hurrying up the redeeming. Not so much through any action by states or super-states, or even by the Christian Church as such; of these he seems to entertain little hope for this purpose (though often of course quoting Popes advocating peace). No, the redeeming of force, the converting of the violent, must be undertaken by the individual persons, whether few or many, who will be inspired by

the Christian law of love. But this law (and here you may think his thinking falters somewhat) is not a law in the customary sense, but rather a call to each one to go as far as each finds possible, as far as his circumstances allow, along the road towards a loving non-violence. I'm not sure I like this idea. It reminds me too much of that lawyer-saint Andrew Avellino who bound himself by vow always to do the most perfect thing. *Do* it by all means, my feeling would be, but don't make an obligation of it and so let yourself in for endless casuistry, maximising instead of minimising. The absolute imperatives he seems to envisage are refusing to use torture (seemingly an echo of the Algerian situation) and refusing orders to actually use nuclear weapons. Any peace-effort more drastic than this (he seems to say) will have to be decided by the individual conscience. He finds Christ's mind about force perplexing (p. 85) and says we need the guidance of the Church to preserve us from dangerous deviations (p. 38), but he evidently envisages times when some chosen souls at any rate must follow their conscience into an open disobedience to 'established disorder' (p. 119). As for 'the law of the gospel', he prefers to follow Aquinas in thinking of it as being nothing other than 'the grace of the Holy Spirit given to the faithful' (p. 107). Perhaps this summary scarcely does his thought justice, perhaps one should supplement his book by a pamphlet which he wrote in 1961 in conjunction with Pere J. Y. Jolif, O.P. (*Face à la Violence*, Editions du Cerf: Burns Oates, 5s.) where there is more insistence on applying Christian non-violence to social and political life as well as personal.

The dominating figure of Fr Régamey's book, from beginning to end, is Gandhi, whom he evidently regards as translating the purest ethical teaching of the gospel into our twentieth-century situation. Accepting the challenge (as it seems to him) of Gandhi's victorious non-violence, he surveys the whole ethical situation anew from that standpoint. The great impressiveness of this book lies in its full awareness of every aspect of the violence-problem: whatever you think of, Fr Régamey has thought of it already, and faced it, if not in the text then in one of his innumerable footnotes. In the 40 pages of Part I he studies Our Lord's teaching and example, easily avoiding the 'rigorist' excesses of the doctrinaire pacifists (p. 99) and upholding the natural right of self-defence (p. 103). Much space is occupied with the meaning of the word 'douceur' which the translator rightly refuses to render as 'meekness' and translates 'gentleness'; but perhaps peacefulness or peaceableness or even just kindness would have been better. (The chapter on this topic, p. 136, etc., seems true enough but very wordy.) The central Gandhian term *satyagraha* (truth-force, or soul-force, which can break the vicious circle of chain-reaction violence) naturally comes in for frequent exegesis, as on pp. 203–6. So does *ahimsa* (pp. 161–174) which means consciously putting love or good will into our dealings with everything and everybody, enemies included; though even here, unlike many pacifists, Régamey

realises that it is possible to love your enemy even while you are obliged to kill him (p. 186–7). ‘The paradox is then to go on loving the enemy in a real way while one resists him; most Christians do not even consider the possibility of simultaneous love and resistance to the enemy. Would it not be crazy to say: I love you while I strike you, plot against you and kill you? It is better not to say it; how many of us could say it with real sincerity? Nevertheless it is true that on us is placed the obligation of loving him and fighting effectively against the evil he does, if violence seems the only way of defending the truth. The real scandal is to take the abdication of love for granted. On the other hand there could also be scandal in refusing a necessary fight.’

Such a quotation is enough to show how distant Fr Régamey is from the ordinary doctrinaires who perhaps take shelter under his theological mantle. Nor does our author let himself be so pre-occupied about war that he loses sight of other world-troubles. In the end (p. 237) he announces that nuclear war is less of a danger than world-starvation. What is infinitely more serious than the nuclear confrontation of East and West is ‘the enormity of human misery and its increase which is unavoidable without a brand of heroism that no-one seems prepared for . . . This is paving the way to unprecedented forms of violence which will be sparked off by the states that are oblivious of the terrible forces they are dealing with in terms of the politics of another age’. Here for once our translator hardly rises to the occasion, but you see what Fr Régamey is saying. Even at this point he still follows Gandhi faithfully, rejecting contraception as any sort of remedy for over-population and calling for ‘a restraint of certain desires which might be permissible in times of well-being’ (p. 258). The last few pages of this book soar into a mood of prophetic exaltation which echoes Gandhi’s word: ‘Let us invent a new kind of history,’ and Mounier’s call for ‘a tragic optimism’. In the dark and stormy period that lies ahead there will be unbearable tensions for the few responsible elect, but these must do what little they can. ‘The humblest actions are priceless if they spring from perfect love. A few are preparing themselves in this spirit for future struggles and their action bears witness to this spirit; but at present there are virtually none in high places.’ Such a consciously heroic stance is French in the noblest sense. And yet somehow one feels a need to ask a few questions.

Can we really follow Gandhi so unreservedly? He was indeed a great and good man, a saint if ever there was one, making experiments (as he put it) with truth. Must we call him also a doctor of the Church? Undoubtedly he shared with Our Lord and Francis of Assisi (and for that matter with Luther, and even with Hitler) the gift of speaking directly to the mass of humankind. Can we with our hindsight isolate what is permanently useful in his teaching from what was local and situational?

Père Régamey was evidently drawn to Gandhi by his success in non-violently driving out the English. But was this not due partly at least to his knowledge of the English, and of their rather good-natured character? Would he and his disciples have succeeded equally well against a Nazi or Japanese occupation? Long before his movement had time to spread would he not have been contemptuously liquidated by the occupying power, in this case without any prospect of a rising on the third day? And even if we admit that he drove out the British, what happened as soon as they were gone? Racial and religious riots with millions of casualties and whole populations fleeing from each other in terror. Whatever successes Gandhi's method achieved were surely of a very embryonic and experimental kind, as he himself would have been the first to admit. The fact is that although Gandhi gave such an impression of unyielding and of unattainable ideals, he also (like another ex-lawyer saint, St Alphonsus) had a strong sense of situation and could be flexible enough on occasion. For him non-violence was the most practical method rather than a sacred dogma. He never retracted the words he wrote in 1920 in *Young India* (they find a place in Mr Mayer's anthology): 'Where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advocate violence . . . I advocate training in arms for those who believe in the method of violence. I would rather have India resort to arms to defend her honour than that she should in a cowardly manner become or remain a helpless witness to her own dishonour.' One imagines he would have fasted against war with Pakistan, but what about invasion by the Chinese?

Some years ago the present reviewer met (in Munich) an Indian priest who was pastor of some remote village in some northern region of India. He gave me a vivid account of the many weeks of turmoil after the British left. (Incidentally his own church activities and property were in dire peril from some over-zealous new local authorities who seemed to think that the end of the Raj meant the end of Christianity. He had made a long train journey to New Delhi, where all he could get from the new Government men was vague assurances. But one official suggested he should go and see Gandhi who then happened to be in New Delhi. Gandhi received him kindly, talked for an hour or two to get the full particulars, and finally promised to do what he could to help. That very evening Gandhi, in his usual evening devotional broadcast, described what was happening to the Catholics in my friend's village, showed how anything like intolerance was unworthy of the newly-free India, how everyone's conscience must be respected, and so on at considerable length, with the whole sub-continent listening, and my friend's troubles were over.) He told me also that all through the period of communal riots Gandhi's constant theme on the radio was that people must not attack each other; no aggression, above all *no retaliation*. I asked if Gandhi had admitted any right of self-defence under aggression; my

priest answered that this aspect had been simply left aside, unmentioned by Gandhi during those sad days. This seems to show that he was more practical than some of his disciples nowadays. But it suggests too that this idea of 'no retaliation', no revenge, no punishing, is really the essence of the matter, and coincides with Our Lord's teaching about forgiveness, and about loving one's enemies. Love is the greatest power, we *can* love our enemies and thus overcome evil by good. Loving the sinner, being on his side, does not necessarily mean letting him do what he likes. If aggressors are using unjust force against our neighbour, it may be our duty to use just force against the aggressor. We can still love both of them. We are still on the side of our enemies, against their own worse self. The opposite of love is not force, but hate.

If we can clear up our ideas in some such fashion, we may begin to see some light ahead even in the agonizing ethical problems of the nuclear age. 'Massive nuclear retaliation', or even the threat of it and preparation for it, must evidently be discarded and disobeyed by the individual. Even a whole nation could conceivably be enlightened enough to renounce such mass-murder. But what then, if some aggressor-nation uses nuclear blackmail? This is indeed the point where Gandhi's example would be relevant in a big way, and Fr Régamey's chapter ten on 'The Technique of Non-Violent Action' is the best thing in his book, though he still seems to think of such action as being a movement organised by free souls against unjust authority such as a tyrannical State or occupying Power. Yes, but what if it were the *rightful authority itself* which organised the non-violent resistance against some aggressor Power, an aggressor materially overwhelming but still spiritually vulnerable? Such a situation, thoroughly organised beforehand, could easily be imagined in the case of some small nation such as Switzerland or Ireland; in fact it was what Arthur Griffith (inspired by nineteenth century happenings in Hungary) had planned for Ireland and which contributed far more to the struggle for freedom than did the rather ill-starred militaristic complications. But what we need now is that some *great* nation, or even all Western Europe, should make the unilateral nuclear renunciation and take the consequences. If properly organised and trained for beforehand, like 'Civil Defence' only more so, the consequences (if the worst happened) could be, first, some resistance by conventional forces, ceasing at the first use of nuclear weapons by the enemy, who would then try to take over, by military occupation or puppet government or both. The legitimate government would then go 'underground', and the whole nation would go into non-violent civil disobedience under its trained leaders. It would co-operate with the usurpers in a few well-defined matters necessary to carry on organised life and the economy, but in everything else it would support the legitimate but hidden authorities. There would be no guerilla or military maquis, if only

because these provoke intolerable reprisals; and there would be no assassinations of quislings or spies, because this would be against the principles of non-violence. (The link with violence was Gandhi's objection to Sinn Fein.) Evidently things would be difficult for the citizens; many would falter, but many would be loyal at all costs: as Gandhi said 'Let being hanged be regarded as a normal part of life'. For the invading power things would become even more difficult; the larger the area the more impossible their task would become.

Non-violent resistance of this kind, made credible by a whole nation being trained for it beforehand, is the genuine ultimate deterrent nowadays. Let us hope that Père Régamey or somebody will soon write a book working out the possibilities in detail. The late Commander Stephen King-Hall did write a small book with the title *Defence in the Nuclear Age* (Gollancz, 1958) in which he clearly set out the possibility of such organised non-cooperation, but he seemed to underestimate the likely ruthlessness of the occupying power, for instance he thought the press and B.B.C. would be able to join in the campaign: evidently they would be the very first victims. Père Régamey himself mentions various others who have tentatively organised ordinary people in non-violent movements of non-cooperation or protest: especially Martin Luther King in U.S.A. and Danilo Dolci in Sicily; he makes much use also of a book (unknown to me) by Dr L. Corman called *Nonviolence* (Stock, 1949). It seems that Gandhi rather doubted whether his method could succeed in the West – would we Westerners ever have enough self-mastery? But if he had known the English during the blitz, or the Germans under even worse bombing, or the Russians under invasion, he might have seen plenty of raw material for *satyagraha*, and even plenty of *ahimsa* at least towards one's fellow-countrymen and allies.

Fr Régamey knows all about the psychological and practical difficulties raised by non-violence, in fact he devotes a separate chapter to these. But his faith in non-violence is profound, because it has a firm moral basis in the understanding and love of one's enemy. And on p. 220 he has an effective quotation from a writer called Maryse Choisy: 'The whole dynamics of non-violence comes from the fact that it succeeds in totally dissipating the unconscious feeling of guilt in the non-violent, while it simultaneously actualizes a proportionate sense of guilt in the adversary. It is the guilty conscience that makes him vulnerable. But to the extent that the non-violent is prompted by love, he not only convinces the opponent of his guilt but also helps him to accept it. It can no longer be projected into a form of paranoia. On the contrary, it inhibits the aggressive urge.' Christ kissing the Grand Inquisitor, in fact.

A book like Fr Régamey's so rich in insights and so full of seeming indecisions, should have the effect of making everyone try to clear up their own minds. Accordingly perhaps the reader will be tolerant

if this reviewer sets down once more the conclusions he has been forced to in these matters.

*The Ethics of War.* A 'just war' (in the sense of starting a war in a just cause) must be nowadays regarded as unthinkable, except when it can truly be described as police action for the common good. Defensive war against aggression remains always lawful, if not always desirable. But in any case indiscriminate cruelty, killing, and destruction are immoral.

*The Political Situation.* The balance of terror may have produced a terrified 'peace' for a dozen years but it cannot last, as more and more nations get their hands on the bomb. It is plainly the duty and interest of Britain to lead the way in unilateral renunciation. At least this might prevent proliferation. Russia and U.S.A. would probably not follow suit, but it is for Russians and Americans to tackle their own governments.

*The Role of the State.* Any Government must practise the art of the possible, and much depends on the situation it finds itself in, how far it depends on votes, how quickly it can educate public opinion, etc. Statesmen should damp down nationalistic sentiment instead of inflaming it, and should work towards world-federation. Evidently all statesmen should try for agreed disarmament, and some should go further and faster.<sup>1</sup> The rights of conscience, even of erroneous conscience such as the 'absolute pacifist', should be recognised by law as far as possible. Presumably an individual statesman ought to resign rather than carry out a majority policy against his own conscience. As regards Britain it is evidently our duty (and interest) to renounce nuclear weapons unilaterally, but with due preparation for non-violent resistance instead, on the lines already suggested. Of course this would need the general consent of the nation.

*The Role of the Individual.* This will naturally depend on ability, education, opportunity, etc. Everyone should use his conscience, but for many people this can only mean following directions from State, Church, or trusted friends. If a war is clearly unjust, the individual citizen should stay out of it in every way he can. In suitable circumstances (as at present in Britain) he should try to persuade his fellow-citizens and government about the possibilities of non-violent resistance on the national scale. If this or that weapon or method is clearly indiscriminating or barbarous, the individual service man should refuse orders to use it. As for choosing the armed forces as a career, this may be rather a rash thing to do in Britain at present, but in itself it should always be praiseworthy since defence or police-action will always be needed, all the more if there should ever be a world government.

*The Role of the Church.* The morality of war is a matter of the natural law of right and wrong, and all humans, certainly all

<sup>1</sup>On the mind of Vatican II about unilateral disarmament, see the Abbot of Downside's letter in *Pax Bulletin* May 1966. He shows that there was no intention of excluding it.

humans who believe in God, should take reason as a guide. But since God became man, his Church is here in the world and ideally should act as mankind's conscience, declaring and applying the eternal Will of God to current human affairs. We know from Church history how far the fact has been from the ideal, how theoretical teaching has been sound enough but practice has been mostly scandals. The few years of Pope John and Vatican Two have given us a fresh vision of the possibilities. The People of God should feel its own supra-national life, as indeed even the humblest Catholic does already to some extent, say at Lourdes. The leaders of the Church, even bishops in their countries, should be aware of their wider responsibilities, and be ready to stand up to Caesar not only in defence of 'the Church' but in defence of justice and freedom and peace. We all know in our hearts that a few bishops publicly hanged somewhere in Africa, or lynched by mobs in American cities, would be the best advertisement for the Church since St Peter cured the lame man in the Temple. If public opinion in the Church were properly educated, the laity, and still more the clergy (being free from family cares) would provide innumerable leaders for non-violent resistance and suchlike, whether against outside aggressors or against the unjust actions of their own government. Whole new secular Institutes could arise dedicated to the service of world-peace. Above all, the Church in a given country could speak up, and provide a voice and a moral authority equal to that of any government or any mass-communication media. That is what the average citizen needs when his government is herding him into war and worse – some voice of equal *authority* to tell him what to do. How far the Church should use its spiritual penalties, as by refusing the sacraments to erring emperors (as St Ambrose did) or to airmen who bomb cities, is a matter for consideration; such powers have been so misused in past history that they are naturally suspect. The ecclesiastics of the future like those of the past will have their temptations to power-lust. But what is needed above all is the voice of the human-conscience-at-its-best, speaking straight to the heart of mankind. Pope John showed that this can happen, and Pope Paul too is doing his best, as when he told us all the other day that to fight world-hunger and set up justice and solidarity '*nothing less will do than to change the whole world's economic and financial system*'. It is not the Popes who fail today, but the Pope is not the Church. (Incidentally, I wonder how many British Catholics ever heard of Pius XII's pronouncement against the Suez operation at the time? See Régamey p. 253.) In today's danger of war, and especially of nuclear war, those in each nation who believe in God must undertake the converting of their own people and government, and where there are Catholics their responsibility is clear, whether as a body or as lonely prophets moved by the Spirit. The need is for witness. A few more bishops like Archbishop Roberts, many more laymen like the

lonely martyr Franz Jagerstätter, and mankind's poor could once more have the good news preached to them and could lift up their eyes and hope.

NOTE. Since writing the above article I have come across a book which shows that there has been more thought going on than I imagined about the practicability of non-violent resistance on a national scale against a nuclear power. The book is *Alternatives to War and Violence*; edited by Ted Dunn, with a foreword by the Bishop of Colchester (Publishers: James Clarke Ltd., 33 Store St., W.C.1; 7/6). It is a well-planned symposium by two dozen writers, and I recommend especially the editor's introduction and the chapter by Gene Sharp on 'Facing Totalitarianism without War'.

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