

COMMENTARY

HUNGARY. The martyrdom of Hungary—and the word means first of all the bearing of witness—has evoked the admiration and the pity of men and women everywhere. Whatever the future may bring, the evasions of 'co-existence' must surely now be ended. A peace that is no peace at all can be bought at too high a price when it means the toleration of organized tyranny and of the sufferings silently borne by all the millions under Soviet rule. The silence has been broken, and even though there must remain the frustration, and indeed the shame, of being unable to help those who continue to suffer, at least consciences have been stirred and the easy accommodations of political necessity have been terribly exposed.

For Hungary there is a patron, little known and at first sight weak enough, but with the weakness which, in St Paul's phrase, confounds the strong. St Margaret of Hungary, a Dominican nun, was the daughter of King Bela IV, who seven centuries ago was the defender of his land against the threat of utter destruction from the Tartars. St Margaret is known for the rigours of her penitential life, for her chosen acceptance of pain and humiliation. She was only canonized in 1943, and we can commend her countrymen to her care—in an age like her own, knowing a menace as huge, and finding in her intercession some part of their hope.

THE RESORT TO ARMS. The tragic events of the last few weeks have given a harsh actuality to the traditional Catholic teaching on war and peace. *War and Christianity Today* (Blackfriars Publications; 12s.), by Father Francis Stratmann, O.P., appears at a moment when passion, if not panic, can easily affect a judgment which, for a Christian, must always be a moral one. Between the wars, Father Stratmann was a fearless leader of the German peace movement. He was far from being an academic moralist, never confronted with the agony of personal choice. His own sufferings under Nazi persecution give him an additional claim to be heard, and his new book bears the mark of his own experience in the sense that he never separates the speculative moral debate from the human context in which it is in fact

experienced. Moralists can sometimes seem to be speaking of disembodied beings, affected only by intellectual argument, and for that reason their testimony can seem remote from the individual's urgent need.

In his earlier books, Father Stratmann had insisted on the imperative application of the classical teaching of St Thomas and Vitoria to the conditions of modern warfare. There can be few theologians who would disagree with the virtual impossibility of a 'just' modern offensive war, for, as Cardinal Ottaviani has remarked, 'the conditions which theoretically make it justified and permissible are never present'. And the present Pope's repeated warnings of the immorality inherent in the capacity for indiscriminate destruction of the new nuclear weapons only emphasizes the gravity of a situation in which the defence of a just cause seems only possible through their use.

The question of conscientious objection is, therefore, both difficult and urgent: difficult, because the refusal to serve is a decision that the individual who is not an 'absolute' pacifist (and no Catholic can be that in principle) is reluctant to make (how can he ever be certain?), and urgent, because it is a decision that may well be imminent for millions of men. The need perhaps is to insist on the word 'conscientious' rather than on 'objection', for conscience, even though it be erroneous, must be followed. Vitoria's principle remains true, namely, 'when subjects believe that a war is unjust, they must not participate in it, whether or not their belief is mistaken'. Conscience, it is true, is never an excuse for evasion, and it is the business of the individual to instruct his conscience. It is here that the value of Father Stratmann's book is most apparent. He assembles, with moderation and charity, the imposing evidence drawn from moral theologians and papal utterances; he treats in detail of the problem of conscience and the inalienable rights it confers. In fact he provides what is most needed at the present moment: an authoritative and at the same time a charitable summary of the Catholic teaching on the resort to arms. This is too often merely acknowledged and not seen as the application of abiding moral principles to situations that are actual or as illuminating the consciences of men in the decisions that they must make.