

WAR, JUST OR UNJUST

THERE is a danger of war in Europe to-day; in spite of peace pacts, conferences and other attempts to establish security one nation does not trust another, and war may arise at any moment. On the other hand, it may never arise, and upright men of all nations are endeavouring to prevent it by every means within their power. In all this Catholics are vitally concerned, for we form a large section of the European community, and are directly concerned about the welfare of that community. We must not be blind to obvious facts, we must know what is expected of us if war should actually break out; at the same time, we must show a practical desire for peace in Europe, and assist in any way possible to secure it. But our actions must be guided by sound principles, clearly understood and appreciated. Without such clear intellectual judgment we may be carried away by sentiment either to glorify war in militarist fashion, or to condemn war absolutely as something of its nature evil, like murder or adultery. Either view might lead to the worst disasters; neither is a view which a Catholic may hold. Popes and Bishops have repeatedly insisted on the evils of war, but they have never categorically asserted that war is always and inevitably sinful. Rather they have pointed out that war may sometimes be just. Living in the midst of a world crying out for peace we may find this attitude of the Bishops rather disconcerting, and the reasons for it are not always clear. On these reasons, on the principles behind the teaching of Pope and Bishops, the present writer has attempted to shed a little light.

The principles may be first briefly summarised:

1. War in its very essence is not sinful. It may be lawful provided certain conditions are observed. They are
2. that the war must be waged in an honourable fashion, without the use of sinful means;
3. that the declaration of war must be made by a legitimately constituted authority, which represents the nation, and whose intention is upright;
4. that the evils involved must be at most merely tolerated, not directly intended either as an end or as a means to an end;

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5. that the good to be achieved must be greater than the evils resulting. There must be a just cause for going to war.

'War' is here understood in the strictest sense, not as civil war or rebellion, but as a struggle between nations. It is not any kind of struggle, but a struggle carried out by armed force, a struggle between nations as such—not between any number of individuals of different nations who are not authorised to fight. It is a struggle or contest carried out by armed force between two or more nations acting as such.

Such a struggle, even carried to a fatal end, is not necessarily unlawful. War means the infliction of bodily harm up to the point of death; there are other evils associated with war which may be considered worse than death, but they are not of the essence of war, for the essence of war is nothing more than the application of armed force. War is not necessarily unlawful because it is not necessarily unlawful to inflict bodily harm even to the point of killing. Killing is only unlawful if unjust. Normally it is unjust because we have no right over our own lives, much less over the lives of others. But there are especially two occasions when God, the supreme Lord of life and death, communicates to men a limited authority over the lives of others, because in these cases it is necessary to preserve justice, to avert a greater evil. First, one who is threatened by an unjust aggressor may defend himself even to the point of killing the aggressor if this is necessary in self-defence. Secondly, if it is necessary to maintain justice, the State may take the life of one who deliberately injures the community or any member of it.

If one nation unjustly attacks another, the latter may justly defend itself even by warfare which involves killing, if such a measure is necessary and there is no other efficacious means of defence. For then war does not involve unjust killing on the part of the nation attacked, and the case is merely one of killing in self-defence on a large scale.

But is a war of aggression lawful? Can one nation ever take up arms and attack a nation which is not at the moment actually an aggressor? The cause might be the obtaining of due reparation for injuries inflicted in the past. And here there is a difference between the nation

and the individual. So long as the individual is not attacked he has no right to attack another, however menacing the latter may be, for up to the moment of actual aggression the superior authority of the State, represented by the police, can be expected and is bound to intervene. Similarly, he can appeal to the law to obtain reparation for past injuries. But among nations there is no such superior authority. The League of Nations only has power to the extent conceded by its members. It can show an unjust nation that other nations disapprove of its injustice, and in the last resort it can threaten war against the persistently unjust nation. In this way the League is indeed a power for good, and it has already prevented war, but it is not wholly effective and may fail. If it fails, in the absence of any other court of appeal the injured nation and the nation which has good reason for fearing future injury may attack injustice by war. Therefore, war, whether aggressive or defensive, may be lawful. It is not of its essence sinful, provided the conditions are observed.

War may, then, be lawful. But it is not lawful if it is waged in a dishonourable fashion, if means which are in themselves sinful are used to achieve even a good purpose. The end does not justify the means, even in war. Justice and Charity, the virtues and the ten commandments must be maintained even in war, and any infringement of these is sin, for which the sinners must bear a fearful responsibility. For example, to kill the innocent who do not actively participate in the action of war is unlawful, and involves the sin of homicide on the part of those who authorise such killing.¹ War is no longer carried on in an honourable fashion if greater injuries are inflicted than are necessary to avert the injustice of the aggressor. Even the victorious nation which has fought justly has no right to inflict punishment on the enemy, for it has no jurisdiction over the other unless received expressly from God, as the Israelites received it in the Old Testament. Victory only gives the

¹ Munition-workers must be counted active participators, but they are far away from the scene of the main struggle, in the midst of non-combatants. An attack on these would mean inflicting injury on so many innocent people that the cause which justified the war in the beginning could never be extended to permit such widespread injury.

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right to secure just demands and to ensure the preservation of justice in the future, the right to reparations and security—nothing more.

Even killing, normally implied in any war, becomes a sinful means if it is not necessary. If it is possible to avert an opposing force by lesser injury or by taking them prisoners, the less injurious means must be adopted. This is a most difficult question to settle when it actually arises, but those who have the authority in the matter of attack and defence are bound to judge as far as is humanly possible, to what extent the extreme measure of inflicting death on the enemy is necessary.

The position of the common soldier also calls for attention. The soldier who is fighting on the side of justice is merely performing a duty which the nation can reasonably demand of him. An able-bodied man capable of fighting is bound to defend the community of which he is a member; he is bound even to risk his life to prevent an injustice so widespread that it affects a whole nation. If he is not fighting on the side of justice and realizes that his cause is unjust, he commits sin by participating. If, however, he thinks that his cause is just (and normally he must accept the judgment of superiors on this point), he fights justly even though in reality the cause is unjust. But it does not seem legitimate to kill those who are fighting for what they honestly consider to be just (and most soldiers are in this position). They have committed no sin; they are in good faith. Nevertheless, it may be necessary and lawful to kill them just as it is necessary and lawful to kill a lunatic who threatens one with death. He is in good faith, he commits no sin, but it is lawful to kill him if his aggression cannot be averted in any other way.

Life is so short that normally it gives to each individual only sufficient opportunity to become master of one trade or profession. One of the professions which calls urgently for expert knowledge and very special qualifications is that of directing the policy of the State for the common good. The government may be king, emperor, dictator, autocracy or democracy. In any case, it may be taken generally to represent more or less adequately the will of the nation. It is for the supreme authority in the State to judge when the common good can only be safeguarded by war.

The Government has this right and this duty; but it must use this awful power with great circumspection. Unless their intention in declaring war is upright and honourable the rulers commit a crime of the first magnitude against mankind, and the war is immoral in its very origin. Actually all those who declare war claim to do so with an upright intention. All claim to be acting in self-defence or for the maintenance of justice. At the beginning of the last war the ex-Kaiser, speaking to the Reichstag, represented Germany as fighting a war of self-defence against the hostility of East and West, the whole world against the German people. 'In dire need, with pure mind and clean hand we take up the sword.'² England claimed to be defending the neutrality of Belgium in accordance with a just treaty previously made which Germany had violated. But if the leader manifests an evil intention by deeds which contradict his words, he must be judged guilty of the sin of causing an unjust war. Hence if he appeals to war without first considering whether other means are adequate, his intention is not upright and the war is unjust, for war involves such evils that it must always be the very last court of appeal for civilized nations. Moreover, his intention is not upright if he is uncertain about the justice of his cause. For so long as the other nation is not certainly unjust in retaining any of its possessions, it has the certain right to keep them. He interferes with the peaceful possession of a certain right and thereby commits an injustice.

The evils of war are manifest, and the evils of modern warfare are infinitely greater than anything which was known to combatants even of a hundred years ago. If there were a war to-day it would be far more frightful even than the last. In modern warfare millions of lives are lost in the midst of excruciating torture, and many are cut off without the opportunity of making their peace with God. Large numbers are maimed and broken for life, left limbless, blinded, paralysed, or driven utterly insane by the cruelties of war. Even non-combatants suffer to a less degree indeed, but often in the same manner as those who fight for their country. And in every war women have suffered in the most

² In aufgedrungener Notwehr, mit reinem Gewissen und reiner Hand ergreifen wir das Schwert.'

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shameful way, which to some of them is a fate worse than the most cruel death. Certainly this is not a necessary part of war, but in actual fact it has been present in every war since the beginning of history and can be expected in any future war. All this must be considered seriously by those who let loose the horrors of war; if any of these are intended directly as an end, then the intention is evil; if as a means then the mode of war is unjust. In either case the war is unlawful. But because they need not be directly intended, because theoretically at least it is not primarily desired even to kill or wound a single individual, war may be just; it is supposed that the mind of one who fights justly is to inflict the least possible harm necessary to maintain justice.

These horrors are the concomitant evils of war, but they may not even be permitted unless there is some good cause to be achieved which justifies a leader in permitting them. But they are so terrible that the cause must be proportionately grave and there must be great hope, amounting almost to a moral certainty, of achieving it. One might well ask whether there can ever be so great a good to be attained that these appalling evils are more than counter-balanced by it. In the past it may have been possible, but we are concerned with present conditions. The principles outlined are the principles of the natural law written on men's hearts and remain eternally true, but the conditions to which they are applied may change, and it may be that the evils of modern warfare are so great that no proportionate cause can be assigned for allowing them. This may be so in fact, but we must maintain that in theory at least a just war is possible. And this is not mere idle speculation, for outward circumstances change while the theory remains fixed. Conditions might arise again when we should not only have to maintain the essential justice of war in theory, but take part in it in grim reality.

Meanwhile, we must support every honest effort which is made to establish world-peace, and in particular the League of Nations which, however imperfect, is probably the most effective means we have to repress war. Belonging as we do to a universal Church whose bond of union is the charity of Christ we must make every effort to break down that spirit of mutual distrust and hatred which leads to the

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increase of defensive armaments on all sides. We must refuse to co-operate with the immoral traffickers who provide armaments for two nations at war with one another, who sell them to the highest bidder, regardless of the use to which they may be put, who in time of war even sell them to the enemy to be used against their fellow countrymen. But we must face facts, and realizing the danger of aggression in Europe to-day must not condemn a nation for refusing to disarm beyond the needs of adequate self-defence. In this as in so many other moral problems the Catholic view avoids extremes and carefully considers all circumstances. Realizing that war may be just and necessary, we cannot condemn the making of armaments to some degree. But we hope for peace and seek it. Recalling what has been effected in the post-war years we regard the past as some guarantee of the future and may perhaps have confidence that the peace of Europe will be maintained during the years to come. But our confidence must have a surer foundation still, the foundation which is Christ Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

EDWARD QUINN.