

Reviews

INTERNATIONAL MORALITY, by Alfred de Soras, s.j.; Burns, Oates; 9s. 6d.

The appearance of this book (No. 58 in the 'Faith and Fact' series) is timely. Because of *Pacem in Terris*, there is an unusually wide interest just now in what the Catholic Church has to say on international problems. It may be argued that it would have been better if this book had been held back so as to take account of *Pacem in Terris*. But, on the whole I think not, for two reasons. First, seen in perspective, *Pacem in Terris* was hardly as revolutionary as the secular press has made out. Secondly, any danger there might have been of the book becoming just a commentary on the latest Encyclical has been avoided. (The author does, however, take account of certain passages in *Mater et Magistra* which were devoted to international problems).

Fr de Soras is well qualified to undertake the important task of interpreting Catholic thought on international questions. He has been chaplain at many educational establishments, including the *Ecole de la France d'Outre-Mer*. He has taught at the *Institut Catholique* in Paris; he has been theological adviser to the *Pax Christi* movement; and he is at present working at the newly founded Jesuit centre for African social studies and research at Abidjan in the Ivory Coast.

It is with a truly Gallic precision that Fr de Soras begins his task. He defines international morality as 'that branch of ethics which should furnish the States of today with the rules of conduct which should govern their relations' (p. 11). He has the familiar difficulty with the word 'international' and especially the concept of a 'nation', and explains that a more correct (if more awkward) title would have been 'Contemporary Inter-State Morality' (p. 12). But he rightly includes within his terms of reference the standards which should govern the conduct of the growing army of international organisations. He distinguishes between international morality and international law. He says that, from the Catholic point of view, an exclusive reference to international law would be dubious for two reasons. First, because present-day international law does not reflect absolute and essential values. Secondly, because even if international law did reflect these values, it would not necessarily provide the answer to the new problems that arise in the family of nations from time to time. This reasoning may be accepted. But it is a salutary thing that Fr de Soras seems also to accept that the starting-point from which one should consider an international problem is the relevant rule of international law. Provided this position is accepted, there is room for a healthy dialogue between international lawyers and those whom for want of a better name I must call 'international moralists'. If, however, this position is not accepted, the 'international moralists' are likely to find themselves arguing in a vacuum. It is, in my opinion, because the moralists have paid so little attention to the legal aspect that the controversy about nuclear weapons,

as carried on at any rate in Catholic circles in Great Britain, has proved so ineffective. Is it possible, I would be tempted to ask, under modern conditions to discuss sin without also discussing crime, or to consider crime, without also considering sin? But that is a wider question, beyond the scope of this review.

To return to Fr de Soras, he says that the correct solution of an international problem requires three things: (i) a position on the values to be arrived at; (ii) an analysis of the facts; and (iii) a determination on 'the precise means of setting about things as a result of that analysis and in view of those values' (p. 20). It is only on the first point that Catholic international moralists can claim to speak with any certainty. On the other two points they may be as mistaken as anyone else. To this useful distinction Fr de Soras adds another. Around a nucleus of unvarying and universal principles (the aim of which is to express certain truths of both the natural and the supernatural orders), he places a group of what he calls 'historico-prudential' assertions. These assertions, he says, have a hybrid character. They are absolute because of the values they bear witness to; but they are also contingent because characterised by the circumstances they refer to. Thus, it would seem to be a fundamental moral rule that 'while States should preserve the right to a genuine sovereignty, they must move towards the formation of a true inter-State community of them all' (p. 34). But it would, if I understand the author rightly, be a 'historico-prudential assertion' to say that Catholics should support the United Nations, as at present constituted. For a variety of reasons, they probably should do so. But it would be an open question, and Fr de Soras is careful to point out that he has no intentions of trying to suppress freedom of political choice in given international situations. The reasoning in this part of the book is necessarily difficult and is likely to disappoint those who would prefer to find on their breakfast table every morning a Papal pronouncement on the latest international issue. Having got through this passage, however, Fr de Soras steers once again into smoother waters by saying that he is going to concentrate on the absolute principles involved in international morality and by *disclaiming any intention of making many "historico-prudential assertions" on the contemporary international situation.*

It would be otiose in this review to discuss the chapter on 'The Bases of Catholic International Morality' and associated chapters. These bases have been discussed many times and, as is well known, there is a steady tradition reaching back from the modern popes, through Taparelli d'Azeglio to Suarez and Vitoria, St Thomas, St Augustine and of course even further back. It is sufficient to say that these basic chapters are very competently handled. In a chapter entitled 'International Disputes', Fr de Soras considers the question whether, under present circumstances, there can be a just war. His conclusion is that 'it seems too much to hold that today even a defensive war cannot be a just war' (p. 91). He will doubtless be criticised for this view. Unfortunately, at the level at which many controversies are carried on in the Catholic press and elsewhere, there is a tendency to regard the question of the possible existence or not of a 'just war' as the only question that has to be decided. The real question is of

course far wider and more complex than that. It concerns in a general way the organisation of the international community and the ordered use of force within that community. Fr de Soras deals adequately, and in due proportion, with the doctrine of the 'just war' and the problem of ABC weapons. The traumatic effect of Algeria is evident in the attention which he pays to the questions of psychological warfare and the use of torture. It is perhaps a pity that he does not devote more space to the problem of persuading States to utilise peaceful methods of settlement, such as arbitration and international adjudication. Are not the true offenders against international morality today not so much those States who arm themselves with 'deterrents', which may well be a justifiable policy in the circumstances, as those who refuse to accept even the principle of third-party judgment for the settlement of international disputes?

In the penultimate chapter, entitled 'Fraternal Aid Among the Nations', Fr de Soras makes a valid point when he says that 'it has until very recently been a failing of Catholic writings on international morality that they have made too brief a mention of the positive duty of giving international aid' (p. 103). Of course, this has not been a failure of Catholics only. Be that as it may, this question has come right to the fore lately and it is like to be 'the international question' for the rest of the twentieth century. Fr de Soras discusses in a practical manner the right and the wrong methods of giving such aid. From the point of view of the average reader, this is perhaps the most important chapter in the book. If Fr de Soras' reminder that 'indirectly the subjects of international morality are all men in the world' (p. 14) does not exactly make him sit up, perhaps he will pay more heed when the incomparable Pope John tells him in *Pacem in Terris* that 'We deem it opportune to remind Our children of their duty . . . to contribute towards the attainment of the common good of the entire human family as well as to that of their own political community'.

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A SHRINKING WORLD? by Jacques Leclercq; Burns, Oates (Faith and Fact); 9s. 6d.

LA CIVILISATION ET L'ATOME, by D. DuBarle; Editions du Cerf; n.p.

No subject is more urgent today than the structure of international society, and yet none is more likely to evoke from the moralist pious platitudes and ineffective generalisations. Both of these books deserve praise for their sense of concern, and for their attempt to reach out beyond abstractions to the complexity of the real situation. They do so however with very different degrees of success. The 'Shrinking World' is milk for the new internationalist, 'La Civilisation et l'Atome' is meat for the more mature. The one sets out to tell us what the Church thinks; the other gives us the privilege of sharing the thoughts and the insights of a sensitive Christian mind.

Symbolic of this difference is the arrangement of the subject in each book. Canon Leclercq starts with theology, working from the Old Testament, through