

Commentary

THE FUTURE OF CRUELTY. It needs more than a Declaration of Human Rights to banish injustice, though the efforts, at the United Nations and at Strasbourg, to establish a code that commits its signatories to a minimal regard for the rule of law, are at least a token of international concern. But the remedy lies deeper, and as the catalogue of cruelty grows longer—and that not only in countries under Communist control—it becomes imperative that individuals should not abandon the responsibility that is theirs.

But what can they do? They can hardly affect the issues that divide the world: they can seem impotent in face of horrors that are too huge even to envisage, still less to be ended by any action of theirs. But it would be a disaster above all others if Christians were to forget the true dimensions of their faith, to assume that, because cruelty can hide behind political necessity, there is nothing for them to do or say. The mustard-seed, the cup of cold water, the Samaritan's gesture: they matter still, and their meaning was never so plain.

It is the scale of things that can deceive, creating the alibi that the mere size of a problem confers: since we can't capture the city, why bother even to move a stone? What is needed now is the stand that every single man and woman of good will can make against cruelty wherever they find it. It is not so much a matter of protests against torture in Algeria—though indeed they must be made—as of a protest against cruelty as such in the context we know. It is a strange irony that an age that has so eliminated the impact of pain should be so eager to invent fresh ways to inflict it. Tranquilisers in the hospital ward do little to compensate for an insensibility that can reject a person for his colour, and which only the other day consigned six million Jews to the gas chambers. And a defence policy that can speak in the same breath of security and of the unimaginable price in certain suffering that policy must mean marks a decline that has gone very far. The Geneva Convention has an old-fashioned ring, with its talk of the rights of non-combatants and the limits of discrimination in killing.

But the witness of a single person, however pointless it seems, is never without its effect. A Charles de Foucauld, dying a futile death in a hostile desert, only begins to speak to the world long after his failure is over. And the single gesture, in Notting Hill or in a camp at Vincennes,

the refusal to accept the claims that cruelty makes in the name of the inevitable, can achieve much more than we know. Too many causes are marked by selective indignation; they can seem a matter of taste in fury; they are 'against' rather than 'for'. That is why the individual who has no interest in forwarding any cause at all but the essential cause of man's own dignity as a person can do more than any movement ever could. For he exemplifies what he believes and his credentials are what he is.

BROADCASTING AND LOCALITY. The evidence submitted to the Pilkington Committee in favour of an extension of local broadcasting is an important reminder of the influence that radio can bring to bear on the life of the community. Too often broadcasting—and especially television—is assumed to have a universal message, and pompous claims are made for its power. But the realities of life in local communities are good and worth preserving, and a common denominator of 'national' interests is no substitute for a healthy regionalism, concerned with the manageable details of its own way of living. When, as in the case of Wales or of parts of Scotland, a language is rapidly dying for lack of the sort of support that a sympathetic broadcasting policy could give, the question is even more serious. The image of commercial television, appealing, as the advertisers say it must, to the widest public, is in effect featureless, eliminating the unusual lest the ratings suffer. It is unlikely that much can be hoped for now from television, so entrenched is the motive of profit in its operations. But sound broadcasting remains mercifully free from the cruder pressures, and by a courageous extension of its scope it could do much to foster many things that are good in a town or a county, which, of their nature, are hardly for export. A concrete case is to be found in local politics, so desultory and clique-ridden as they often are. Here a lively radio coverage of issues that matter very much—the take-over bid that threatens a Georgian street, the plans for a new school, the acceptance of coloured immigrants—could inform opinion at an intelligent level. And the decline of local newspapers, with the increasing trend to monopoly in national ones besides, could be offset by a close network of really local radio stations. It would be a pleasant irony if the universalist assumptions of the B.B.C.—'Nation shall speak to nation' and all that—should in the end be a powerful means in the preservation of the vitality of the local communities without which nations become totalitarian monoliths.

FUTURE NUMBERS. In past years, issues of BLACKFRIARS devoted to special subjects created much interest. It is hoped to publish two or three such numbers each year, and the first will deal with the Holy Land, to be followed by one on Problems of Population.

Contraception Revised— *Reflections on a Spreading Argument*

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Money-dealings to the religious temper of the Middle Ages were somewhat like sex-activities to that of the nineteenth century and after: they were a pity, but could be excused. Now as the condemnation of usury by canonists and moralists was based on a reading of the rôle of money afterwards displaced by another, on the rôle of capital investment, and the first was allowed to stand even when it was no longer applied to a changed economic structure, so the traditional arguments about sex are based on a reading of its function which simply does not fit in with our changed social structure. The old premise was that the primary purpose of sex was the preservation of the race. Once upon a time this was true, but not now. There is a new situation: science has enormously diminished the dangers of a pregnancy, infant-mortality, and famine; machinery supplies for a large labour-force and State welfare for the parents' education of their children and the children's care for them; psychology enhances values in sex formerly relegated to secondary purposes; domesticity itself demands wider spacing and the standard of living for whole nations a lessened birth-rate. Let Catholic theologians then, instead of appearing evasive by the distinction they draw between contrivance and contrivances and by allowing intercourse more certainly destined to be childless than the contraception they forbid, instead of tinkering with their old apparatus and adjusting it to 'rhythm' and other methods which do not touch the heart of the problem, just leave it intact for what it is worth, like the condemnation of usury, and address themselves to a fresh statement adapted to modern conditions. They are not invited to preach a new morality, but to revise their arguments which appeal