

CORRESPONDENCE

'WAR AND THE CATHOLIC.'

To the Editor of BLACKFRIARS.

SIR,—Mr. Francis McDermott, in his article *War and the Catholic*, makes many statements which invite discussion; but they are, I think, of minor importance in view of the fact that he obscures the issue as a whole by failing altogether to broach the greatest difficulty. If we decide, hypothetically, that there is just cause for a war, and that it can be justified also in its results, we are then in a position to tackle that difficulty: Mr. McDermott leaves it severely alone. The Catholic, he writes, 'wonders whether . . . hate propaganda and the deliberate attacks on civilians can ever in any circumstances secure justice.' No doubt he does; but even if he were to decide that they can, he would still have to go on to ask whether, whatever their effects, they are in themselves right or wrong. Because, if wrong in themselves they can never be justified, however excellent their effects. Christianity is not utilitarianism. And the trouble is that in themselves they *are* wrong. Mr. McDermott makes the common but catastrophic mistake of forgetting the question of means. The Catholic may be faced with a situation in which he regards war—a war—as a duty, but at the same time knows that *this* war—the war which will in fact be arranged for him, on principles other than those of Catholic theology—will adopt methods which are in themselves evil.

That situation is one of the most tragic in which a man can find himself. I do not know why Mr. McDermott regards theological conclusions which reject the use of evil means as being based on emotion and not on reason; but I understand still less how he can think of such conclusions as a 'facile solution.' The facile solution is surely that which consists in ignoring, as does his article, the bulk of the problem.

I am, Sir, yours, etc.,

GERALD VANN, O.P.

Points from other Letters.

SIR,—So now even BLACKFRIARS has lined up with the recruiting sergeant; or is Mr. Francis McDermott's articles on War and the Catholic merely intended as an expression of the bewilderment of the layman before the imbecile profusion of injustice that hangs over Europe to-day?

I suppose Mr. McDermott's answer to the bewilderment (Let's all muck in with the Government) will be assented to, in the end, by the majority of Catholics, but it is discouraging to find BLACKFRIARS giving first publicity to this easy way out.

It's all rather complacent don't you think, the stuff about 'the Church in her wisdom does not adjudge Catholics of both sides as murderers by adopting a position that all modern war is unjustified'; for all the same in spite of her wisdom the Church 'has never sufficient information to adjudicate on the merits of a quarrel.'

Do the conditions for a just war outlined by Mr. McDermott earlier in the article hold any significance at all for the Church once the chance for acting on them arises? Mr. McDermott would imply not.

But there are other questionable contentions.

'Refusal to fight involves complete readiness to submit.' So if I don't squat down behind my machine gun and perforate as many Germans as possible, it means I am completely ready to submit to Hitlerism?

Why will perfectly good people, good Christians put all their trust in the strength of pieces of metal? Why is it imagined still, two thousand years after the death of Christ, that the only form of resistance possible is by the sword? Would McDermott argue that the Christians of Rome submitted to the Imperial paganism because they did not seek to kill their aggressors? And did their unwillingness to kill imperil the endurance of their beliefs? There are other forms of resistance besides the Bren gun. An amazingly large number of Catholics are reluctant to believe in those forms however. They pay lip service to trust in God, but keep such a heap of powder dry that one cannot help wondering which is considered the more valuable. Of course if the powder is the only means of defeating evil, of removing injustice, of consolidating religion, it is valuable indeed. 'What else remains to a country, as to an individual, in the last resort but the use of force to rectify injustice?'

War of course is 'execrable' but all the same 'it remains the only remedy left open when all others fail, for the prosecution of justice.'

But what does justice mean? Who is in the position to say: 'This and this only is justice' when passions are made feverish with war?

Elsewhere in his article Mr. McDermott says: 'Only posterity can judge the justice or otherwise of a country's action.'

There are other ways of establishing justice than by going as lunatic or wicked as your aggressor. Christianity was built up by people—we call them saints now but they were in their days of living thought of as ordinary Catholics—who followed these other ways; by people who believed that when Christ said: 'They that take the sword shall perish by the sword,' He was not talking in allegory, any more than He was when He said: 'For this is my body.'

Christianity has endured not by the sword but in spite of the sword. Even the massacre, pestilence, ruin of the Thirty Years War, fought in the name of God, did not root out the Christianity of Central Europe; but whether in any part of Europe Christianity can withstand the ravages of the first world war of political ideologies is as doubtful as the final effectiveness of our mountains of dry powder.

Yours, etc.,

PETER THOMPSON.

[Mr. McDermott replies: For Catholics living in countries threatened with war a most urgent question is 'What should be my personal attitude in the event of war involving my country?' My article was an attempt to face that problem and find an answer. In the absence of specific ecclesiastical direction every Catholic is entitled to find his own answer, but indignation with the world circumstances that force this decision on Catholics to-day does not help to solve the problem.

Amid his facile jibes does Mr. Thompson offer any alternative course of action to mine? I cannot find it. There is a suggestion that Catholics should adopt the attitude of 'organised non-violent resistance' referred to in my article. If Mr. Thompson advocates this he should say so categorically. Those adopting this and similar pacifist attitudes have to face the logical necessity of being ready to submit to the force against which they are not prepared to defend themselves and their fellow-citizens. 'Pacifism,' as Count Michael de la Bedoyere has well written, 'for men in society involves a contradiction and is therefore not under discussion except for the man who utterly renounces the world.']

SIR,—Mr. McDermott seems to admit (BLACKFRIARS, p. 323) that modern warfare involves a '*Massacre of the Innocents.*' He seems to admit (p. 327) that modern warfare involves 'air bombing, poison gas, blockade, *hate propaganda and deliberate*