Absolute Pacifism.

IT is important that we should distinguish at the outset between the idea of *peace* and the idea of an *ideal* peace. For our present purpose it may suffice to define peace as that condition in which nations live together in freedom from armed aggression. In this general sense the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* defines peace as "freedom from war." The same authority defines pacifism as "the doctrine or belief that it is desirable and possible to settle international disputes by peaceful means." In that sense most Englishmen may write themselves down as "pacifists" to-day.

The idea of an *ideal* peace is, of course, a different matter. An *ideal* peace requires for its actualisation ideal States populated by ideal people, and necessitates such ideal reasonableness and altruism, such an ideal mass-mentality, as would make peace something spontaneous and perpetual, needing no enforcement, no external safeguards, no sanctions except the sanctions of the spirit.

All of us believe in *peace,* and most of us believe it is possible to organise and actualise it. We believe the call to translate this possibility into a functioning fact is a moral imperative that commands the conscience of the civilised world. On the other hand, relatively few of us imagine that Europe and the world to-day are ripe for that *ideal* peace of the Kingdom of Heaven which is maintained simply by ideal sanctions without the enforcements of law.

Now, although this general statement would probably excite little dissent, it is nevertheless at this point that the forces that make for peace begin to fall into schism. For while few would contend that the ideal peace of the Kingdom of Heaven is immediately practicable in our present unideal world, many feel themselves morally bound to agitate for the application of ideal measures to unideal conditions. As a fair example of these ideal measures one may indicate the demand for immediate unilateral disarmament.

But this reflects a state of mind that is deadly to "idealism," for it ends by defeating its own object. American Prohibition was a case in point. It was an ideal measure applied to unideal conditions, with a result which was the exact opposite of the end desired. For whereas the Dries had hoped to confiscate the liquor and present the Wets with an inviolable law, it turned out that "the Dries got the Law and the Wets got the liquor." The nurse in charge of a diabetic patient may believe conscientiously in his recovery; but if she treats him as if he were already in ideal health and orders his dietary accordingly and abolishes his insulin, she will probably kill him. For good intentions and a moral glow are no remedy for diabetic coma.

It should not, therefore, seem perverse to argue that measures appropriate to an ideal, weaponless and spiritual peace, as for example an absolute non-resistant pacifism, universal disarmament or unilateral disarmament, are not well calculated to match existing conditions in a Europe of commercial competition, tariff-wars, racial jealousies and power-politics; and that, by the same token, such a policy would only defeat the purpose it was intended to serve. For not even the most ardent and doctrinaire of the extremer pacifists would argue that these actual, unideal conditions, economic, racial, national and imperial, can be removed within the next six months or even within the compass of a Five Year Plan. On the other hand, the need for a practical, constructive peace policy is urgent and imperative *now*. It is an urgency to be reckoned not in terms of decades but of months, weeks, days. The extreme pacifist is no doubt right in proclaiming the splendid ideal; he must " write the vision and make it plain." But when he divides the forces of peace by opposing all practical, and admittedly unideal measures, and insisting upon his own programme of non-violence and total disarmament (coupled perhaps with economic reforms which would require generations of inspired advocacy), his service to the cause of humanity may seem to be diminished in value.

But at this point the doctrinaire pacifist who bases his agitation upon a finished Christian conscience has every right to direct the argument to the explicit teaching of the New Testament, and thus to waive all considerations of worldly expediency. He may say in effect: " We believe in taking the New Testament seriously. We are bound to do so, and for us the course is clear. Not only can we have no part or lot in military or national war-service, but also we must do our utmost as Christians to convince the Government of its national duty to disarm immediately; and if other Powers do not choose to do likewise, so much the more is it imperative that the British Empire should set the example."

There is, it is true, some division of opinion about what should be held out as the consequence of such a policy. Some have said that the sure consequence would be peace and safety. God would see to it that the defenceless, the voluntarily defenceless, should be defended. There would, moreover, be an immediate quickening of the general conscience of mankind which would overcome the natural cupidity of esurient Powers at the spectacle of so rich an imperial estate inviting plunder. And even though the Totalitarian press and Totalitarian propaganda might conceivably conceal, or distort and caricature, the actual facts of this Pacifist Revolution, and annex certain territories and their populations, in any case war would be averted and safety would be assured. Others, objecting, perhaps reasonably, that this addresses the appeal to the less laudable and heroic instincts of human nature, say that, on the contrary, the consequences of such a policy might be national martyrdom in a righteous cause. But the policy, whatever the consequences, is the same.

Now, so far as the "martyrdom" alternative is concerned (that is, "martyrdom" on the national or imperial scale), we have here, it may be said, an example of that application of ideal measures to unideal conditions of which we have spoken—an application which, whatever its further consequences, destroys the virtue of the "martyrdom" itself. For the Master of Balliol is justified, surely, in indicating that the Christian pacifist has no Christian or moral right to urge his country to such a course as would force his countrymen (and, in the case of the Empire, native populations under the country's protection) who do not share his conscientious faith, to share his "martyrdom" for that faith, and submit helplessly to injustice. It is not Christian to impose "martyrdom" on others, and the fact that it is done when earthly States send conscript armies to their deaths does not make it Christian. And as to the other alternative, it is not transparently Christian to bid men disarm and go defenceless in this actual world on the assurance that God will see to their physical and material safety.

Nevertheless, who cannot feel the force of the Christian pacifist protest against war itself and military service? Compromise of some sort there must be, it seems, in this difficult world; and the ethics of compromise are complicated; but to Christian compromise there must be a limit, and that limit seems to be reached when a Christian is expected to bombard civilian areas with high explosive and incendiary bombs.

But the concern of the Christian conscience can never terminate simply upon a private, moral escape from the evils in which it refuses to participate. That private moral escape is provided by the alternative of "conscientious objection" and refusal of military service. But the Christian pacifist is clearly right in going further and attacking the evil of war itself. And no doubt if he could persuade all the people of military age in the civilised world to refuse military service, the evil would be abolished by that short method; mankind, having signed the Peace Pledge on the dotted line, would have signed the death warrant of war. But a world of conscientious objectors is far to seek, and the pacifist cannot pretend that this method can save the situation to-day. He sees instead the so-called peace-seeking Governments (certainly not from disinterested motives, for they are the " Haves " who have everything to lose by war) striving to build up a Peace Front to discourage the sort of aggression that victimised Czecho-Slovakia and to save the world from a conflagration. It is certainly not an ideal method, but it is the only practical one that has immediate promise of being temporarily effective: beyond it lies the hope of a calm discussion of the complex problems that make for strife, and beyond that the building of a real community of nations.

The fact remains, however, that a certain type of doctrinaire Christian pacifist feels himself obliged in this crisis to lift up a protesting voice and demand that his country should disarm, and thus tear down whatever defences of collective protection the nation has pledged its honour to maintain. For it is plain, as we have said, that this type of Christian pacifist feels that his loyalty to the New Testament, his Christian obedience, allows him no other course. He cannot, he feels, destroy his integrity by recognising a dualism as between State morality and the Sermon on the Mount. Christ's teachings are for the common life of man, and Christ has bidden us not to meet violence with violence, not to resist evil with its own weapons, but rather to submit and turn the other cheek to the aggressor and give to the litigant man more than he demands.

Now let this issue be faced. It is recognised that the immediate application of the teachings of Christ is to those who accept their authority; to the Christian community of disciples; to that community which, by the essential nature of its allegiance, lives not by law but by grace. It by no means follows that the application can, or ought to, be extended to the State in a pagan or sub-Christian civilisation. Thus it is of the essence of the New Testament community that it does not employ force. It does not employ it for the extension of its own apostolate. The Christian apostle must be weaponless. It does not employ it in its own community life. The Church has, rightly, no judiciary bearing the sword of magisterial compulsion. Its rule is the rule of conscience and love. It lives, we say, above the law; it lives by grace. It has so strong an inward principle that it has no need of external checks and compulsions.

But can we say this of the State? We may resent the dualism, but we cannot obscure the distinction between Church and World *and* be true to the New Testament. We cannot treat the New Testament seriously *and* suppose that precepts that are authoritative for the Christian community were intended to be applied, or *can* be applied, *holus bolus,* to the world, to civic governments, to heterogeneous communities composing the State. For the State is "of the world," not "of the Church." It is not composed simply and solely of citizens who own allegiance to Christ and live by grace. The State, in Brunner's words, is "a God-given order of sinful reality." Mankind, actual, imperfect, sinful humanity, has been placed on this world under the necessity of either living in community and under law or disintegrating and rotting in anarchy. In that sense, according to the New Testament, even the Pagan State is "of God"; not because it is "divine," but because it does serve in some sort to administer the Providential design of an ordered community life. And, as imperfect, sinful humanity is now constituted, all States are under the necessity of maintaining compulsion as a power behind the law. That is indeed what makes a State a State. And few would be found to argue that the time has now come, either in our national or our international life, when States should be abolished or should be transformed into Christian Churches.

According to the New Testament, Christians are bound in conscience to recognise and honour the function of the State with its governmental authority and judicial power of the sword, even as they are bound in conscience to "live above the law" of the State in their own ethical and spiritual life. This dualism may be illustrated by two quotations. "Dare any one of you," says St. Paul to the Corinthian Church, "having a matter against another, go to law" [in the State courts]? "Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?" Precisely; for that is the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount! On the other hand, he writes to the Roman Christians (Moffatt's version): "Every subject must obey the government authorities. . . . A magistrate does not wield the power of the sword for nothing; he is God's servant. . . . You must be obedient, therefore . . . as a matter of conscience, for the same reason as you pay taxes—since magistrates are God's officers." That is to say, because you live by the Christian rule of love it does not mean that you must repudiate the function of the State, with its magisterial authority and power of compulsion. For the world is the world, and the State, with its judicial power of the sword, is a necessary institution for the restraint of evil in the mixed multitudes of mankind. The Sermon on the Mount presupposes the existence of the State, with its laws and compulsions (Matthew v. 25, 40, 41), its "judges," "officers" and "prisons"; how else should it command Christians to exceed the requirements of the law? It nowhere commands Christians to seek to substitute *in the State itself*, as a sub-Christian institution of this world, the purely preceptive code of the Christian community. This would be contrary to the tragic realism of the New Testament. Christians must live by the rule of love: it does not follow that they should seek to deprive others of the protection of the law. Christians must do no murder; it does not follow that they must deprive others of legal protection from murderers. The Church observes only a spiritual discipline; it does not follow that the State must attempt to govern simply by good advice and moral suasion.

This, of course, is not to say that violence or war is right! It is because they are wrong, and because nevertheless violence, rapine, cruelty and lawlessness exist, that States are necessary, and that State law and legal force are necessary, for the restraint of evil-doing. Thus, in fact, the State's use of force may, on the actual sub-Christian level of the world's life, serve the law of love; for when legal force is used by the State to restrain illegal violence, it does serve the interests of love and preserves an ordered community-life in which the nobler apostolate of the spirit may fructify. Thus ancient Rome, in New Testament times, policed the world and kept the peace. It was not peace in the Christian sense; it was not the peace of the Kingdom of Heaven; but it was the only possible peace, and it aided the apostolate of the Christian Gospel. Nor did the greatest of the Christian evangelists refuse the protection of his Roman citizenship nor of the military power (Acts xxii. 25; xxiii. 27). The Apostolic Church never so interpreted its commission as to declare that the State itself should be weaponless. Its conflict with Caesar was on another and very different issue. The Church affirmed the Lordship of Christ and refused to recognise the divinity of Caesar. It did not interpret the Mind and Lordship of Christ to mean that Roman Law and Roman Justice must disarm and rule a turbulent world simply by moral admonition, or by a paternal discipline powerless to enforce its own authority.

Therefore, it may be said that the doctrinaire and absolute Christian pacifist who agitates for immediate, and if necessary one-sided disarmament, because it is "the mind of Christ," has not yet come to terms with his New Testament. To argue that murder is incompatible with the mind of Christ, that war is murder, and that therefore the State should disarm in the presence of all potential murderers, is not a transliteration of the New Testament teaching. It fails to do justice to what we have called the tragic realism of the New Testament and to the fundamental dualism of Church and World. It assumes, what is by no means assumed in the Christian Scriptures, that an ethic and discipline that are possible and imperative in a society of Christian men and women are also possible and imperative in a heterogeneous and mainly sub-Christian aggregation of communities. And it assumes that "the mind of Christ" takes no account of the fundamental distinctions involved in these disparities. These are assumptions it is difficult to maintain.

Finally, it may be said that the Christian mind, no less than other minds, ought to be open to the education of history. And peace, which after all is not a new moral discovery nor an entirely novel experiment, has a history. It is not so long ago, relatively to the life of man on this planet, that we on this island lived in a state of perpetual war. We were split up into a medley of different States—Northumbria, Mercia, Wessex, East Anglia and the rest—each fighting for its own hand. Much the same was true of France and the other countries of Europe. To-day in our own country we are zoned within a permanent territorial peace, and wherever on the broad face of Europe the like is true, such peace has been achieved not through an absolute pacifism or the method of non-resistance, but through the building up of community law with a legal force behind it capable of maintaining it, and it has been developed because in the shadow of that security have grown up common interests, common ideals and a community-conscience. To-day we need to extend this achievement from national territories to whole continents. Our opportunity is to organise peace on the basis of a community of nations owning a common loyalty to international law and justice. This is the logic of history and the hope of civilisation. It is not "Christian" peace, which can be obtained only when the world is Christian; but it is a peace in which war can be outlawed and banished from the earth. To dream of patching on to the polity of modern civilisation, with its commercial rivalries and racial egoisms, one single shred of the Christian ethic—non-resistance—torn from the code of the Christian life, is not to nourish the New Testament hope nor effectively to serve the world.

Therefore, to end upon the reflection with which we began; we must distinguish between *peace* and *ideal* peace, between the pragmatic morality of earthly States and the ethics of the Kingdom of Heaven. This is a dualism which we cannot dissolve by denying it. We cannot rule out the function of force in the world civilisation of to-day because it is ruled out of the ethics of the Church and of the Kingdom of God. To do so would lead, not to the New Jerusalem, but to the jungle. The Christian conscience may refuse military service and accept the consequences. It cannot justifiably require the State, by disarming, to force these consequences upon citizens and subject-peoples who do not approve this course, and whom the State has pledged itself to protect.

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