

by Rev. Charles C. Miltner, C.S.C.

It would be a great satisfaction if these questions of peace and war were so simple that a brief and positive answer could be given to them. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Too many decisions as to facts and laws and human relationships have to be made to allow of that. Principles of morality taken in the abstract are intelligible enough, but the situations to which they are applied are frequently, and none more so than in the present instance, so criss-crossed with circumstances rising out of life in the concrete that little more than a high degree of probability can be had in their application.

The late prohibition issue offers a case in point. Was the prohibition law a just or an unjust law? In the abstract one can say that if the law was morally necessary for the common welfare, it was certainly just and binding in conscience; and if not so necessary, it was unjust and could be conscientiously objected to. Right order of course requires that a law promulgated by public authority be presumed necessary for the common good. If objection is taken to it, the burden of proof is on the objector. Everyone knows how contradictory were the views of even the ablest investigators. Had the law been manifestly unjust, i.e. evidently injurious to social welfare, no one could conscientiously have observed it. But it was neither manifestly just nor unjust. At best, it could be called probably just, and so also probably unjust. Meantime, i.e. until the doubt was resolved by the weight of public opinion against it, individual consciences were perplexed, and much had to be left to the individual's decision on the basis of what facts he could muster.

The question concerning the morality of the conscientious objector to war is not dissimilar. An objection that is "conscientious" is one that is based on sound evidence of an action's incompatibility with the moral law. An objection which springs from emotion alone--as many pacifistic objections do--is not conscientious, for conscience, in ethical terminology, means judgment, that is, an act of reason affirming or denying something on evidence. Moreover, emotions are subjective and variable, and so not capable of being norms of action.

What then is the evidence, what are the certainties, available for the formation of conscience on the question of the lawfulness of participating in a war? In the light of what was said in previous Bulletins, they would seem to be as follows: 1) War is not intrinsically wrong. 2) Apart from a manifestly unjust war, the individual actual soldier, whether serving as a pre-war conscript or volunteer, ordinarily may assume, i.e. is morally justified in assuming, that a war declared by his government is a just war. 3) Those who enlist after the war has begun, must examine the justice of the cause of the war being fought. 4) If this is a world-war, it is only probable (because the judgment of equally weighty authorities differ) that it is unjust, since it is only probably that the evil effects of such a war outweigh any good that can come from it. On this point consciences may be temporarily perplexed. Escape to that certainty sufficient for moral uprightness to act, i.e. either to enlist or to object to enlistment or conscription on conscientious grounds lies in being able either through one's own study (e.g. of points 4,5,6 and 9 mentioned in the last Bulletin of this series) to reach the required certainty for prudent judgment, or in being able to cite at least one genuinely weighty authority in his favor. Here there is no question of the validity of an act, but only of its lawfulness, and therefore, applying the principle of probabalism, one is free either to enlist or to object to enlistment or conscription. 5) In wars, that are localized, unless clearly unjust, it is not clear that a Catholic can offer conscientious objections to it. (See D'Arcy, Christian Morals, Ch. v) Civil laws that are just, bind in conscience. Conscientious objections then are in order when a war is certainly unjust and, as stated under 4, if it is not certainly just. Otherwise, if conscription comes, he'd better go quietly.--- I will appreciate receiving and, in later Bulletins, try to answer, criticism of the views stated in the three Bulletins of this series on war and peace.

PRAYERS: (Deceased) Father of Jim Murphy--9 Masses, arranged by Howard hallmates, to be said in Howard; father of Mr. Donald Easley of the Comptroller's office; Justin Cronin (Winthrop, Mass.); cousin of Pete Sheehan; I spec.intn.
PEACE MEETING WED NITE 7:45 LAW AUDITORIUM*****THIRD ORDER PROFESSION TONIGHT MAIN CH.