

Moral Principles of International Political Action

International Morality by Alfred de Soras, S.J. Hawthorn Books, 125 pp., \$3.50.

by William Joseph Johnson

This 125 page book is volume 106 of *The Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Catholicism*. We are reminded by recent criticism of the venerable *Britannica*, that encyclopedic monographs are difficult to evaluate in terms of achievement with respect to the intended audience. The present work, by a single author who is active in *Pax Christi*, endeavors to represent received Catholic thought and an earlier reviewer has, with this criterion, given it high marks.

Father de Soras' book is a successful attempt to explain the principles of Catholic morality and their practical application in modern international affairs. . . . This work is recommended as an example of how to use an essentialist morality in existential situations. (Clement Burns, O.P. in *The Torch*.)

It may then be referred to those who want a clear and concise statement of Catholic teaching on international morality. The brevity of quotations from papal encyclicals and other reference material, however, limit its usefulness as a source book, and the absence of serious argument in the exposition of the theoretical sections restricts its critical interest. Possibly the best way to indicate the values and the limitations of the book is to offer an illustration of Father de Soras's method, namely, his discussion of the "just war."

International conflict, if not international immorality, is the basic issue for international morality.

Mr. Johnson, who has previously taught moral philosophy, is currently working in the area of morality and politics.

Traditional Catholic international morality has depended upon the concept of the "just war" for its interpretation of international disputes until the exigencies of recent history have rendered its application highly dubitable. Father de Soras catalogs a series of circumstances which make the task of the contemporary moralist different and more difficult in defining the justice of a war.

Technology has made modern war a total affair of populations and places, whose source may be from within or from without, and whose course cannot be controlled. The contemporary moralist is confronted with an impossible task to determine the relevance of the criteria of just war to the highly fluid and expansive character of war. Contemporary historians have confirmed the predicament of the moralist.

War has almost been what the old theologians imagined that it was. In fact, only very rarely can it be seen as the exercise of a judicial or retributive function; belligerents have generally faced one another not as just men and guilty, but as competitors. . . . Essentially, war has never been anything but an effective means of altering the legal relations between nations.

In the view of contemporary historians, therefore, the old theologians' theory of the "just war" has become to a large extent only a theoretical abstraction, very fine, no doubt, in the abstract, but almost always bearing no relation to historical reality.

This is no surprise, except possibly, to some moral theologians.

Father de Soras summarizes the argument against the just war doctrine as follows: the existence of an international organization preempts the right to use force in international conflict; and the imponderables involved in assessing the good and evil consequences of war, including the difficulties

of separating belligerent and non-belligerent, make the application of just war criteria most questionable. In defense of the doctrine are the inability of the international organization to guarantee protection and the denial that the just war doctrine may not be serviceable in future cases. Furthermore, Pius XII has, according to Father de Soras, pronounced three times in favor of a moderate position between these extremes.

The community of nations [Pius XII said on October 3rd, 1953] still has to reckon with criminals with no conscience who do not scruple to launch total war in order to further their own ambitions. That is why, if the rest of the nations of the world want to protect their existence and their most precious possessions, and if they do not want to give free rein to international wrongdoers, they have no choice but to prepare for the day when they might have to defend themselves. *Even today*, this right to hold oneself ready to defend oneself cannot be denied to any nation.

What then, is the status of the doctrine of the just war in contemporary Catholic international morality? We may suppose that the doctrine lacks the full confidence of moral theologians, though they are reluctant to give it up for theoretical and ecclesiastical reasons. The result is an indecisiveness in the one aspect of the international situation in which the moral theologian is supposed to make his contribution, the doctrinal element. I cannot recommend this book as "an example of how to use an essentialist morality in existential situations" because it doesn't do that most complex job. It can be recommended as a review of the issues confronting moral theologians who are attempting to bring moral principles to bear upon international relations.

Toward a Genuine World Security System

Stillman P. Williams. United World Federalists. 65 pp. \$1.00.

Students and scholars who are seeking a guide to sources of information on world law, world order, and world peace will find this annotated bibliography a valuable reference work.

A Christian's Handbook on Communism

John Knox Press. 86 pp. \$1.00.

Communist theory and practice, the principles of Christian faith, and Christian responsibility in the cold-war world, are surveyed in this revised and enlarged fourth edition of a work originally prepared and distributed by the Committee on World Literacy and Christian literature of the National Council of Churches.

Toward a Strategy of Peace

James P. Warburg. Current Affairs Press. 72 pp. \$.75.

Although we cannot "expect that during an election year much progress in foreign policy can be made," the author states, he hopes that his "Election Year Guide for Responsible Citizens" will stimulate discussion of some alternatives to present policies where world developments have made such debate imperative.

The Challenge to Change

Francois Houtart. Sheed and Ward. 212 pp. \$4.50.

Abbé Houtart, sociologist and founder of the Center for Socio-Religious Research at Brussels, examines here the "origin and consequences" of today's "technical civilization" and its effect upon the worldwide mission of the Church.

Independence and Involvement

René de Visme Williamson. Louisiana. 269 pp. \$7.50.

It was Dr. Williamson's plan, in his own words, "to rethink such basic concepts of political science as state, constitution, civil rights, law, liberty, citizenship, and representation in the light of the Christian faith and to develop a more Christian conception of the proper relations between church and state." The author is professor of government at Louisiana State University.

Guidelines for Cold War Victory

American Security Council. 122 pp. \$1.95.

This study is said to be a "non-partisan synthesis of the best liberal, moderate and conservative thinking on how to win the Cold War." Current policies of "containment" and "interdependence," it is asserted, aid Communist expansionism, and these must be replaced by a "victory strategy" on every front.

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