

‘NOT TO RESIST EVIL’

MATTHEW V, 39

THIS passage of our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount has been used to support the doctrine of pacificism. ‘You have heard that it hath been said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’; but I say to you not to resist evil, but if one strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him also the other’ (Matt. v, 38–39). Does our Lord by these words really forbid resistance to evil? Does He even exhort His disciples in all circumstances to submit passively to evil?

We know that Christ’s teaching is constant and does not contradict itself. But He said and said approvingly: ‘This know ye, that, if the good man of the house knew at what hour the thief would come, he would certainly watch and would not suffer his house to be broken open’ (Matt, xxiv, 43). This clearly supposes that the good man of the house might have to use, and would be justified in using, force to protect his house and property.

Then we remember that our Lord came ‘to do and to teach’ (Acts i, 1), not merely to teach but to illustrate His teaching by His own example. ‘I have given you an example’ are words of His recorded in John xiii, 15. We know what was His conduct when unjustly struck: ‘One of the servants standing by gave Jesus a blow, saying, ‘Answerest thou the high-priest so?’ Jesus answered him, ‘If I have spoken evil, give testimony of the evil; but if well, why strikest thou me?’ (John xviii, 22–23). Jesus did not at once offer Himself for another blow, but protested against the wrong done to him. His example was imitated by St Paul on more than one occasion. When the magistrates at Philippi sent permission to him to leave the prison in which he had been confined, he protested strongly: ‘They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men that are Romans, and have cast us into prison. And now do they thrust us out privately? Not so, but let them come and let us out ourselves’ (Acts xvi, 36–37). He protested even more vigorously when the high-priest Ananias ordered him to be struck on the mouth: ‘God shall strike thee, thou whited wall. For, sittest thou to judge me according to the law and contrary to the law commandest me to be struck?’ (Acts xxiii, 2–3). This conduct of our Lord and His Apostle St Paul suffices to show that our Saviour gave no commandment and not even an exhortation on every occasion to turn the other cheek. Neither did He give a command or exhortation never to resist evil. Both He and St Paul resisted the evil on the occasions mentioned as far as it was possible to do so at the time, though it is true that St Paul could have reported to Rome the treatment which had been meted out to him, a privileged Roman citizen. Moreover, St Paul shows that it is the duty of the ruler to resist evil by force: ‘Princes are not a terror to the good work but to the evil . . . He is

God's minister to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, fear, for he beareth not the sword in vain. For he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath upon him that doth evil' (Rom. xiii, 3-4).

Having shown from the authority of Scripture that our Lord gave no command or even exhortation always to refrain from resisting evil, we may go on to say how absurd it is to suppose that He did anything of the kind. The policy of never resisting evil would hand over the State together with all honest and God-fearing citizens to the power of ruffians and hooligans, who would be free to work their will as they please. They are prevented from doing so in every civilized state by the good work of the police. And not even the pacifists are opposed to the protection they receive from this useful and loyal public body. But be it observed, there is no difference in principle between the police forced and the army. Both rely on force, as is indicated by the very name of the police force. The difference between the two lies in this that the degree of force normally required by the police is much less than that required by the army, and the police afford protection against domestic enemies whereas the army defends against enemies from abroad.

What then is the meaning of our Lord's words? The Old Testament law which is summed up in the words 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth', and is commonly referred to as the *Lex Talionis*, sounds rather brutal to us after centuries of the civilizing influence of Christianity. But in its time it was not a brutal law. On the contrary its purpose was to restrain man's unbridled urge for revenge by forbidding the exaction of a greater injury than the malefactor has inflicted. In this the law may be considered comparatively mild, as it is not unreasonable to consider that the guilty party should suffer more than the innocent victim of his brutality. The ancient law, then, quoted by our Saviour had for its purpose to bridle man's spirit of vengeance. He, who had come to perfect the law, carries the war against the spirit of revenge further and exhorts us to overlook an offence whenever it may be done without harm to society or the offender himself. He even exhorts us not only not to avenge ourselves but even in a spirit of humility to welcome an offence. It was in this spirit that St Francis of Assisi, when mocked in the street, would stand still to give his insulter time to speak his mind.

These remarks may be concluded by a quotation from St Augustine: 'What is the meaning of not returning evil for evil if not to have an abhorrence of the lust for revenge? And that is to prefer to forgive injuries rather than to seek vengeance and is simply to forget injuries. . . This is the right line to take when it appears likely to be of advantage to him for whose sake it is taken in order to procure in him correction and harmony.' He then shows by the example of Christ and of St Paul that 'these precepts belong rather to the internal disposition of the heart than to external action; and the purpose is that patience and benevolence

should be fostered in the privacy of our soul, while that course of action is taken publicly which appears suited to benefit those to whom we ought to wish well', *Epistle 138* (Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 33, 529f.).

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A PROTOTYPE OF CHRIST?¹

MONSIEUR DUPONT-SOMMER devotes the greater part of his book *Aperçus préliminaires sur les Manuscrits de la Mer Morte*² to the non-biblical texts discovered in 1947. These texts are the work of a Jewish sect called the New Covenant, to be identified with the 'Sons of Sadoq' or 'Sect of Damascus', known to us through the Damascus Document published in 1910. These sectaries would seem to be Essenes. Our author sets out to reconstruct their history and teaching to show that we have here a foreshadowing of Christianity. This thesis has aroused great attention and controversy in France which has been duly reported in the Press, both religious and secular.³

THE THEORY OF M. DUPONT-SOMMER

The New Covenant had its origin about the year 103 B.C., in the opposition to the Hasmonean princes who usurped the High-Priesthood till then in the exclusive possession of the Aaronic line of Sadoq. Towards the year 63 B.C., the founder of the sect, priest and prophet, entitled the 'Master of Justice', was condemned to death and executed by Aristobulus II, the 'impious priest' supported by the Sadducees. Our author identifies the victim with a certain Onias the Just of whom Josephus speaks (*Antiquities*, xiv, 22-24, ed. Reinach), and who was stoned to death by the Hasmonean troops.

The sect had to take refuge in Damascus. The Kittim (or Romans) were the instruments of God's vengeance on Aristobulus II (as shown

¹ The Editor apologizes for the delay in publishing this article.

² Collection *L'Orient ancien illustré*, no. 4, 125, Paris, Maison-neuve, 1950.

³ *Temps modernes*, January 1951; *le Figaro littéraire*, 24th February 1951; *L'Observateur*, 1st February 1951. And here are some Catholic articles we have been able to consult: J. Bonsirven, *Révolution dans l'histoire des origines chrétiennes*, Etudes, February 1951; pp. 213-18. A. Gelin, *Le Christianisme avant le Christianisme?* in *l'Ami du Clergé*, 1951, pp. 101-03. A. Vincent, *Les manuscrits hébreux de la Mer Morte*, in *La Croix*, 13th, 14th and 15th March 1951; G. Vermes, *Apropos des 'Aperçus . . .'* de M. Dupont-Sommer, in *Cahiers Sioniens*, March 1951, pp. 58-69. G. Lambert and G. Vermes, *Les Manuscrits du Desert de Juda, Les 'Aperçus . . .'* de M. Dupont-Sommer, in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, April 1951, pp. 385-98; R. de Vaux, *Les Manuscrits de la Mer Morte et les origines chrétiennes*, in *La Vie Intellectuelle*, April 1951, pp. 60-70.