

Clarification

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Responds to criticism of their refusal to participate in air raid drills. Says they are rejecting the authority of the State to compel men to war. Says "Self-suffering, non-resistance to evil, is an alternative offered by the pacifist to the government, . . ." Keywords: civil disobedience, pacifism (DDLW #728).

The comments made by some of our Catholic diocesan papers, while trying to be both fair and kindly disposed, show only too often that we have not made ourselves clear as to why we refused to obey the Civil Defense law which made it obligatory for all to take shelter during the annual civic defense drill, which refusal resulted in our going to jail. The Catholic press was rebuked for its silence and seeming indifference to the imprisonment of us twelve pacifists during July and August by another diocesan newspaper – but I felt that we were to blame for not having made our position clear.

Maybe it is impossible to clarify our stand. But we can at least try, again and again. From the Dubuque Witness, a story was reprinted in other papers, asking why, since the drill was to save life rather than take it, did we refuse to take shelter? At the same time it criticized what we had said. To them our explanations were muddled. "Given the premise of pacifism one can understand why people picket the H. bomb testing grounds. It is logical for a pacifist to refuse to pay taxes that would go to buy armaments. But by any premise and in any system of logic the civil disobedience of civil defense is – to use a mild adjective instead of a deservedly severe one – irrelevant."

We thank them for their mildness, whoever wrote and printed this editorial, and we will try again to explain what we did and why.

Albert Camus explains in his book **The Rebel**, how Marx, Hegel and Nietzsche tore down the City of God and built up the State. All revolutions have led to a reinforcement of the power of the State. Truman in one of his speeches pointed out that we are truly now a military state. We have peacetime conscription since 1939 and compulsory registration. Now we have compulsory air raid drills.

We are rejecting this authority of the State, compelling men, and now women and children, to take part in War games. "One might think that a period which in a space of 50 years uproots, enslaves or kills seventy million human beings should be condemned out of hand," writes Camus.

The nature of revolt has changed, he points out. It is no longer slave against master, nor the poor against the rich. It is a metaphysical revolt of man against the conditions of life. We explained that we wished to do penance as Americans for our sins in being the first to drop the atom bomb at Hiroshima. We also explained that such compulsory participation in **War Games** was against our principles as pacifists and conscientious objectors. (Indeed, for a woman, it is her

only opportunity to register her protest since she is not called upon to register for the draft or to go to war). We had thought that these explanations were sufficient. But Charles Butterworth, one of our staff, put it more clearly today. **Self-suffering**, non-resistance to evil, is an alternative offered by the pacifist to the government, setting an example – an example which the government could follow, were it a Christian government, in its relations with other states. If the government followed the same technique of endurance and suffering, and offered no resistance to the threatened bombing by another, it would be the beginning of peace. It would call for a complete disarmament on the part of the government. A wild, Utopian dream? But the Popes have said that we could not expect one morality from the individual and another from Governments. It is more than a question of counsel and precept. It is a question of survival.

Together with this example of non-violent resistance, we do our positive work, offer our positive example of combating at all times, poverty, homelessness, hunger and prejudice, by the practice of the works of mercy.