

Pacifism

By Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, May 1936, 8.

Summary: Outlines The Catholic Worker pacifist position: opposition to class war, imperialist war, and war preparations. Calls for the courage to disarm. "It takes a man of heroic stature to be a pacifist and we urge readers to consider and study pacifism and disarmament in this light." (DDLW #215).

The Catholic Worker is sincerely a *pacifist* paper.

We oppose class war and class hatred, even while we stand opposed to injustice and greed. Our fight is not "with flesh and blood but principalities and powers."

We oppose also imperialist war.

We oppose, moreover, preparedness for war, a preparedness which is going on now on an unprecedented scale and which will undoubtedly lead to war. The Holy Father Pope Pius XI said, in a pastoral letter in 1929:

"And since the unbridled race for armaments is on the one hand the effect of the rivalry among nations and on the other cause of the withdrawal of enormous sums from the public wealth and hence not the smallest of contributors to the current extraordinary crisis. We cannot refrain from renewing on this subject the wise admonitions of our predecessors which thus far have not been heard.

"We exhort you all, Venerable Brethren, that by all the means at your disposal, both by preaching and by the press, you seek to illumine minds and open hearts on this matter, according to the solid dictates of right reason and of the Christian law."

"Why not prepare for peace?"

1. Let us think now what it means to be neutral in fact as well as in name.
2. American bankers must not lend money to nations at war.
3. We must renounce neutral rights at sea.

These three points are made by Herbert Agar in "Land of the Free." Neutrality "in fact," he says, could be practiced on by either saint or cynic.

In fact, it would mean that either we must not pass judgments (upholding a positive stand for peace instead) or else in condemning Italy, also to condemn Ethiopia for resisting. To do this one would indeed have to be either saint or cynic.

The cynic would say, "It is none of my business."

The Saint would say, and perhaps he would be a very wise man in saying it, "The conquered conquers in the end. Christ was overcome and He overcame. There was His ostensible failure on the Cross, yet He rose triumphant and Christianity spread over the world. The Christian thing to do would be not to resist, but when anyone asked for one's coat, to give up one's cloak besides. As Peter Maurin pointed out in the last instance, Australia could be given up to Japanese expansion for instance, if England objected on "noble" grounds for Japan's aggression in Manchuria. But recognizing that the majority of people are not Saints; that they are swift to wrath, to resist aggression (when they are not the aggressors), then we can only insist ceaselessly that even when the people are taking sides mentally they must keep out, they must not participate in "a War to end War."

In the last war we helped to impose an unjust peace, even if we grant that we sincerely thought we were engaged in a noble crusade and were throwing our support on the right side in the conflict. We were influenced to this way of thinking not only by deliberate propaganda, but also by the muddle-headedness of pacifists who were not truly "peace-lovers."

Example Again

If we are calling upon nations to disarm, we must be brave enough and courageous enough to set the example.

Nations can live at home. That is the title of a recent book, and many surveys are being made at present to find out how many nations can do without trade and "live at home."

If we abandoned our neutral rights at sea, we would still have a surplus of food and material goods with which to help feed nations which had been made gaunt by war. We are not suggesting this as a business note but as a reminder of Christian Charity.

Do we believe we help any country by participating in an evil in which they are engaged? We rather help them by maintaining our own peace. It takes a man of heroic stature to be a pacifist and we urge our readers to consider and study pacifism and disarmament in this light. A pacifist who is willing to endure the scorn of the unthinking mob, the ignominy of jail, the pain of stripes and the threat of death, cannot be lightly dismissed as a coward afraid of physical pain.

A pacifist even now must be prepared for the opposition of the next mob who thinks violence is bravery. The pacifist in the next war must be ready for martyrdom.

We call upon youth to prepare!