

Our Stand

Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, June 1940, 1, 4.

Summary: Reasserts their pacifist stand and opposes the use of force in the labor movement, in class struggle, and struggles between countries. Quotes Catholic theologians and Popes. Repeats that God's Word is Love and that using only non-violent means is indeed "the Folly of the Cross." Doubts that the conditions for a "just war" can be met in these times. (DDLW #360).

Many of our readers ask, "What is the stand of the CATHOLIC WORKER in regard to the present war?" They are thinking as they ask the question, of course, of the stand we took during the Spanish civil war. We repeat, that as in the Ethiopian war, the Spanish war, the Japanese and Chinese war, the Russian-Finnish war—so in the present war we stand unalterably opposed to war as a means of saving "Christianity," "civilization," "democracy." We do not believe that they can be saved by these means.

For eight years we have been opposing the use of force—in the labor movement, in the class struggle, as well as in the struggles between countries.

Chesterton in writing about Pacifism (to which he stood opposed) said that there were "the peacemakers who inherited the beatitude, and the peacemongers who profaned the temple by selling doves." We stand at the present time with the Communists, who are also opposing war. It happens at this moment (perhaps the line will change next week as it is wavering now), that the party line so dictates this policy. But we consider that we have inherited the Beatitude and that our duty is clear. The Sermon on the Mount is our Christian manifesto.

Many Catholics oppose the use of the word pacifism. But Father Stratmann, O.P., writes:

"The triumph of Pacifism, the condemnation of war, and the declaration of passive resistance, is just as little opposed to tradition as was the attitude of the Church towards slavery or serfdom, or the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, or the Infallibility of the Pope. Only he who does not realize the wonder of the Church and her life in Christ, can be disturbed that her progress is impeded—not he who believes in Christ and His Church."

In various issues of the CATHOLIC WORKER, we have reaffirmed this stand. We have quoted the Pope on the "fallacy of an armed peace." We have quoted Pope Pius XI, who urged the press and the pulpit to oppose increased armaments (adding sadly, "and up to this time our voice has not been heard"). We quote Bishop Duffy of Buffalo in this issue, who stands out alone in opposing Roosevelt's gigantic preparedness program.

Theologians have laid down conditions for a just war (Monsignor Barry O'Toole is writing on these conditions in the last eight issues), and many modern writers, clerical and lay, hold

that these conditions are impossible of fulfillment in these present times of bombardment of civilians, open cities, the use of poison gas, etc. Fr. Stratmann, in his book, *The Church and War*, speaks of how “many fervent Catholics are awaiting a moral definition about war, for a decisive word as to its immorality. . . That the Church should forbid war belongs to those things of which our Lord says: ‘I have many things to say unto you but you cannot hear them now’.” And how agonizingly true is it when we consider the millions in Europe and China defending with their lives and at untold suffering, believing it the only way their country, their families, their institution and their Faith.

Prayer and Penance

Instead of gearing ourselves in this country for a gigantic production of death-dealing bombers and men trained to kill, we should be producing food, medical supplies, ambulances, doctors and nurses for the works of mercy, to heal and rebuild a shattered world. Already there is famine in China. And we are still curtailing production in agriculture, thinking in terms of “price,” instead of human needs. We do not take care of our own unemployed and hungry millions in city and country, let alone those beyond the seas. There is prejudice in our own country towards Jews, Negroes, Mexicans, Filipinos and others, a sin crying to Heaven for punishment.

“And if we are invaded” is another question asked. We say again that we are opposed to all but the use of non-violent means to resist such an invader.

At a meeting of the CATHOLIC WORKER when Maritain spoke a few weeks ago, the question was asked: What other means are there besides the use of an even greater force than that of the enemy." Mrs. De Bethune, who has a son in Belgium and a daughter with two small babies in Holland, spoke up from where she was sitting: “Prayer and penance,” she said, recalling what to all should have first come to mind. There had been little mention of it made that evening.

During the Franco-Prussian war, Bernadette considered the Prussians the servants of God. When the Maccabees were being slain, one by one, in defense of their faith, they each testified that they were suffering for the sins of their race. How many Christians think of Hitler or Stalin in this way, as “the servant of God.” Do they remember them as temples of the Holy Ghost, creatures made to the image and likeness of God, two human beings for whom Christ dies on the Cross? Are they praying for them—with love and pity?

The Pure Mean of Love

We are urging what is a seeming impossibility—a training to the use of non-violent means of opposing injustice, servitude and a deprivation of the means of holding fast to the Faith. It is again the Folly of the Cross. But how else is the Word of God to be kept alive in the world. That Word is Love, and we are bidden to love God and to love one another. It is the whole law, it is all of life. Nothing else matters. Can we do this best in the midst of such horror as has been going on these past months by killing, or by offering our lives for our brothers?

It is hard to write so in times like these when millions are doing what they consider their duty, what is “good” for them to do. But if the Catholic press does not uphold the better way, the counsels of perfection will be lost to the world.

There are many who consider that we are approaching the end of the world, but what are two thousand years in the history of the world? We are still in the beginnings of Christianity. It is true that we are at the end of an era, and we are probably seeing the death throes of capitalism.

“Just as slavery was only put down after hundreds of years of labor by Christian men, so war will never be done away with, or even limited, but by an army of Peace workers who never cease their labors.”

Preparation Must Take In the Whole Man

It is good to conclude with the words of Father Stratmann:

“No young man should consider himself superior to his companion who obeys the call to arms. Yes, he may be very much his inferior for there is a poor, feeble, unmanly pacifism without any strength or greatness, a compulsory pacifism from bodily weakness, or a sham pacifism from cowardice. Such are contemptible and it gives one food for thought that one of the young men of the other camp, Max Boudy says: ‘I have never yet found a pacifist whose pacifism inspired him with such inner beauty as I have found in several men for whom war, under certain circumstances, was a reasonable, justifiable, if tragic necessity.’ Such remarks must be taken seriously. They impose inner and outer obligations. If it is not to be a bloodless intellectualism or a weak, cowardly quietism, or a luxurious epicureanism—pacifism must lay very great stress on bodily discipline, on culture, on bodily and mental development.

“More than all, he who opposes war must be inwardly clean. His passion for justice must not be tainted by hidden uncleanness. As long as pacifists are in the minority, let them begin with a steady fight against all that is evil in themselves.”