

On War and Peace

Dorothy Day

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In these articles Dorothy explains her Christian pacifist stance. She covers all the wars of the middle decades of the 20th Century.

Chapter 2

Pacifism

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!

Chapter 3

The Use of Force

The Catholic Worker, November 1936, 4.

Summary: Argues that Christians should not take up arms in the Spanish Civil War. Points to Christ, the Apostles, and martyrs whose willingness to suffer led to victory. Opposes the Communist cry to use force. Prays “give us the courage to suffer.” Keywords: pacifism, non-violence. (DDLW #306).

Christ our Lord came and took upon Himself our humanity. He became the Son of Man. He suffered hunger and thirst and hard toil and temptation. All power was His but He wished the free love and service of men. He did not force anyone to believe. St. Paul talks of the liberty of Christ. He did not coerce anyone. He emptied Himself and became a servant. He showed the way to true leadership by coming to minister, not to be ministered unto. He set the example and we are supposed to imitate Him. We are taught that His kingdom was not of this earth. He did not need pomp and circumstance to prove Himself the Son of God.

His were hard sayings, so that even His own followers did not know what he was saying, did not understand Him. It was not until after He died on the cross, it was not until He had suffered utter defeat, it would seem, and they thought their cause was lost entirely; it was not until they had persevered and prayed with all the fervor and desperation of their poor loving hearts, that they were enlightened by the Holy Spirit and knew the truth with a strength that enabled them to suffer defeat and martyrdom in their turn. They knew then that not by force of arms, by the bullet or the ballot, they would conquer. They knew and were ready to suffer defeat—to show that great love which enabled them to lay down their lives for their friends.

And now the whole world is turning to “force” to conquer. Fascist and Communist alike believe that only by the shedding of blood can they achieve victory. Catholics, too, believe that suffering and the shedding of blood “must needs be” as Our Lord said to the disciples at Emmaeus. But their teaching, their hard saying is, that they must be willing to shed every drop of their own blood, and not take the blood of their brothers. They are willing to die for their faith, believing that the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church.

Our Lord said, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” And do not His words apply not only to Him as Head of his Church but to His members? How can the Head

be separated from the members? The Catholic Church cannot be destroyed in Spain or in Mexico. But we do not believe that force of arms can save it. We believe that if Our Lord were alive today he would say as He said to St. Peter, "Put up thy sword."

Christians when they are seeking to defend their faith by arms, by force and violence, are like those who said to our Lord, "Come down from the Cross. If you are the Son of God, save Yourself."

But Christ did not come down from the Cross. He drank to the last drop the agony of His suffering and was not part of the agony the hopelessness, the unbelief of His own disciples?

Christ is being crucified today, every day. Shall we ask Him with the unbelieving world to come down from the cross? Or shall we joyfully, as His brothers, "Complete the sufferings of Christ"?

And are the people to stand by and see their priests killed? That is the question that will be asked. Let them defend them with their lives, but not by taking up the sword.

At a meeting of the opposition last week, when a Spanish delegate of the Loyalists told of unarmed men flinging themselves, not from principle but because they had no arms, into the teeth of the enemy to hold them back, the twenty thousand present cheered as one.

In their small way, the unarmed masses, those "littlest ones" of Christ, have known what it was to lay down their lives for principle, for their fellows. In the history of the world there have been untold numbers who have laid down their lives for our Lord and His Brothers. And now the Communist is teaching that only by the use of force, only by killing our enemies, not by loving them and giving ourselves up to death, giving ourselves up to the Cross, will we conquer.

If two thousand have suffered martyrdom in Spain, is that suffering atoned for by the death of the 90,000 in the Civil War? Would not those martyrs themselves have cried out against more shedding of blood?

Prince of Peace, Christ our King, Christ our Brother, Christ the Son of Man, have mercy on us and give us the courage to suffer. Help us to make ourselves "a spectacle to the world and to angels and to men." Help your priests and people in Spain to share in your suffering, and in seeming defeat, giving up their lives, without doubt there will be those like the centurion, standing at the foot of the cross who will say, "Indeed these men are the sons of God."

Chapter 4

Our Stand

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.”

Chapter 5

Our Country Passes from Undeclared War to Declared War; We Continue Our Christian Pacifist Stand

The Catholic Worker, January 1942, 1,4.

Summary: A month after Pearl Harbor she reaffirms the gospel basis of pacifism. Says she will not be carping in her criticism of our country but refuses to participate in war. Recommends constant prayer, the works of mercy, and mutual forbearance in disagreements. (DDLW #868).

DEAR FELLOW WORKERS IN CHRIST:

Lord God, merciful God, our Father, shall we keep silent, or shall we speak? And if we speak, what shall we say?

I am sitting here in the church on Mott Street writing this in your presence. Out on the streets it is quiet, but you are there too, in the Chinese, in the Italians, these neighbors we love. We love them because they are our brothers, as Christ is our Brother and God our Father.

But we have forgotten so much. We have all forgotten. And how can we know unless you tell us. "For whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." How then are they to call upon Him in whom they have not believed? But how are they to believe Him whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear, if no one preaches? And how are men to preach unless they be sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace." (Romans X)

Seventy-five thousand Catholic Workers go out every month. What shall we print? We can print still what the Holy Father is saying, when he speaks of total war, of mitigating the horrors of war, when he speaks of cities of refuge, of feeding Europe. . . .

We will print the words of Christ who is with us always, even to the end of the world. "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute and

calumniate you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, who makes His sun to rise on the good and the evil, and sends rain on the just and unjust.”

We are at war, a declared war, with Japan, Germany and Italy. But still we can repeat Christ’s words, each day, holding them close in our hearts, each month printing them in the paper. In times past, Europe has been a battlefield. But let us remember St. Francis, who spoke of peace and we will remind our readers of him, too, so they will not forget.

In *The Catholic Worker* we will quote our Pope, our saints, our priests. We will go on printing the articles which remind us today that we are all “called to be saints,” that we are other Christs, reminding us of the priesthood of the laity.

We are still pacifists. Our manifesto is the Sermon on the Mount, which means that we will try to be peacemakers. Speaking for many of our conscientious objectors, we will not participate in armed warfare or in making munitions, or by buying government bonds to prosecute the war, or in urging others to these efforts.

But neither will we be carping in our criticism. We love our country and we love our President. We have been the only country in the world where men of all nations have taken refuge from oppression. We recognize that while in the order of intention we have tried to stand for peace, for love of our brother, in the order of execution we have failed as Americans in living up to our principles.

We will try daily, hourly, to pray for an end to the war, such an end, to quote Father Orchard, “as would manifest to all the world, that it was brought about by divine action, rather than by military might or diplomatic negotiation, which men and nations would then only attribute to their power or sagacity.”

“Despite all calls to prayer,” Father Orchard concludes, “there is at present all too little indication anywhere that the tragedy of humanity and the desperate need of the world have moved the faithful, still less stirred the thoughtless masses, to turn to prayer as the only hope for mankind this dreadful hour.

“We shall never pray until we feel more deeply, and we shall never feel deeply enough until we envisage what is actually happening in the world, and understand what is possible in the will of God; and that means until sufficient numbers realize that we have brought things to a pass which is beyond human power to help or save.

“Those who do feel and see, however inadequately, should not hesitate to begin to pray, or fail to persevere, however dark the prospects remain.” Let them urge others to do likewise; and then, first small groups, and then the Church as a whole, and at last the world, may turn and cry for forgiveness, mercy and deliverance for all.

“Then we may be sure God will answer, and effectually; for the Lord’s hand is not shortened that it cannot save, nor His ear heavy that it cannot hear.” Let us add, that unless we combine this prayer with almsgiving, in giving to the least of God’s children, and fasting in order that we may help feed the hungry, and penance in recognition of our share in the guilt, our prayer may become empty words.

Our works of mercy may take us into the midst of war. As editor of *The Catholic Worker*, I would urge our friends and associates to care for the sick and the wounded, to the growing

of food for the hungry, to the continuance of all our works of mercy in our houses and on our farms. We understand, of course, that there is and that there will be great differences of opinion even among our own groups as to how much collaboration we can have with the government in times like these. There are differences more profound and there will be many continuing to work with us from necessity, or from choice, who do not agree with us as to our position on war, conscientious objection, etc. But we beg that there will be mutual charity and forbearance among us all.

This letter, sent to all our Houses of Hospitality and to all our farms, and being printed in the January issue of the paper, is to state our position in this most difficult time.

Because of our refusal to assist in the prosecution of war and our insistence that our collaboration be one for peace, we may find ourselves in difficulties. But we trust in the generosity and understanding of our government and our friends, to permit us to continue, to use our paper to “preach Christ crucified.”

May the Blessed Mary, Mother of love, of faith, of knowledge and of hope, pray for us.

Chapter 6

Why Do the Members of Christ Tear One Another?

The Catholic Worker, February 1942, 1, 4, 7.

Summary: Protesting against a journalist's assertion that they are sentimentalists in their pacifism and afraid of suffering, she challenges her critics to spend time in the city slums where Catholic Workers regularly battle the realities of disease, poverty, filth, cold, foul smells, etc. Quoting Dostoevsky, she assures her readers that Catholic Workers were not sanctimonious but approached their work with true humility and love. Notes with irony that pacifism, while not popular with society as a whole, was the philosophy which society wished to impose on the poor and disenfranchised victims of America's class war. Rejects the suggestion that they should remain silent. (DDLW #390).

Why Do the Members of Christ Tear One Another? Why Do We Rise Up Against Our Own Body in Such Madness? Have We Forgotten That We Are All Members One of Another?—St. Clement.

Fr. Stratman writes: “We think with Cardinal Faulhaber that Catholic moral theology must in fact begin to speak a new language, and that what the last two Popes have already pronounced in the way of **general** sentences of condemnation on modern war should be translated into the systematic terminology of the schools. The simple preacher and pastor can, however, already begin by making his own words of the reigning Holy Father (Pius XI), ‘murder,’ ‘suicide,’ ‘monstrous crime.’”

“But we are at war,” people say. “This is no time to talk of peace. It is demoralizing to the armed forces to protest, not to cheer them on in their fight for Christianity, for democracy, for civilization. Now that it is under way, it is too late to do anything about it.” One reader writes to protest against our “frail” voices “blatantly” crying out against war. (The word blatant comes from bleat, and we are indeed poor sheep crying out to the Good Shepherd to save us from these horrors.) Another Catholic newspaper says it sympathizes with our sentimentality. This is a charge always leveled against pacifists. We are supposed to be afraid of the suffering, of the hardships of war.

But let those who talk of softness, of sentimentality, come to live with us in cold, unheated

houses in the slums. Let them come to live with the criminal, the unbalanced, the drunken, the degraded, the pervert. (It is not decent poor, it is not the decent sinner who was the recipient of Christ's love.) Let them live with rats, with vermin, bedbugs, roaches, lice (I could describe the several kinds of body lice).

Let their flesh be mortified by cold, by dirt, by vermin; let their eyes be mortified by the sight of bodily excretions, diseased limbs, eyes, noses, mouths.

Let their noses be mortified by the smells of sewage, decay and rotten flesh. Yes, and the smell of the sweat, blood and tears spoken of so blithely by Mr. Churchill, and so widely and bravely quoted by comfortable people.

Let their ears be mortified by harsh and screaming voices, by the constant coming and going of people living herded together with no privacy. (There is no privacy in tenements just as there is none in concentration camps.)

Let their taste be mortified by the constant eating of insufficient food cooked in huge quantities for hundreds of people, the coarser foods, the cheaper foods, so that there will be enough to go around; and the smell of such cooking is often foul.

Then when they have lived with these comrades, with these sights and sounds, let our critics talk of sentimentality.

"Love in practice is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams."

Our Catholic Worker groups are perhaps too hardened to the sufferings in the class war, living as they do in refugee camps, the refugees being as they are victims of the class war we live in always. We live in the midst of this war now these many years. It is a war not recognized by the majority of our comfortable people. They are pacifists themselves when it comes to the class war. They even pretend it is not there.

Many friends have counseled us to treat this world war in the same way. "Don't write about it. Don't mention it. Don't jeopardize the great work you are doing among the poor, among the workers. Just write about constructive things like Houses of Hospitality and Farming Communes." Keep silence with a bleeding heart," one reader, a man, pro-war and therefore not a sentimentalist, writes us.

But we cannot keep silent. We have not kept silence in the face of the monstrous injustice of the class war, or the race war that goes on side by side with this world war (which the Communist used to call the imperialist war.)

Read the letters in this issue of the paper, the letter from the machine shop worker as to the deadening, degrading hours of labor. Read the quotation from the missionary's letter from China. Remember the unarmed steel strikers, the coal miners, shot down on picket lines. Read the letter from our correspondent in Seattle who told of the treatment accorded agricultural workers in the North West. Are these workers supposed to revolt? These are Pearl Harbor incidents! Are they supposed to turn to arms in the class conflict to defend their lives, their homes, their wives and children?

Another Pearl Harbor

Last month a Negro in Missouri was shot and dragged by a mob through the streets behind a car. His wounded body was then soaked in kerosene. The mob of white Americans then set fire to it, and when the poor anguished victim had died, the body was left lying in the street until a city garbage cart trucked it away. Are the Negroes supposed to “Remember Pearl Harbor” and take to arms to avenge this cruel wrong? No, the Negroes, the workers in general, are expected to be “pacifist” in the face of this aggression.

Love Is the Measure

Perhaps we are called sentimental because we speak of love. We say we love our president, our country. We say that we love our enemies, too. “Hell,” Bernanos said, “is not to love any more.”

“Greater love hath no man than this,” Christ said, “that he should lay down his life for his friend.”

“Love is the measure by which we shall be judged,” St. John of the Cross said.

“Love is the fulfilling of the law,” St. John, the beloved disciple said.

Read the last discourse of Jesus to his disciples. Read the letters of St. John in the New Testament. And how can we express this love—by bombers, by blockades?

Here is a clipping from the Herald Tribune, a statement of a soldier describing the use of the bayonet against the Japanese:

“He (his father) should have been with us and seen how good it was. We got into them good and proper, and I can’t say I remember much about it, except that it made me feel pretty good. I reckon that was the way with the rest of the company, by the way my pals were yelling all the time.”

Is this a Christian speaking?

“Love is an exchange of gifts,” St. Ignatius said.

Love is a breaking of bread.

Remember the story of Christ meeting His disciples at Emmaus? All along the road He had discoursed to them, had expounded the scriptures. And then they went into the inn at Emmaus, and sat down to the table together. And He took bread and blessed it and broke it and handed it to them, and they knew Him in the breaking of bread! (St. Luke, 24, 13-35.)

Love is not the starving of whole populations. Love is not the bombardment of open cities. Love is not killing, it is the laying down of one’s life for one’s friend.

Worse Than Others

Hear Fr. Zossima, in the brothers Karamazev:

“Love one another, Fathers,” he said, speaking to his monks. “Love God’s people. Because we have come here and shut ourselves within these walls, we are no holier than those that are outside, but on the contrary, from the very fact of coming here, each of us has confessed to himself that he is worse than others, than all men on earth. . . And the longer the monk lives in his seclusion, the more keenly he must recognize that. Else he would have no reason to come here.

Responsible for All Sins

“When he realizes that he is not only worse than others, but that he is responsible to all men for all and everything, for all human sins, national and individual, only then the aim of our seclusion is attained. For know, dear ones, that every one of us is undoubtedly responsible for all men and everything on earth, not merely through the general sinfulness of creation, but each one personally for all mankind and every individual man. For monks are not a special sort of man, but only what all men ought to be. Only through that knowledge, our heart grows soft with infinite, universal, inexhaustible love. Then every one of you will have the power to win over the whole world by love and to wash away the sins of the world with your tears. . . Each of you keep watch over your heart and confess your sins to yourself unceasingly. . . Hate not the atheists, the teachers of evil, the materialists, and I mean not only the good ones—for there are many good ones among them, especially in our day—hate not even the wickedness. Remember them in your prayers thus: Save, O Lord, all those who have none to pray for them, save too all those who will not pray. And add, it is not in pride that I make this prayer, O Lord, for I am lower than all men. . .”

“Holier Than Thou”

I quote this because that accusation “holier than thou” is also made against us. And we must all admit our guilt, our participation in the social order which has resulted in this monstrous crime of war.

We used to have a poor demented friend who came into the office to see us very often, beating his breast, quoting the penitential psalms in Hebrew, and saying that everything was his fault. Through all he had done and left undone, he had brought about the war, the revolution.

That should be our cry, with every mouthful we eat, “We are starving Europe!” When we look to our comfort in a warm bed, a warm home, we must cry, “My brother, my mother, my child is dying of cold.

“I am lower than all men, because I do not love enough. O God take away my heart of stone and give me a heart of flesh.”

Chapter 7

In Peace Is My Bitterness Most Bitter

The Catholic Worker, January 1967, 1, 2.

Summary: Expresses her anguish over the works of war in Vietnam, which are the opposite of the works of mercy. She is upset with churchmen calling for “total victory,” and notes that the Church is our Mother even though “she is a harlot at times.” Calls on each person to work on changing their hearts and attitude. (DDLW #250).

It is not just Vietnam, it is South Africa, it is Nigeria, the Congo, Indonesia, all of Latin America. It is not just the pictures of all the women and children who have been burnt alive in Vietnam, or the men who have been tortured, and died. It is not just the headless victims of the war in Colombia. It is not just the words of Cardinal Spellman and Archbishop Hannan. It is the fact that whether we like it or not, we are Americans. It is indeed our country, right or wrong, as the Cardinal said in another context. We are warm and fed and secure (aside from occasional muggings and murders amongst us). We are the nation the most powerful, the most armed and we are supplying arms and money to the rest of the world where we are not ourselves fighting. We are eating while there is famine in the world.

Scripture tells us that the picture of judgment presented to us by Jesus is of Dives sitting and feasting with his friends while Lazarus sat hungry at the gate, the dogs, the scavengers of the East, licking his sores. We are the Dives. Woe to the rich! **We** are the rich. The works of mercy are the opposite of the works of war, feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, nursing the sick, visiting the prisoner. But we are destroying crops, setting fire to entire villages and to the people in them. We are not performing the works of mercy but the works of war. We cannot repeat this enough.

When the apostles wanted to call down fire from heaven on the inhospitable Samaritans, the “enemies” of the Jews, Jesus said to them, “You know not of what Spirit you are.” When Peter told our Lord not to accept the way of the Cross and His own death, He said, “Get behind me, Satan. For you are not on the side of God but of men.” But He also had said, “Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church.” Peter denied Jesus three times at that time in history, but after the death on the cross, and the Resurrection and the Descent of the Holy Spirit, Peter faced up to Church and State alike and said, “We must obey God rather than men.” Deliver us, O Lord, from the fear of our enemies, which makes cowards of

us all.

Jesus Present

I can sit in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament and wrestle for that peace in the bitterness of my soul, a bitterness which many Catholics throughout the world feel, and I can find many things in Scripture to console me, to change my heart from hatred to love of enemy. “Our worst enemies are those of our own household,” Jesus said. Picking up the Scriptures at random (as St. Francis used to do) I read about Peter, James and John who went up on the Mount of Transfiguration and saw Jesus talking with Moses and Elias, transfigured before their eyes. (A hint of the life to come, Maritain said.) Jesus transfigured! He who was the despised of men, no beauty in him, spat upon, beaten, dragged to his cruel death on the way to the cross! A man so much like other men that it took the kiss of a Judas to single him out from the others when the soldiers, so closely allied to the priests, came to take him. Reading this story of the Transfiguration, the words stood out, words foolishly babbled, about the first building project of the Church, proposed by Peter. “Lord shall we make here three shelters, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elias?” And the account continues, “For he did not know what to say, he was so terrified.”

Maybe they are terrified, these princes of the church, as we are often terrified at the sight of violence, which is present every now and then in our houses of hospitality, and which is always a threat in the streets of the slums. I have often thought it is a brave thing to do, these Christmas visits of Cardinal Spellman to the American troops all over the world, Europe, Korea, Vietnam. But oh, God what are all these Americans, so-called Christians doing all over the world so far from our own shores?

But what words are those he spoke – going against even the Pope, calling for victory, total victory? Words are as strong and powerful as bombs, as napalm. How much the government counts on those words, pays for those words to exalt our own way of life, to build up fear of the enemy. Deliver us, Lord, from the **fear** of the enemy. That is one of the lines in the psalms, and we are not asking God to deliver us from enemies but from the fear of them. Love casts out fear, but we have to get over the fear in order to get close enough to love them.

There is plenty to do, for each one of us, working on our own hearts, changing our own attitudes, in our own neighborhoods. If the just man falls seven times daily, we each one of us fall more than that in thought, word and deed. Prayer and fasting, taking up our own cross daily and following Him, doing penance, these are the hard words of the Gospel.

As to the Church, where else shall we go, except to the Bride of Christ, one flesh with Christ? Though she is a harlot at times, she is our Mother. We should read the book of Hosea, which is a picture of God’s steadfast love not only for the Jews, His chosen people, but for His Church, of which we are every one of us members or potential members. Since there is no time with God, we are all one, all one body, Chinese, Russians, Vietnamese, and He has commanded us to love another.

“A new commandment I give, that you love others ****as I have loved you,****” not to the defending of your life, but to the laying down of your life.

A hard saying.

“Love is indeed a harsh and dreadful thing” to ask of us, of each one of us, but it is the only answer.

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