

Father Milani R. I. P.

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Mourns the death of Don Lorenzo Milani, an Italian parish priest who was a staunch defender of conscientious objection to war for Italians. (DDLW #854).

Don Lorenzo Milani is dead—in his early forties, of leukemia, and we mourn his passing.

His was a mountain parish, in Barbiana, Italy. When he arrived there, there was only one elementary school of five grades to serve the community, five classes in one schoolroom. He made up his mind to teach the boys of the village who “grew up shy and despised.” For the last twelve years of his life he devoted himself to a group of boys who lived with him. “We receive guests in common. We read together, books, papers, the mail. We write together.”

One day a friend dropped in to bring Don Lorenzo a newspaper clipping, entitled, “A communique by the retired military chaplains of the region of Tuscany,” which asserted that the action of the thirty-one Italian boys in jail because they were conscientious objectors to war, was “foreign to the Christian commandment to love, and an expression of cowardice.” It was afterwards learned that only twenty out of the hundred and twenty members of that organization were present when the communique was read.

Fr. Milani responded with an open letter in reply to the military chaplains which was sent to a thousand people – priests, bishops and political leaders. The letter was published in several Italian papers including a communist paper, and when it appeared Fr. Milani was brought into court together with the editor of the Communist paper. For the first hearing of the case, Fr. Milani wrote a long letter of defense, since he was too sick to appear at the hearing. The letter was printed in the January, 1966 issue of the *Catholic Worker*, and also in full in pamphlet form by the War Resisters League (in which a historical outline of Italy’s wars was included.) Even in its abbreviated form it took twelve columns of that issue, which also included Jim Wilson’s statement on the works of war and the works of mercy, illustrated by Rita Corbin’s five-column picture. We hope that the War Resisters League, 5 Beekman St., New York, still has a supply of this pamphlet which so movingly shows us Don Milani’s great-hearted efforts not only to defend conscientious objectors but also to teach the youth around him how to work for a better world.

We must pray for more humble parish priests, the like of Don Lorenzo Milani.
God grant him a place of refreshment, light and peace.