

IV. Dorothy Day and Pacifism

Dorothy Day was a life-long pacifist who decried war and the justification of war on any terms. In a May 1936 article in *The Catholic Worker*, Day stated the organization's position as "sincerely pacifist" and opposed to "class war and class hatred," as well as "imperialist war" and the "preparedness for war." Day and Catholic Worker supporters protested American involvement in World War II, as well as the Vietnam War and the post-World War II nuclear arms race. Day refused to accept theories of a "Just War" or a "good" war, instead seeing all violence as a contravention of Jesus' call for his followers to be peacemakers.

Questions to Consider:

(Students and teachers may note that many of these questions relate to social justice courses taught in Roman Catholic religious schools.)

1. Do you agree with Day's pacifism? Is it a tenable position – or even a "Christian" one, as Day declared? Is pacifism possible in an age of domestic and international terrorism or genocide, as in Rwanda in the 1990s---or the Holocaust of the 1940s?
2. Do you interpret Jesus' call to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9) as a call to pacifism? Why or why not? What difference does it make how we interpret this Beatitude?
3. Day opposed the centuries-old Roman Catholic teaching on "just war" -- that defensive war can sometimes be morally justified. Do you find the "just war" argument compelling? Why or why not? Briefly review Catholic teaching on "just war" theory in the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church before formulating your answers. A summary of that teaching can be found here: https://www.ewtn.com/expert/answers/just_war_CCC.html.
4. Day and other Catholic Workers were involved in many anti-war and anti-nuclear weapons protests and acts of civil disobedience from the 1940s to the 1970s (in Day's case). Do you consider demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience appropriate? What sort of parameters would you draw around what acts of civil disobedience are or are not appropriate? Do you agree with those Catholics who accused Day and her fellow Workers of undermining war efforts and of not being patriotic (particularly during World War II)?

Related Dorothy Day Quotes

RTE INTERVIEW

3:15 The works of war destroy the food, destroy the homes, and do the very opposite of what the Lord asks. So that makes us, of course, ardent pacifists, and as such we could not possibly be communists or fascists or think in terms of use of force at all.

MOYERS FILM

27:06 I believe in miracles of course. I believe someday there will be mutinies large enough to bring an end to war. Who knows what will happen. ...

THE CHRISTOPHERS PROGRAM

(9:50) there is a tremendous growth in the peace movement in this country... (10:10) and the constant emphasis on the need for voluntary poverty and the works of mercy as a basis of the peace movement. (10:35) these things are taken hold all through the young. The desire is there to grow spiritually and to see how much they can do without to see how much they can change the system by each one playing his part...a great sense of personal responsibility...and the importance of it.