

We Go on Record: the CW Resonse to Hiroshima

Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, September 1945, 1.

Summary: Denounces the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and is outraged at the jubilation in the press. Juxtaposes words and images that contrast the evil of the bomb's destruction with God's creative love. Keywords: pacifism, war (DDLW #554).

Mr, Truman was jubilant. President Truman. True man; what a strange name, come to think of it. We refer to Jesus Christ as true God and true Man. Truman is a true man of his time in that he was jubilant. He was not a son of God, brother of Christ, brother of the Japanese, jubilating as he did. He went from table to table on the cruiser which was bringing him home from the Big Three conference, telling the great news; "jubilant" the newspapers said. Jubilate Deo. We have killed 318,000 Japanese.

That is, we hope we have killed them, the Associated Press, on page one, column one of the Herald Tribune, says. The effect is hoped for, not known. It is to be hoped they are vaporized, our Japanese brothers – scattered, men, women and babies, to the four winds, over the seven seas. Perhaps we will breathe their dust into our nostrils, feel them in the fog of New York on our faces, feel them in the rain on the hills of Easton.

Jubilate Deo. President Truman was jubilant. We have created. We have created destruction. We have created a new element, called Pluto. Nature had nothing to do with it.

Created to Destroy

"A cavern below Columbia was the bomb's cradle," born not that men might live, but that men might be killed. Brought into being in a cavern, and then tried in a desert place, in the midst of tempest and lightning, tried out, and then again on the eve of the Feast of the Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ, on a far off island in the eastern hemisphere, tried out again, this "new weapon which conceivably might wipe out mankind, and perhaps the planet itself."

"Dropped on a town, one bomb would be equivalent to a severe earthquake and would utterly destroy the place. A scientific brain trust has solved the problem of how to confine and release almost unlimited energy. It is impossible yet to measure its effects."

"We have spent two billion on the greatest scientific gamble in history and won," said President Truman jubilantly.

The papers list the scientists (the murderers) who are credited with perfecting this new weapon. One outstanding authority “who earlier had developed a powerful electrical bombardment machine called the cyclotron, was Professor O. E. Lawrence, a Nobel prize winner of the University of California. In the heat of the race to unlock the atom, he built the world’s most powerful atom smashing gun, a machine whose electrical projectiles carried charges equivalent to 25,000,000 volts. But such machines were found in the end to be unnecessary. The atom of Uranium-235 was smashed with surprising ease. Science discovered that not sledgehammer blows, but subtle taps from slow traveling neutrons managed more on a tuning technique were all that were needed to disintegrate the Uranium-235 atom.”

(Remember the tales we used to hear, that one note of a violin, if that note could be discovered, could collapse the Empire State Building. Remember too, that God’s voice was heard not in the great and strong wind, not in the earthquake, not in the fire, but “in the whistling of a gentle air.”)

Scientists, army officers, great universities (Notre Dame included), and captains of industry – all are given credit lines in the press for their work of preparing the bomb – and other bombs, the President assures us, are in production now.

Great Britain controls the supply of uranium ore, in Canada and Rhodesia. We are making the bombs. This new great force will be used for good, the scientists assured us. And then they wiped out a city of 318,000. This was good. The President was jubilant.

Today’s paper with its columns of description of the new era, the atomic era, which this colossal slaughter of the innocents has ushered in, is filled with stories covering every conceivable phase of the new discovery. Pictures of the towns and the industrial plants where the parts are made are spread across the pages. In the forefront of the town of Oak Ridge, Tennessee is a chapel, a large comfortable-looking chapel benignly settled beside the plant. And the scientists making the first tests in the desert prayed, one newspaper account said.

God, Our Creator

Yes, God is still in the picture. God is not mocked. Today, the day of this so great news, God made a madman dance and talk, who had not spoken for twenty years. God sent a typhoon to damage the carrier Hornet. God permitted a fog to obscure vision and a bomber crashed into the Empire State Building. God permits these things. We have to remember it. We are held in God’s hands, all of us, and President Truman too, and these scientists who have created death, but will use it for good. He, God, holds our life and our happiness, our sanity and our health; our lives are in His hands. He is our Creator. Creator.

And as I write, Pigsie, who works in Secaucus, New Jersey, feeding hogs, and cleaning out the excrement of the hogs, who comes in once a month to find beauty and surcease and glamour and glory in the drink of the Bowery, trying to drive the hell and the smell out of his nostrils and his life, sleeps on our doorstep, in this best and most advanced and progressive of all possible worlds. And as I write, our cat, Rainbow, slinks by with a shrill rat in her jaws, out of the kitchen closet here at Mott Street. Here in this greatest of cities which covered the

cavern where this stupendous discovery was made, which institutes an era of unbelievable richness and power and glory for man

Everyone says, "I wonder what the Pope thinks of it?" How everyone turns to the Vatican for judgement, even though they do not seem to listen to the voice there! But our Lord Himself has already pronounced judgement on the atomic bomb. When James and John (John the beloved) wished to call down fire from heaven on their enemies, Jesus said:

"You know not of what spirit you are. The Son of Man came not to destroy souls but to save." He said also, "What you do unto the least of these my brethren, you do unto me."

The following text appeared as an introduction to this article when it was reprinted in the July-August 1975 issue of *The Catholic Worker*.

This August marks the 30th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima. On that day a new age of fear was unveiled. Each year the U.S. budget provides more and more money for arms, B-1 bombers, Trident submarines. Towns across the country are prospective sites for nuclear power plants. It is for each of us to resist, as far as we can, this movement of power, and fear, and destruction. One very immediate way is war tax resistance, highlighted in this issue of CW.

In September, 1945, Dorothy Day wrote the following position statement on the atom bomb. We reprint it now as a reminder of our responsibility to preserve life. Eds. Note.