

Peace Witness in World War II

Gordon C. Zahn

Wilfred Owen, one of the poetic voices stilled by World War I, chose as his subject "war and the pity of war," finding his poetry in the pity. It can be argued that even then the pity had gone out of war. It is certain that the events of subsequent wars—large and small, local as well as worldwide—have been so pitiless in character and conduct that little or no "poetry" remains.

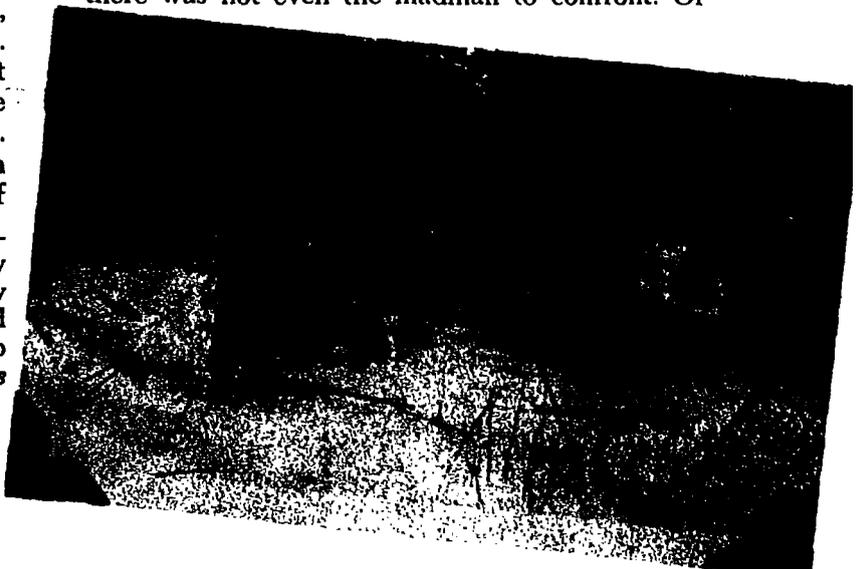
We are three-quarters through a century of unprecedented violence, with the grim prospect of even greater evils lying ahead. In his *Twentieth Century Book of the Dead* Gil Eliot offers what he considers a reasonable estimate of 100,000,000 "man-made" deaths since 1900. That figure alone is enough to give us pause. But it is not merely the number of deaths that should concern us here, but who is killed and the manner in which the victims are killed. In World War I, of the ten million or so victims, 90 per cent were soldiers. The carnage of World War II was so great and so indiscriminate that an equally simple estimate is almost impossible to contrive. (I have seen estimates ranging up to eighty million.) Nevertheless, Eliot's statistical appendix makes it clear that, whatever the total may have been, civilian deaths were at least at a par with military deaths and exceeded them by a wide margin if peripheral casualties—the attempted extermination of Europe's Jews, to mention only one—are included in the body count.

"Total war" and the technology which makes it possible depersonalize victim and perpetrator alike and make the killing process itself a random affair. The heroism and the sense of personal tragedy which contributed so much to the old poetic illusions of

glory have been supplanted by the cold efficiency of an automated slaughterhouse. It was still possible, in the period between the two great wars, for a generation to be profoundly moved by Remarque's poetic image of a soldier killed as he reaches for the beauty of a fluttering butterfly; one looks in vain for equally poetic symbols for the sacrifices of the Second World War. Of all the literature I have read only one such scene is fixed in my mind, and it is found in a relatively little known novel (*The End of It*, by Mitchell Goodman). The passage describes the impact upon the sensibilities of an artillery officer who witnesses the effects of a bombardment he has called in by mistake and is unable to stop:

The shells kept coming, carefully seeded in rows over this part of the valley, dispersed in a formal pattern. Up and down and back again. Inside the network of explosive fire the hot steel fragments cut like razors. The men were not swallowed up all at once as in the fairy tales. They were not snuffed out. They did not quietly disappear. One by one, rooted to the ground by concussion they were chopped to pieces, as if with an axe. But not the quick precise axe of the headsman, or the butcher. The axe of a madman. Except that here there was not even the madman to confront. Or

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any man—only this chaos of blast and flame and the screaming chunks of steel. Out of nowhere. The men did not die as men. . . .

Goodman's character finds escape in a mental breakdown; Goodman himself went on to share indictment with Dr. Spock and the Boston peace conspirators. The episode illustrates that randomness and depersonalization of modern total war: Once set in motion the engines of destruction ten miles away took on a will of their own so that there was no way for the men who turned them loose to stop them or even to try to discriminate between enemy combatant and innocent bystander in that valley of death. With Owen, again, we might ask: "Was it for this the clay grew tall?"

What is presented here in the guise of a fictional accident is an accurate reflection of the calculated and planned nature of the war itself. The terror bombing of civilian centers—whether we think in terms of the German "blitz" or the more extensive and much more effective Allied operations designed to "take out" entire cities on a set schedule—remains the most authentic symbol of the conflict, and Winston Churchill's frank admission that there were "no lengths in violence to which we will not go" serves as its most fitting words of consecration.

We have become so transfixed by the special threat posed by atomic war that we forget that the technologies and strategies of what we like to call "conventional" war had already broken all bounds of decency and humanity. The shadow burned into the pavement at Hiroshima had many counterparts in the bodies rendered down into miniature in the "massacres by bombing" at Hamburg and Dresden. One of the few possible "benefits" from the horrors of Vietnam is the reminder it provided of this forgotten truth in the fifty-square-mile blankets of napalm described by Frank Harvey in his book *Airwar Vietnam*.

No more pity, hence no more poetry. Newly matured techniques of social science can reduce even courage to a simple matter of conditioning.

None of this comes as a surprise to those of us committed to the pacifist point of view. One of the arguments used by those who opposed involvement in World War II was expressed in the warnings that violence, once unleashed, has a dynamic all its own and would only result in an escalation of the horrors already witnessed; that ultimately, win or lose, we would find ourselves forced to sacrifice much of that "way of life" we claimed to be defending; that, finally, if the struggle went on long enough, we could even become what we had set out to fight—as, in many ways, we have. The opponents of the war were not blind to the atrocities committed by the designated enemy (though, to be honest, we sometimes did explain too many of them

as products of exaggeration and propaganda); rather, they knew atrocities of all kinds were to be expected, to be taken for granted as an inescapable part of the greater atrocity of war itself.

One did not have to be a secret admirer of Hitler or callously indifferent to the massacres attributed to the Nazis and their Asian allies to recognize their echo in the urgings of our own political and military leaders. "Kill Japs; Kill Japs; Kill More Japs" proclaimed the billboard greeting ships as they entered Tulagi Bay—an incitement apparently aimed at fighting men, but one which found broader application in an American admiral's insistence that "There should be instilled in the heart of every man, woman, and child in America a deep undying hatred of the Japanese." Official sentiments concerning the foe in Europe (witness the so-called Morgenthau Plan proposals) were scarcely less vindictive.

It would be gratifying to report that such sentiments were repudiated by spokesmen for our religious and moral communities, but the sad fact is they were not. That too is the way it is in a large-scale total war: If truth is the first casualty, the other moral virtues are not far behind. All the "softer" values are suspended and repressed "for the duration." There is a price to pay for this, unfortunately. Once the duration has run its course, the effects of the suspension are likely to linger on, and the lost values (if they are remembered or restored at all) are not likely to regain their former influence over public and private behavior. We are paying that price today. If respect for human life has diminished over the past few decades—and I suggest one need go no further than the daily newspaper to see how much it has—much of the explanation can be traced to the wholesale slaughter of human beings and the general approval of that slaughter to which we have become accustomed.

Never was slaughter greater or the approval more general than in the Second World War. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, coupled with the character of the Fascist threat in Europe, made that a truly popular war, if popularity is measured by the virtual unanimity of support for the war effort. The opposition was reduced literally overnight to a feeble remnant of what had been a powerful political force before. Thus in a poll taken December 10, 1941, only 2 per cent of the respondents voiced disapproval of the declaration of war; and any fluctuations of opinion in the years that followed were minor in scope and significance.

That pre-Pearl Harbor peace movement was a confused and confusing amalgam of often incompatible political, philosophical, and religious viewpoints. The largest and most visible segment was the isolationist and nationalist America First Committee. This much-criticized organization drew its mass support from ordinary people who were simply opposed

to getting involved in any kind of war; but it cannot be denied that it exploited other factors as well: anti-British sentiment and suspicions, the conservatives' dedicated hatred of Franklin Roosevelt and all his works; and yes, though probably not to the extent its critics claimed, a certain measure of native American fascism along with a touch of anti-Semitism here and there. This made little difference in the long run. Almost before the first echo of exploding bombs died down, the Committee disbanded in a burst of superpatriotic rhetoric.

A similar fate was to overtake most of the lesser political components of the enthusiastic peace crusade of the thirties. The Communist element had flipped and flopped according to whether the Soviet Union was endangered by, or temporarily allied with, the Fascist powers. By the time of Pearl Harbor, of course, the "mother" country had been invaded by Nazi forces, and Communist opposition to American involvement in the war had long since vanished completely. The socialists had a harder time of it. They, like other of the political elements, had already split on the choice between pacifist neutrality and collective security as the best means of avoiding war. Now they split again, with a very small fragment maintaining a pacifist commitment. As for those political fringe groups which had opposed intervention because they admired or supported the Fascists' ideals and program, they quite prudently disappeared from the scene or were soon hounded into hiding.

Things fared only slightly better for the philosophical and religious components of the prewar peace movement. Those whose commitment to humanitarian values had led them to reject the intentional and organized destruction of human life or had won them to the vision of universal brotherhood and enduring peace were not easily converted into all-out support for history's most total war. But if they were not susceptible to ultranationalistic appeals and objectives, there were other temptations that drastically reduced their ranks. The Nazi persecution of the Jews, the Axis powers' flagrant disregard for the limits imposed by international law and treaty obligations, and, pervading it all, the inescapably antihumanitarian and antidemocratic thrust of the Fascist political system and ideology—all of these brought widespread defections, reluctant perhaps, but defections nonetheless. Where one prominent author was moved to complain that the America Firsters had "appropriated the war" and described their newspapers as "the most chauvinistic" and their speeches "the most flamboyant," the tone of these latter defections is best illustrated by the statement of one former pacifist, who said, "I cannot oppose this war effort," but added, "I confess my soul is sick within me because my feeling against the war . . . and my honest intellectual conclusions are at variance."

Not surprisingly, it was the religious element



which provided the irreducible core of the peace movement such as it was during the war years. This is not to say that Pearl Harbor did not wreak its havoc here as well. In the "glory days" between the wars even the most conservative churchmen and religious communities were renouncing war and all its works; now the majority hastened to join the national consensus. The Methodist Church, for instance, which less than two years before had declared it would never "officially support, endorse, or participate in war," now assured the world through its bishops that "the Methodists of America will loyally support our President and our nation." Other denominations were not far behind.

According to a British sociologist, "Pacifism is either the faith of a minority religion or the faith of a minority within a majority religion." Most of the peace activity that continued must be credited to the three traditional peace churches—the Society of Friends, the Mennonites, and the Brethren. The efforts of these minority religions were supplemented by individuals and groups from the larger denominations, but the latter represented deviant minorities acting without approval—often in the face of outright disapproval—of their parent communions and leaders. My own history makes me most familiar, for example, with the contribution of the Catholic Worker group and its wartime "front," the Association of Catholic Conscientious Objectors; but there were similar centers of dissent operating within the major Protestant communities as well. Making full allowance for such contributions, however, it must be repeated that without the leadership and the funds provided by the three historic peace churches, there would have been little, probably no, organized peace activity during the war. I do not mean to ignore contributions of such organizations as the nonsectarian Fellowship of Reconciliation, the War Resisters' League, and similar peace groups. I would argue, however, that a large part of their continuing activity and support was also linked to the efforts of the peace churches, most particularly the Friends.

What was the nature of that peace activity and its extent? The first thing to be said is that it is too much to speak of it as a peace movement, at least in the early stages of the war. Then the peace activity was devoted almost exclusively to maintaining a presence, existing as a dissident minority in an almost totally hostile social environment. Later there would be public statements protesting the policy of saturation bombing or calling for a negotiated peace in place of the officially declared war objective of unconditional surrender. Even then, however, the major effort was to defend and to provide for the conscientious objectors in Civilian Public Service (and, to a lesser extent, those in prison as well) and, looking ahead, to prepare as best they could to meet the postwar needs of relief and reconstruction and plan for a world order which would never again know the horrors of war.

The most obvious tangible expression of a peace witness was refusal of military service, in whole or in part, by draft-eligible men. These conscientious objectors fell into three categories. Men who refused to bear arms but were willing to accept noncombat service in the military were classified I-A-O; Selective Service estimated their number at 25,000, though their records were not kept separate from men inducted for regular military service. Men who refused even noncombatant military service were classified IV-E and assigned to Civilian Public Service (CPS) camps and special units to perform "work of national importance under civilian direction." Finally, the absolutist objectors and those who were denied C.O. classifications by their local boards ended up in prison for violating the conscription laws. The CPS men numbered approximately twelve thousand and the prisoners slightly more than six thousand. Modest totals, perhaps, compared with the ten million or so who accepted induction, but still figures not to be ignored. Conscientious objectors, it is appropriate to note, comprised one-sixth of the federal prison population at the time.

Civilian Public Service deserves special attention, if only because it produced the highest level of official coordination among the active opponents of the war. When peacetime conscription was introduced in 1940, the three peace churches volunteered to undertake responsibility for an alternative service program for conscientious objectors. In this they were partly motivated by the grim history of the hardships and abuse suffered by men who refused service in the First World War. Another strong motivation was a desire to "go the second mile," affording the objectors the opportunity of contributing to the welfare of the nation and society as a service of love instead of devoting their efforts to the destructiveness of war. Unfortunately, the willingness of the religious agencies to finance and administer the work camps committed the men assigned to them to work without compensation. Indeed, the men assigned to

camp were expected to contribute \$35 a month to cover the costs of food and keep!

It was probably a bad deal from the beginning. Once war came and the twelve-month term of service stretched out to an indefinite "duration plus six months," the peace churches and other religious groups comprising the National Service Board for Religious Objectors found themselves locked into the highly ambiguous position of opposing the war while helping to administer its conscription program. Before too long the strains produced by this unhappy situation led to serious morale problems and increasingly bitter divisions between the older generation of recognized and established pacifist leadership and the men who, for better or worse, represented the active peace witness of the Second World War.

As a former CPS man, I might find it ego-gratifying to be able to expose a pattern of physical punishment and mistreatment endured as the price for being true to my conscience, but such (happily or unhappily) was not the case. There *were* physical hardships, especially in the Catholic camp in which I served, a camp financed out of the never too abundant resources of the Catholic Worker. Our camp was obliged to operate on a food budget of a few cents per day per man, with the result that men in other CPS camps skipped meals to help feed the "starving" Catholics.

A more widespread problem faced men with family responsibilities, who found it all but impossible to continue a witness which required them to serve month after month without pay or the family allotments available to men drafted into the other services. Medical and dental care were minimal where not lacking altogether—not a small matter when one considers that local draft boards made it a practice to overlook physical or mental incapacities in C.O. registrants that would have kept them out of the other services. True, the same physical standards were *supposed* to apply, but this did not carry much weight with local board members who found the CPS camp option an easy solution to a potential community problem. A Selective Service official was to testify before Congress in 1945: "We got a great many people who were disabled. We had to meet the train with an ambulance and haul them to the hospital to keep them from dying before we could get them back home again." (Which is a bit of exaggeration on Colonel Kosch's part—especially that bit about rushing them to a hospital; more likely they would have been left to die in camp.)

No one will deny that the "price" we had to pay was far less than the sacrifices required of conscientious objectors in most other countries. We did not have to face the headsman's axe as did Franz Jaegerstaetter and the others who refused to serve in Hitler's armies, or suffer the other severe penalties

imposed by countries on both sides of the great conflict. In most respects, our physical hardships could not compare with those borne by those of our peers who accepted military service—at least that minority of servicemen who were called into active combat.

Which is not to say, however, that our lot was the cinch described by Arthur “Bugs” Baer, a prominent columnist of the time. In a particularly outrageous column in August, 1942, Baer portrayed the idyllic state of the World War I C.O. in his “nice clean cell,” resting on his bunk, eating “three squares a day,” and reading the best books while Baer and others “slogged through dust, sand and mud”; the World War II C.O., as he saw it, had all this and radio too, “to while away the overstuffed hours.”

It was not like that at all. The hardships suffered by the men of CPS were real, even though they may have been more psychological than physical. Baer’s column is itself a classic example of the antagonistic attitude one encountered in the media, in the minds of the general public, even in Congress itself. Indeed, whatever the original reason for denying pay for service performed may have been, once war came all proposals to correct the situation were quashed on the grounds that they would only intensify animosity toward the C.O.s themselves. Of course, Selective Service saw an additional virtue in the arrangement in that it served as a device for deterring men from seeking classification as conscientious objectors in the first place. In General Hershey’s words, “the fact that they get no pay, and that they have to be financed” kept the number down. For the objector, the lack of money was bad enough; the experience of increasingly total dependence on others, plus the realization that this was a kind of hidden punishment, was a continuing source of severe psychological strain.

Where no effort was spared to demonstrate the nation’s support of the man in uniform, the conscientious objector could be certain only of public disapproval. The burden of knowing one had set himself apart from the national celebration produced an overpowering sense of alienation not always easy to manage. It did not help that the service he was required to perform made a farce of the high-sounding “work of national importance” standard. College graduates assigned to clearing the New Hampshire woods of fallen timber could contemplate the reports of schools closed for lack of teachers; drainage ditches were being dug by men who were neither physically nor temperamentally suited to the task, again while the much-needed social services they could have performed went begging for lack of qualified personnel. Even later, when appeals for more meaningful work opportunities did result in the assignment of some men to mental hospital or training school units, most of them were limited to unskilled ward duties and the like. Another Selective Service official, a Lieutenant Colonel McLean, put

it bluntly: “There is no obligation to provide an assignee with work for which he has been particularly prepared, wishes to do, or regards as socially significant.” It is safe to say that the major share of the eight million man-days of unpaid labor performed under Civilian Public Service could claim no “national importance” at all.

But the work program, with all its failings, did serve a most important purpose for Selective Service at least. Along with the deterrence value already noted and the intense frustration arising from the obvious unimportance of most of the work, the CPS camps guaranteed the *isolation* of the men who had chosen to make their witness for peace in the midst of war. This conformed with the theory of General Hershey, who stated before a Congressional committee that the conscientious objector “is best handled if no one hears of him.” Hershey could justify his “theory” from two perspectives: As a military man he was opposed to conscientious objection in principle; as a government bureaucrat he recognized the public relations benefits of keeping potential troublemakers out of sight and out of mind as much as possible.

The sense of isolation took its psychological toll too, and it was compounded by another objectionable feature, which may have become evident to the reader by now: the extent to which the men who had rejected military service found their lives and their witness managed and controlled by military officers—Colonel Kosch, Lieutenant Colonel McLean, and, above everyone else, the Director of Selective Service, General Hershey himself. Theoretically, of course, the civilian direction the C.O.s were promised was provided by the camp officials (employees of the Forestry Service, Soil Conservation Commission, etc.). Nevertheless, there was no hiding the fact from the men in the program that the ultimate and direct authority for determining policy or setting disciplinary rules rested with the Selective Service officials. Technically this, too, could be considered a “civilian” agency, but so precious a distinction was easily blurred and lost when all the important documents and decisions affecting CPS were issued by officers identified by military rank.

Increasingly the men in camp, resentful of this domination by the military, extended their resentment to the pacifist leaders, accusing them and the National Service Board for Religious Objectors of temporizing and collaborating at the expense of their rights and interests. This feeling that they and their cause were being “betrayed” added to the already pervasive sense of alienation; and in a way this was the sharpest alienation of all. Men who had accepted as inevitable social disapproval for their stand (including in far too many cases the disapproval of family, friends, and coreligionists) now found them-

selves in open opposition to men they had long respected as spokesmen for the ideas and ideals which brought them to camp in the first place. One of the more moving expressions of this unhappy situation can be found in the statement issued by a group of men who "walked out" of CPS in June, 1943:

We see no gain ahead of us, if we follow our present course within CPS. We can but widen the underlying gap between us and the administration, which is still willing to yield ground on many, but by no means all, points of principle, in the hope that they can so maintain respect and harmony between them and government and in the long run win advances better by avoiding conflict. Below the outward physical unity of our work, and even below the confused level of plans and policies, actions and penalties, we have felt a rending of the world of personality values. Bitterness and misunderstanding are growing on all sides and blocking reconciliation. Our ideologies clash in a sterile civil warfare.

Fortunately, except for such individual acts of protest, the split never reached the point of full-scale open rebellion. It did produce considerable and continued controversy within some of the camps; certainly it was a dominant theme of concern in our short-lived Catholic camp and was widespread, though probably never dominant, in the Quaker camps. On the other hand (at least this was the general impression), the Mennonite camps, representing the largest segment of the conscientious objector population, remained relatively untouched by such disruptive ideas.

From my perspective as a member of the Catholic minority in CPS, the program was a failure to the extent that it weakened and divided the peace forces. At the same time, however, one must acknowledge that from the standpoint of those who created and maintained the program it was at least a partial success in that it represented a great advance over the treatment accorded conscientious objectors in World War I. It is unlikely that the religious pacifist leadership would repeat the experiment. On the other hand, it should be no surprise that Selective Service officials have already indicated interest in reviving the camp program in the event the draft is ever reactivated.

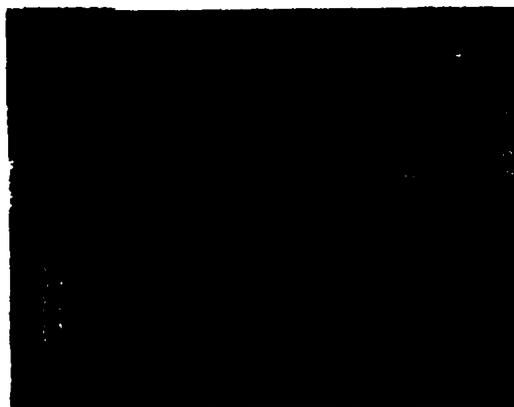
One cannot say, however, that the CPS contribution to the wartime peace witness accomplished nothing. Even at the level of work output, the record was not a total loss; there must have been some usable ditches dug, dams built, forests planted. Patients in mental hospitals and training schools received better care than they would otherwise have had, perhaps better care than they had ever known before. The "guinea pig" experiments must have contributed something to medi-

cal knowledge, and the other "glamor" projects (smoke-jumpers, weather observation research, and the like) had obvious value too.

Nor did these contributions stop at war's end. Once demobilized, many of the former C.O.s who had worked in hospital units organized to agitate for improved institutional standards and professionalization of services to a class of patients that had all too often and all too easily been ignored before the C.O.s appeared on the scene. Others stayed on with the various religious agencies or joined private organizations like CARE to engage in the type of relief work a vindictive Congress had denied them (overruling even the Selective Service officials who had already approved the project!).

In several important respects the most dramatic practical contributions were those made by conscientious objectors interned in prisons who introduced the practice of organized nonviolent resistance in the prison setting. Men in Danbury, Lewisburg, Ashland—names that have a very contemporary ring—managed to engineer a series of strikes, fasts, and other protests varied enough in technique and objective to impress the Director of Federal Prisons with their "uncanny ingenuity at thinking up new issues to raise in connection with such matters as correspondence rules, visiting privileges and race segregation." Through their efforts and their successes they gave the prisoners and the keepers alike a preview of the ideologically motivated activism that has become commonplace in recent years. One superintendent of a Western prison has been quoted as remarking to a pacifist striker: "You C.O.s may be glad when the war is over, but not half as much as I who yearn for the good old days of simple murderers and bank robbers for prisoners."

In the final analysis the one truly major contribution made by the American peace witness of World War II has to be the fact of the witness itself. True, it did not have much impact at the time. Twenty thousand or so objectors, carefully isolated in camps or prison, with a larger but scarcely more visible body of religious pacifists providing them with limited support and encouragement, scarcely bears comparison with millions of men going off to war with a nation united behind them. No public demonstra-



tions were mounted to disrupt the wartime consensus; certainly no mass rallies could have been brought to Washington to protest the great crusade against the totalitarians. Still, that merely made it all the more important to show that there were some, however few, who believed, as the wartime policy statement of the American Friends Service Committee put it:

There must be, amidst all the confusions of the hour, a tried and undisturbed remnant of persons who will not become purveyors of coercion and violence, who are ready to stand alone, if it is necessary, for the way of peace and love among men.

If anything, the smaller the remnant, the more important it was that they made themselves heard even if there was no one who wished to listen. To most Americans such ideas are visionary, impractical, unrealistic. It is true that pacifists had no ready answer as to how Hitler could be stopped then and there. All they could offer was their stubborn belief that violence and bloodshed were not the only way and certainly not a preferred—perhaps not even a permissible—way for the Christian. Hidden away in our CPS camps we did not know that men were being beheaded in Berlin for sharing that conviction, but had we known, I am sure their tragic fate would have given us new strength and confidence in the rightness of our common cause.

I have recently had occasion to renew contact with twenty-six of my former associates at Camp Simon, a third of those ever assigned to that Catholic camp in the New Hampshire woods. None of them, not even the few who left the camp to enter military service, regrets his decision to enter CPS. To one it was “one of those circumstances where one chooses the only thing to be done.” Another, confessing that his decision now seems “more a combination of callowness and luck than of perception and virtue,” remains convinced that “what I did was right and that the war was wrong.” Even one “mixed” response, which admits that the burden of “new evidence” has lessened “the certainties on which my first decision was made,” ends with an affirmation: “Just the same, my conviction about the nature of war and its consequences is still strong enough to say nay again.”

One really cannot conclude a discussion of the peace witness of World War II without addressing the obvious question: To what extent did it contribute to, or prepare the way for, the much more extensive and dramatic opposition to the war in Vietnam? Unfortunately this is almost impossible to answer. There *are* obvious links, of course. Much of the organizational leadership, logistical support, and funding of the mass protests came from the same sources that supported the men in CPS; moreover, some of the more prominent spokes-

men for the resistance movement had served in that program or in prison. In the special case of the Catholic opposition to the war, I, for one, do not believe it could have emerged with such force had it not been for the Camp Simon “experiment” and its direct challenge to previously unquestioned patterns of theological teachings based on the “presumption” that the war aims and policies of “legitimate authority” were almost automatically binding upon the individual. Conscientious objection was simply not recognized as an option for Catholics before our time.

On the other hand, profound differences weakened the links between the two. Since there was never any real chance that Vietnam could be as “popular” a war as World War II, much opposition would have developed, as it did, without any reference at all to the earlier witness for peace. More crucial a difference, perhaps, the Vietnam resistance was far more political in nature and nowhere near as religious in origin or motivation, a factor I regard with some misgivings for the future of a viable, effective, and lasting peace movement. Peace rallies dominated by a forest of raised clenched fists and a rhetoric that proclaims a readiness to use any means to achieve presumably peaceful ends have little in common with the essential tone of the peace witness of World War II. The decline we have witnessed already suggests it may have even less promise for the future.

This, of course, reflects a personal bias. I suspect it is really too early to attempt any definitive judgment as to how strong and deep the common links may be or how broad and irreconcilable the differences. For now it is enough to say that the peace witness of World War II deserves to be judged by its own record in terms of what it intended to accomplish. One such judgment is found in the concluding sentence of Laurence Wittner’s *Rebels Against War*: “In a society grown accustomed to the mass extermination of human life, it led the assault on the forces of death.”

Actually, that may claim too much by putting the contribution in too active a mode. A more modest appraisal might be drawn in the context of a parallel drawn by a young German writer in 1961 between the atrocities at Auschwitz and Hiroshima. Both, he argued, revealed the same frightening capacity for justifying the mass destruction of living human beings. Any mind capable of formulating such justifications, he declared, had to be corrupt—and he went on to add: “This corruption is general.”

So it is—and so it was during World War II, which produced the twin horrors that had led him to his pessimistic conclusion. Objectively speaking, the accomplishments of the American peace witness during those tragic days may have been of considerably less than heroic measure, but at least this much can be said: If it did nothing else, it prevented that “general” corruption of mind from becoming unanimous, and that ought to count for something.