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Guilty nuclear resisters write essays for judge

by Megan Fincher

NCR Today

Eight nuclear protesters found guilty of trespassing onto the Kansas City Plant were given an unusual sentence Dec. 13 (see story here). Instead of jail or community service, Presiding Judge Ardie Bland sentenced the defendants with homework. They were required to write one-page, single-spaced answers to six questions Bland posed on the spot.

The following are a sampling of the defendants' answers to the six questions, which their lawyer delivered to Bland Jan. 23. The full text for each defendant can be accessed here.

1. If North Korea, China or one of the Middle Eastern countries dropped a nuclear bomb on a U.S. city tomorrow, would that change your opinion about nuclear weapons?

?Could the dead be brought back to life? What restitution is there for losing a child, a sister or brother, a parent, relative or friend? There is nothing that can replace a human being. I know?I lost my mother when I was 16 and the oldest of four. I also lost my younger son when he was 18. We know from experience that the death of a loved one causes grief beyond measure and it takes a long time before those left behind can gather their soul and breathe without feeling their heart aflame in the fires of hell. In fact, one never recovers completely. Instead, we learn to transform our suffering and loss into doing good in the world to bring about the Kin-dom. Bringing about the Kin-dom, not Kingdom. Jesus in the Gospels is not about hierarchy or relationships of a domination/subordination paradigm. Rather, he calls us to friendship ? which implies equality between each man and each woman. Everyone is invited to the table.? ?? Janice Sevre-Duszynska, Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests, of Lexington, Ky.

?I would certainly be angry. I can only hope and pray that in time and with the help of others around me that my anger would be a source of energy for good. I know this can happen. I have been influenced in this hope by hearing the children of survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They speak quietly but as if they are on a mission, sent by their ancestors to plead with the world to never let this happen again.? ? Sister of Charity Cele Breen of Kansas City, Mo.

2. If Germany or Japan had used nuclear weapons first in World War II, do you think that would have changed your opinion?

?I was 14 when Pearl Harbor was bombed and was taught and propagandized that the Japanese were cunning and vicious. Though I didn't know what an atom bomb was, I rejoiced at age 17 that the U.S. had dropped the bomb and defeated Japan. I feel that if Germany or Japan had dropped ?the bomb? first, I would have been filled with that time?s spirit of revenge and retaliation and would have wanted to see the weapon used against any foe. However, over the years, the life and teachings of Jesus to put away the sword, to forgive and to love one another, have hopefully taken root in me so that I will not return violence for violence. The followers of Jesus? teaching, such as Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Oscar Romero, Dorothy Day and others, have taught me by their lives that the Kingdom of Peace is possible and that if nonviolence is not accepted, then the global village is headed towards nonexistence. ? The house I live in now is called Jean?s House of Peace, part of the Tacoma Catholic Worker. It belonged to a Japanese lady, Jean Shimoishi, who lived here 55 years. She had lived in the internment camp for the Japanese in World War II in Minidako, Idaho, for three years, from 1942 to 1945, with her husband, her parents, and her young daughter. They lived in cabins, two families to a cabin, with no insulation, only bare boards. They used outside latrines and had a separate building for a dining hall. The concentration camps were surrounded by barbed wire, chain-link fences, and towers with armed guards. Many persons there had been born in the U.S. and were therefore U.S. citizens. Jean died in 1999, the most gentle, loving person.? ?? Jesuit Fr. William J. ?Bix? Bichsel of Tacoma, Wa.

?In 2008, Henry [Stoeber] and I hosted four persons from the Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation, including a translator and

Hibakusha (A-bomb survivor) Yoshiko Kajimoto. A tiny, delightful woman, Kajimoto-san told of the deaths and destruction in Hiroshima in 1945, when she was 14. She and a classmate had been at work in a suburban factory 1 ½ miles from the epicenter of the attack. They crawled out from under the wreckage and then carried classmates out of the building and away from the fires around them. Kajimoto-san saw people walking away from the city holding their arms out in front of themselves because flesh was hanging from their arms, melted. Carrying her classmates to safety, she inadvertently stepped on parts of dead bodies. "I don't want anyone else ever to see what we had to see," she told groups at Rockhurst University and the Community of Christ Temple in Independence [Mo.]. Later, during a videoconference between Avila University and Kajimoto-san in Hiroshima, a student asked her, "Do you feel revenge toward this country?" She replied, "Oh, no!" She said she just wanted an end to nuclear weapons. Kajimoto-san, in working for peace, "I'm trying to walk in your footsteps!" ?? Jane Stoeber of Overland Park, Kan.

3. What would you say to those who say, "If we [the U.S.] do not have the big stick, that is, if we get rid of our nuclear weapons, and other countries develop nuclear weapons, then we do not have the opportunity to fight back"?

"Since I have a sarcastic streak, I would probably say, "O yes, this tactic is working so well for us! We spend roughly half our resources on war-related expenses, can't afford to fund our education system adequately, aren't investing in maintaining infrastructure we have, let alone improvements, and make new enemies every day, contributing to this spiral of insecurity and dependence on violence." I believe that the United States, if it wishes to live up to its own myth of moral superiority, needs to forsake the path of nuclear escalation that will bankrupt us, and eventually any nation that follows this blind and arrogant path. To use the weapons is to cause irreparable harm to the ecosystem we depend upon for life. To build and possess them exposes us to the risk of accident or sabotage every day. This is a reckless policy! Believing that it provides security is delusional. It hasn't prevented us from becoming involved in inconclusive, expensive and unpopular wars, or protected us from terrorism. The idea of American "exceptionalism" that it is noble for us to do what we would label "rogue" behavior from a smaller nation is ridiculous. We are as much blinded by our self-interest as any other individual or group, and should be as willing to submit to International Court and UN mandates, as we wish others to be. The attitude of "No one can stop us from doing what we want" is no guarantee of wisdom! Instead we use international organizations as a tool when it suits us, and ignore them if they wish to call our behavior to account." ? Catholic Worker Elizabeth "Betsy" Keenan of Maloy, Iowa

4. You defendants say you are Christians and one is a Buddhist. Fr. [Carl] Kabat says that you should disobey ungodly laws. How do you respond to someone who believes there is no God? Who is to say what God believes, for example, when Christians used God to justify slavery and the Crusades?

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?I am the one Buddhist among the defendants and will have a difficult time answering this question seeing as, according to Buddhist belief, the matter of an existence of a God is up to the Buddhist. It doesn't really matter if a God exists, according to Tibetan Buddhism, but that persons live their lives according to what they believe is good (the Dharma and Karma) and in an enlightened place to escape reincarnation. ? These are points that we could mostly agree on: humanity and compassion are overall good; destruction and hate are overall bad. It should be these points alone that should answer this question for us. One does not need to believe in a God to know that nuclear war brings nothing but destruction to our Planet and the living organisms on it, just as one does not need to believe that nuclear war is detrimental in the most tremendous ways to believe in a God.? ?? Lauren Logan of Independence, Mo.

?For someone who does not agree with the existence of God, we can understand their denial of God because with the state of the world, there has been so much slaughter, so much of it caused by Christians. The 20th century was the bloodiest century in history?and Christians stand at the head of the ranks of the violent. We give people reason to believe there is no God. We need to follow Jesus: lay down your arms, forgive one another, love one another. In the Lord's Prayer, we say give us this day our daily bread. We mean nobody should be without bread. We say forgive us our trespasses. We mean nobody should be without forgiveness. Concerning the old doctrine of the just war theory, A.J. Muste said, ?The just war theory is *just war*.? We are called to the nonviolence of Jesus, where we do not return evil for evil, blow for blow, insult for insult. We should not wonder how people would say there is no God. The thing that makes a difference in people's lives is if they see somebody acting out of love. We need the evidence of those following in the footsteps of Jesus. All religious traditions have the sense that we are all connected one to another and honor that. Unless we actively live that out, people will not be led to believe in God.? ?? Jesuit Fr. William J. ?Bix? Bichsel of Tacoma, Wa.

5. How do you respond to those who have a God different from you when they argue that their religion is to crush others into dust?

?A question such as this one seems to suggest that there are actually major world religions that call for the systematic elimination of people who worship a God different from theirs. Most scholars who have comparatively studied the religious documents of all the world's major religions seem to refute this. Comparing the world views and written holy documents of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Baha'i reveals an inherent common thread of a preference for peace and toleration for humans of diverse faiths. I personally do not accept the view that any of those major religions promote the idea of annihilating those who worship a God different from their own.? ?? Georgia Walker of Kansas City, Mo.

6. Who determines what "God's law" is, given the history of the USA and the world?

?Very often, it is simple to determine what the Holy One/God wants. Sometimes, such is not true. It requires prudent and deliberate judgment, and sometimes that judgment is wrong. It is then when one asks pardon and attempts to make up for the wrong. It is not easy, but in many instances, it is clear what should be done. The hard part is doing it.? ? Oblate Fr. Carl Kabat of St. Louis, Mo.

?For me, and for most people, I imagine, we come to accept and absorb God's Law not only through the printed Scripture and charismatic religious leaders - but especially through HOW these ?divine teachings about law? are lived out by those same people and others. In my lifetime thus far, being influenced by certain holy and courageous people throughout history, I find reason to believe that certain laws of Love, Justice, Compassion and Truth come from the heart of our Creator. For the moment I point out a few among contemporaries who have profound impact on me (along with Jesus and St. Francis of Assisi), especially regarding God's Law:

- 1) Matahma Gandhi
 - 2) Martin Luther King, Jr.
 - 3) Pope Francis
 - 4) The three ?Transform Now Ploughshares? activists?
- ? Franciscan Fr. Jerome Zawada of Burlington, Wis.

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