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‘PEACE ON EARTH—PEACE IN VIETNAM’: 
THE CATHOLIC PEACE FELLOWSHIP AND ANTIWAR 
WITNESS, 1964–1976

By Penelope Adams Moon

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Gentlemen,

I am not in possession of my registration card or of a classification card. I burned 
them years ago. 
Please send me duplicates. 
Thank you. 

Thomas C. Cornell

When Tom Cornell informed his draft board that he lacked a draft card, 
he did so not out of a sense of civic duty or because he desired to follow the 
letter of the law. Cornell wrote draft officials for new documents because he 
found himself in a dilemma in October 1965. A leader in the Catholic Peace 
Fellowship, a fledgling protest organization with roots in the Catholic Worker 
Movement, Cornell spent the Fall of 1965 organizing fellow American Catholic 
activists to burn their draft cards at an upcoming public rally. All of a sudden, 
though, he faced the embarrassing scenario of showing up at the rally without 
any documents to burn. So Cornell wrote his draft board in hopes that they 
might kindly send him “duplicates,” and in the process enable him to destroy 
them in a ceremony he believed would convey his religious and civic objections 
to the draft and the war in Vietnam.

Tom Cornell was one of a small, but growing number of American Catholics 
opposed to the developing war in Vietnam in the mid-1960s. The organization 
with which he affiliated, the Catholic Peace Fellowship (CPF), emerged as an 
important locus of Catholic antiwar activism in 1964 and remained central to 
Catholic protest of the Vietnam War and to post-Vietnam antiwar activities 
throughout the 1970s. This essay explores the CPF in the 1960s and 1970s 
and the impact that CPF members (CPFers) and Catholic protesters in general 
had on relationships within the American Catholic Church and on the larger 
antiwar movement. While the CPF never enjoyed mainstream status among 
American Catholics—indeed, most Catholics maintained their support for the 
Vietnam War for most of the decade—the activities of the CPF constituted one 
way American Catholics responded to the Vietnam War and reflected deeper 
changes in their attitudes and relationships in the American Catholic Church.2

The rise of the CPF corresponded to significant changes in the Roman Catho-
lic Church, and CPF protest in many ways stands as a measure of how Catholic lay 
people interpreted and adapted to those changes. The activism of the laypeople 
that dominated the CPF reflected a new confidence among some American 
Catholics following the Second Vatican Council, which met in Rome between 
1962 and 1965. As this essay will demonstrate, the Council conferred greater 
authority on Catholic laypeople, an authority CPFers interpreted as a mandate 
to work for social justice in the public arena. Despite a tradition of deferring to
'legitimate authority', Catholic lay people during the Vietnam War took the lead on issues of social justice, exercising a degree of religious authority not seen in American Catholic life prior to the Vietnam War. The confidence with which CPFers publicly opposed the war and employed theological arguments against American military intervention in Vietnam marked them as players on a public stage once reserved for Catholic clergymen. By the 1980s, the American Catholic clergy would once again dominate that stage, but for a brief time in the 1960s and early 1970s, Catholic laypeople took the lead on issues of social justice and peace. While the CPF did not single-handedly transform the dynamics within the American Catholic Church, Catholic protest of the Vietnam War contributed to greater dialogue between the American Catholic laity and the American Catholic hierarchy and helped amplify the voices of Catholic laypeople in public debates about both political and religious issues.

Beyond its impact on American Catholic life, the CPF also warrants historical examination for the ways it can help broaden understanding of the movement against the Vietnam War. The CPF was a religiously-grounded organization with members that ranged from college students to nuns. Contrary to much movement scholarship, which spotlights student-led groups, protest against the Vietnam War was neither a generational phenomenon nor a wholly political undertaking. Heeding Andrew Hunt's call for movement scholarship that moves beyond the scope of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), this essay points to ways that Catholic antiwar protest during the 1960s contributed to the larger antiwar movement. Although it by no means received the notoriety of other antiwar organizations, CPFers injected an important religious component into the antiwar coalition—a religious component that in many ways placed the organization well ahead of and at times in conflict with the American Catholic hierarchy. The CPF offered the public a uniquely Catholic critique of the Vietnam War which influenced the direction of antiwar protest during the Vietnam War and contributed to, for better or for worse, movement diversity.

While the CPF remains a relatively minor organization in the pantheon of sixties protest groups, its history can help broaden understanding both of American Catholicism and the complex era known as the "sixties" and perhaps contribute to a more diverse vision of the era's protest. In many ways Catholic historiography and sixties historiography suffer from similar shortcomings. Both Catholic and sixties scholars tend to discuss their topics in simultaneously overly-narrow and overly-broad dimensions. Both focus disproportionately on leadership which, in the case of Catholic historiography, results in clerical history, and, in the case of sixties historiography, privileges elite political intellectuals and radicals, as well as the visibly eccentric. Yet at the same time, both sets of scholars assume broad definitions of their constituencies. Few Catholic historians delve into how lay Catholics interpreted their own Catholic identity and too many sixties scholars define 'activist' simply as someone who "questioned the status quo." Yet, as this essay demonstrates, antiwar protest was incredibly diverse and that diversity was not simply a product of the issues one chose to engage, but was the result of one's identity. Narrowly focusing on leaders ignores the ways that protesting impacted the lives of people who didn't wield the bullhorns, and focusing generally on the "movement" or "activists" ignores the fundamental differences in the value systems of the people that protested.
This essay highlights movement diversity by examining the ways that protesting informed and was informed by religious belief. Catholics who protested the war did so in ways and for reasons that often differed from their non-Catholic counterparts. Examining CPF protest suggests how central religion was to some antiwar protest. At the same time, Catholics seriously disagreed among themselves not just about the moral legitimacy of the war, but about what it truly meant to be Catholic. Catholic antiwar protest served as a stage for conducting this religious debate. Most importantly, however, the history of the CPF illuminates the ways that the experience of protesting transformed Catholic lay people and their church. The CPF was an organization comprised primarily of lay people, and their activities during the Vietnam War changed not only the organization's members, but traditional relationships between parishioners and pastors, as well as lay people and bishops. While historians wrangle over the efficacy of antiwar protest, in the end its impact transcended the war and the 1960s. Catholic protest is less important for its impact on the war than for its impact on the American Catholic Church.

The Catholic Peace Fellowship and the Lay Apostolate

Founded in 1964 by Catholics close to the Catholic Worker Movement and to Thomas Merton, the well-known Cistercian monk, the CPF quickly became the epicenter around which American Catholics could protest the Vietnam War. Jim Forest, a Catholic convert, conscientious objector, and editor of the Catholic Worker, was at the heart of the CPF. Although committed to Dorothy Day's Catholic Worker Movement, Forest believed that the peace movement needed a new organization, one that could focus full-time on antiwar protest and simultaneously speak specifically to Catholics while working in cooperation with non-Catholic organizations to bring an end to war. With the help of John Heidbrink, Director of Church Relations for the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), a largely Protestant peace organization with a fifty-year history of peace work, Forest helped establish the Catholic Peace Fellowship even before the conflict in Vietnam came to dominate the nightly news. The organization defined itself as an "education service conducted by Catholic members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation," and pursued a protest agenda aimed at raising awareness about Church teaching, uncovering the Church's long tradition of nonviolence, and highlighting the moral implications of the Vietnam War. Although they received no official support from the institutional Catholic Church, CPFers considered themselves upstanding Catholics and conceived of their organization not as one in opposition to the established Church, but as a place where ordinary Catholics could work for peace within a Catholic context.

In its initial year, the CPF leadership fulfilled the organization's peace mission in relatively predictable and traditional ways, spending a good deal of time building membership, securing funding, and publicizing its existence. Because it emerged during a time of momentous change in the Catholic Church, the CPF also focused much of its early effort on lobbying the fathers of the Second Vatican Council, who met in Rome between 1962 and 1965 to discuss the role of the Church in the modern world. Along with two other Catholic organizations, the American PAX Association and the Catholic Worker, the CPF worked primarily
behind the scenes at the Council to secure a condemnation of the nuclear arms race and a statement legitimizing the right of Catholics to conscientiously object to war—important gains for lay Catholics who opposed the Vietnam War and faced the draft.7 The CPF's efforts were so successful that the American-born bishop of Stockholm, Sweden, John Taylor, presented CPFer Tom Cornell with the specially-cast commemorative bronze medallion given to each bishop who participated in the Council. Bishop Taylor gave the medallion to Cornell as a gesture of thanks, with “the understanding that the C[atholic] W[orker] and CPF had played [the] role of invisible Council Father” at the Second Vatican Council.8

CPFers complemented their lobbying in Rome by arranging speaking tours for sympathetic Council bishops and by holding conferences in parishes and on college campuses around the United States to discuss Vatican documents important to peacemaking. They paid particular attention to Pope John XXIII’s encyclical letter, *Pacem in Terris* (1963), and to drafts of the Council’s *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (1965), two documents CPFers felt called Catholics to work for peace.9 In February 1966, for example, CPFers participated in “A Week for Peace” at Saint Vincent’s College in Latrobe, Pennsylvania. The week included campus-wide discussions on peace, Church teaching, and the war in Vietnam, as well as sermons and prayer sessions aimed at “elucidat[ing] a prospective premised on biblical thought, papal encyclicals and the recent Vatican Council schema of The Church in the Modern World.” Committed pacifists from the CPF shared the dais with Catholic members of the American Legion who supported the Vietnam War to discuss how Vatican II might impact Catholic attitudes toward government policy.10 Like the teach-ins that cropped up around the country in 1965, CPFers spent the early months of the Vietnam War talking about, debating, and assessing the meaning of the conflict.

By building a mailing list, sponsoring speaking tours, and publishing informational brochures, CPFers hoped to introduce American Catholics to the theory of nonviolence and to what they considered to be a lost tradition of peacemaking in the Catholic Church. Their actions faithfully followed the advice of Thomas Merton, their most famous sponsor, who believed that what American Catholics most desperately needed was information. By educating Catholics about the Church’s position on war—popularly known as the just war doctrine—and publicizing contemporary peacemaking documents, Merton hoped American Catholics might develop political attitudes better informed by the teachings of the Church and the example of Christ.11

Merton and his fellow CPFers interpreted this type of antiwar war work in religious terms, making their work fundamentally different from secular antiwar organizations. “I am personally convinced that this is the big chance for CPF to really do something important for the Church,” Merton wrote to Jim Forest. “Your more colorless and less dramatic job is apostolic: simply reaching a lot of people and helping them to change their minds.” Merton advised Forest to focus the fledgling organization on “massive and undramatic apostolic work to clarify the Church’s teaching and get it thoroughly known.”12 Like the apostles in the New Testament, Merton hoped CPFers would concentrate their efforts on teaching their co-religionists about the tenets of their faith and the implications...
those beliefs had on their religious and civic identities, particularly regarding issues of war.

While the dissemination of information hardly constitutes radical activity for voluntary organizations—indeed its parent organization, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, focused heavily on publications—the fact that the CPF was an organization dominated and run by lay Catholics made its apostolic activities significant and suggests important changes in the role of the laity in American Catholic life. While papal encyclicals such as Pacem in Terris and Vatican II documents like the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World offered antiwar Catholics theological grounds for opposition to war, they also provided lay Catholics with justification for religiously-grounded social activism. In Pacem in Terris, Pope John XXIII called on Catholics to work for justice. “We exhort Our sons,” the pope pleaded, “to take an active part in public life, and to work together for the benefit of the whole human race.” “Daily is borne in on us the need to make the reality of social life conform better to the requirements of justice,” John XXIII reminded Catholics, and that need at times required cooperation with non-Catholics or non-Christians to “achiev[e] objects which are good in themselves, or conducive to good.”

Continuing in the spirit of Pacem in Terris, the fathers of the Second Vatican Council summoned “all Christians” to “do in love what the truth requires, and to join with all true peacemakers in pleading for peace and bringing it about.” In their Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, the Council fathers specifically connected the liturgy and the sacraments to social justice and called on the laity to use charity and social work to witness to Christ. “The sacraments,” the Council reminded the laity, “especially the most holy Eucharist, communicate and nourish that charity which is the soul of the entire apostolate.” Through the sacraments, particularly the Sacrament of the Eucharist which the liturgy confers, lay Catholics are sanctified by the Holy Spirit to build up the Mystical Body of Christ and work as “good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”

While the main objective of the lay apostolate was the salvation of souls, the Council recognized that evangelization could take many forms and that living the Beatitudes and working for social justice were two ways to order the temporal world according to the Gospel. “Everywhere and in all things [the lay apostolate] must seek the justice of God’s kingdom,” the Council fathers proclaimed.

In Pacem in Terris, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, and the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, the lay Catholics of the CPF heard a call for action. Rather than defer to the leadership of priests and bishops, lay CPFers assumed the responsibility for peace was theirs. As Tom Cornell recalls, the CPF was “a lay organization in that laity took initiative and carried projects through. . . . We always assumed that Christian responsibility in the secular realm is the charge of the laity, specifically, not the clergy.” As a result, the CPF was largely a lay organization. While many of their early efforts highlighted speeches by clergymen or focused on securing institutional change by lobbying bishops, it was nevertheless lay Catholics organizing the events, petitioning Church officials, and debating and discussing Church documents on college campuses. And while the media, conditioned to identify the Catholic Church through its clerics, focused almost exclusively on the antiwar activities of priests and nuns, it was Catholic lay people that filled the ranks of the growing
Catholic Left. Antiwar lay Catholics, not the mainstream clergy, felt compelled to teach other Catholics about their Church's position on war and its history of nonviolence. However unradical their activities may have seemed in 1964 and early 1965, particularly in comparison to the increasingly radical protest in the civil rights and New Left movements, the apostolic activities and social justice leadership offered by the predominantly lay membership of the CPF marked a shift in traditional relationships within the Catholic Church, which tended to reserve public responses to political and religious matters for the clergy. The CPF assumed a leadership role in Catholic opposition to the Vietnam War and provided an outlet through which lay Catholics could exercise their newfound authority in the wake of the Second Vatican Council.17

The lay activism of the Catholic Peace Fellowship was but just one example of an increase in lay Catholic activism in the 1960s. Although founded in 1943, another lay Catholic organization, the Christian Family Movement, “prospered mightily in the early 1960s” and “greeted the opening of the Second Vatican Council with enormous enthusiasm,” according to the movement's biographer, Jeffery Burns. Burns writes that to the lay Catholics of the Christian Family Movement (CFM), “the council seemed to be a clear vindication of the CFM's vision and method,” which placed considerable emphasis on improving race relations. American PAX, also a predominantly lay organization, focused on nuclear disarmament in the early 1960s and contributed to Catholic protest of the Vietnam War. Like the CFM and American PAX, the CPF embodied a new spirit of lay activism, one nurtured by the Second Vatican Council. Yet unlike the CFM and American PAX, the CPF was not closely linked to the clergy. The CFM organized into “action groups,” each of which consisted of a chaplain and American PAX, although not formally tied to the Church, pursued a peace-making agenda that emphasized institutional change through cooperation with Church officials. While it shared in the lay activism embraced by the CFM and American PAX, the CPF operated more independently of the clergy and the diocese. Nevertheless, taken as a whole, the three groups point to an energized Catholic laity in the 1960s and a shift away from the staunchly hierarchical relationships that characterized nineteenth-century American Catholic life.

Catholic Support for War and a Tactical Changes in Catholic Antiwar Activism

Despite positive feedback from the teach in-like campus events the CPF sponsored in the early months of the war, CPFers felt increasingly ineffective and frustrated by continued Catholic support for the war, particularly among the clergy, and by the Catholic peace movement's reliance on apostolic witness in the mid-1960s. Akin to the experiences of other antiwar organizations, the educational tactics the CPF employed at the beginning of the war seemed to have little effect on either the war itself or on American Catholic attitudes toward the war. While early CPF initiatives were crucial to developing the organization for the future and strengthening the growing network of peace-minded Catholics, polls continued to show strong Catholic support for the American military presence in Vietnam.18

Support for the war from rank-and-file Catholics stemmed from a host of
sources, not the least of which was the Church’s long opposition to communism. Following in the tradition of a number of popes, the American Catholic leadership backed intervention in Vietnam on the grounds that communism represented a distinct threat to the Church and to freedom in general. As Roy Palmer Domenico writes: “Vatican anti-communism and concern over the plight of Catholics under Marxist regimes combined to force positions that begged concurrence with Washingtonian [anti-communist] vigilance.”19 Although in the mid-1960s both John XXIII and Paul VI helped reorient the Vatican toward “more purely pacifist and less partisan” positions regarding communism and the Cold War, the American bishops as a whole maintained their support for American intervention until very late in the war.20

Along with virulent anticommunism, CPFers also faced a reticence among American Catholics to challenge authority. America’s long history of anti-Catholic sentiment encouraged Catholics to use patriotism as a defense mechanism and to seek consensus as a means of achieving respectability in American society.21 Cardinal James Gibbons summed up the link between religious and civic duty during World War II when he reminded Catholics that the “[p]rimary duty of a citizen is loyalty to country. . . . It is exhibited by an absolute and unreserved obedience to his country’s call.”22 Gibbons’ remarks reflected a desire to protect the flock from anti-Catholic bigotry and to shepherd it into middle-class respectability, as well as a tradition of deferring to what St. Augustine called, “legitimate authority”. In criticizing the Vietnam War, Catholic activists not only challenged American Catholic tradition, but risked resuscitating an anti-Catholicism nurtured by Protestant America since the eighteenth century. While protesters of all faiths weathered accusations of ‘unAmericanism,’ when a Catholic spoke out against the war his or her unAmericanism stemmed not simply from their opposition to the government’s foreign policymaking, but from the character of their faith, which many non-Catholics still believed to be totalitarian and anti-democratic.23 And although David O’Brien rightly argues that the exodus of Catholics out of the working class and into the middle class in the 1950s eroded much of Protestant America’s anti-Catholicism, many Catholics could still recall a time when their religious identities marked them as outsiders in a nation that proudly touted “100% Americanism.”24 If anything, their newfound middle-class status meant Catholics had considerably more to lose if they rocked the boat.

Part of the general unwillingness among Catholics to oppose the diplomatic agenda of the American government lay in the development of what O’Brien has labeled, “republican Catholicism.” As a minority people, Catholics in the Early Republic sought to minimize religious persecution and discrimination by defending republicanism and avoiding political controversy. Because the Church in the United States developed at a time when the religious and civic spheres were becoming increasingly distinct, Catholics developed a public demeanor that kept religious matters and practices private, cloaked under a veneer of patriotism and democratic values. Such a position constrained American Catholics, especially the clergy, from adopting an openly critical stance on political matters. O’Brien argues that the increased nativism of the post-Civil War years, largely a reaction to the thousands of Catholic immigrants streaming into the United States at the time, brought about a revival of republican Catholicism in the early twentieth
century. Thus, unlike many Protestant sects, which developed specifically to challenge the status quo—Quakers, Methodists, Baptists—lay Catholics in the United States had virtually no tradition of confronting the establishment and in fact envisioned support of the establishment as a means of protection.  

The American Church’s emphasis on respecting authority, rooted in tradition and fostered by fears of anti-Catholicism, left it with little patience for those who challenged its own carefully constructed program of Americanism. Bishops since John Carroll, the first American bishop, understood that there was strength in order and security in conformity, and even ordinary Catholics respected the chain of command that rose from the parish priest to the pope. Thus, during the 1960s when a number of clerics chose to challenge the Cold War and speak out against American activities in Vietnam, the American Catholic leadership responded immediately. Thomas Merton’s superiors, for example, forbade him from publishing anything on the peace issue in 1962. “[T]he voice which was shouting, momentarily, about peace, has been told to shut up,” Merton wrote, although his superiors assured him “it would be all right if [he] prayed” for peace.

Others like Catholic priests Philip and Daniel Berrigan found themselves physically removed from their parishes or shipped abroad for their antiwar rhetoric.  

The tight leash held by the American hierarchy on its ordained sons meant that Catholic dissent would necessarily fall in large part to lay people—presenting the laity with both a challenge and an opportunity to exercise greater authority in their Church. It was a challenge many CPFers, armed with Vatican calls for social justice and peace, felt ready for, despite the risks of social ostracism and religious reprimand.

Faced with persistent Catholic support for the war and frustrated by a lack of peace leadership from the Catholic hierarchy, CPFers began rethinking their tactical approaches to peacemaking. As CPF leader Tom Cornell recalls, “Before long it appeared to us that action [could not] be separated from education.” As a result, the CPF broadened its educational mission in 1965 and 1966 to include public protest of the Vietnam War, a decision that strengthened lay Catholic participation in the antiwar movement and ushered lay Catholics into the vanguard of Catholic social justice activities in the United States. Well before the term came into popular usage in 1967, the CPF set for itself a goal of introducing Catholics “to the principles and techniques of nonviolent resistance.” For years American Catholics had been taught to despise communism, to defer to legitimate authority, and to respect Church hierarchy. Yet, in the face of clerical intransigence, lay Catholics would have to take up the mantle of peace work. CPFers knew that weaning Catholics from their tradition of assuming clerical leadership and supporting the state unconditionally would take more than speeches, informational brochures, and meetings with bishops. CPFers escalated their protest and in doing so embarked down a path that would substantially alter the dynamics in the American Catholic Church.

To justify the escalation of their protest, CPFers argued that the Vietnam War had come to violate the message of Christ and the laws of the Church. Distraught over the intensification of the war in 1965, CPFers deployed theological arguments and moved into public protest as means of witnessing to the ways the war stood in conflict to Church teaching. CPFers lambasted the American military for its use of napalm, saturation bombing and deforestation—tactics
they believed violated just war prohibitions against indiscriminate killing, total war, and excessive violence. According to CPFers, the behavior of both the American military and the federal government rendered the Vietnam War unjust, a judgment that required Catholics to immediately oppose the war. Beyond mandating Catholic opposition, however, CPF co-chairman Jim Forest believed that the immorality of the war compelled Catholic peacemakers to move beyond apostolic measures. Forest called for a proactive nonviolence—what Gandhi called *sathyagraha* or “love force.” To combat the government’s escalation of the war and fill a leadership void created by a Catholic hierarchy which largely supported American intervention, all without forsaking their own religious values, CPFers needed to embrace a “pacifism of the strong.”

Moving into nonviolent resistance created a host of new concerns for CPFers. Pervasive misconceptions of pacifism among Americans Catholics plagued CPF efforts to broaden antiwar sentiment. Few Americans understood pacifism, confounding CPF attempts to explain what they meant by nonviolent resistance and crippling their efforts to promote pacifism as a philosophy consistent with Catholicism. Since many people popularly linked pacifism in the United States to a romanticized image of the nineteenth-century Quaker, Americans tended to perceive the pacifist as a “passivist”—or what historian Charles Chatfield refers to as the “nonresistant” objector to war. Justified or not, religious nonviolence suffered from the common misperception that it was a philosophy of inaction. Letters to the CPF highlight how American Catholics of all stripes misunderstood pacifism and nonviolence. One correspondent recounted how a teaching brother at his Catholic high school described a pacifist as “someone who rolls into a ball if he’s attacked.” Perhaps in an attempt to provide his students with a visual aid, the brother “proceeded to ball himself up in the fetal position.” Such images complicated CPFers’ attempts to define Catholic pacifists as people of faith engaged in the issues of the day.

Moreover, since Catholics were not members of an historic peace church, many American Catholics had a hard time accepting the compatibility of pacifism and Catholicism. Pro-war Catholics could point to a wealth of historical examples in which the Church was decidedly non-pacifist. Although CPFers labored to uncover a consistent tradition of pacifism and nonviolence in the Catholic Church—starting with Christ and continuing through the lives of saints such as Francis of Assisi, Martin of Tours, and Maximus the Confessor—the burden of history, strengthened by the continued public support given to the war by most important American Catholic bishops, loomed large against Catholic peacemakers. CPFers faced serious hurdles in their attempt to promote both nonviolent resistance and Catholic pacifism and knew that advocating a more confrontational brand of Catholic activism could conceivably threaten efforts to broaden Catholic opposition to the Vietnam War.

In spite of such obstacles and fears, CPFers felt action was necessary and responded to the escalation of the Vietnam War in the summer of 1965 by engaging in a newer “pacifism of the strong”—one that contrasted sharply the “passivist” stereotype. In 1965, CPFers drafted and circulated a petition they hoped to personally convey to the Holy Father. The petition encouraged the pope to condemn “preparations for total war,” support the right of Catholics to conscientiously object to war, and pursue “nonviolent alternatives to war.”
through calls for disarmament, support for the United Nations, and immediate negotiations in the Vietnam conflict. The petition is remarkable for several reasons, not the least of which is its lay origins. In sending a personal appeal to the pope, the CPF signified its total commitment to lay activism and an unprecedented confidence in the ability of lay people to guide the Church in the modern world. Lay Catholics rarely petitioned their pontiff and never to suggest he take a certain stand on an issue.

CPFers also stepped up their pressure on American Catholic clerics with petitions. In June, they attempted to personally deliver a petition condemning the war to the famously hawkish Cardinal Francis Spellman, Archbishop of New York, whom they felt was out of touch with recent Church proclamations against war and militarism. Eileen Egan of American PAX, a more conservative Catholic peace organization (vis-à-vis the CPF) whose membership was not exclusively pacifist, found the action troubling, fearing it would alienate the most important Catholic cleric in the United States and with him a sizable portion of the American Catholic lay population. Egan's anxiety underscored differences among Catholic activists and reflected the apprehension many Catholics had about challenging authority. The CPF's protest seemed arrogant and disrespectful to Egan, who preferred to negotiate with Church leaders for change.

Beyond adopting a more confident and confrontational attitude toward the American Catholic leadership, the CPF also escalated its protest by strengthening its connections with the developing antiwar coalition, an action which simultaneously nurtured Catholic radicalism and moved Catholic activists to the forefront of antiwar protest. In August 1965, CPFers helped organize the Assembly for Unrepresented People, which became the first of a number of coalition demonstrations against the war. Although it worked to ally with the mostly secular antiwar coalition, CPFers labored with other faith-based groups to create a religious atmosphere at the Assembly. Catholics held masses prior to the Assembly and, once the march began, participated in a forty-minute silent vigil outside the White House. With their religious activities, CPFers hoped to publicly witness to peace and contribute religious voices to the larger antiwar movement.

Secular antiwar activists would quickly learn that their Catholic counterparts, although associated with perhaps the largest "establishment" in the world, were far from conservative or sentimentalist. In fact, Catholic activists emerged as leaders and important organizers in the antiwar coalition and pushed the antiwar movement in new directions in 1965. As hundreds of Assembly marchers were sitting-in and being arrested in what antiwar activist Fred Halstead called "the largest mass arrest in Washington up to that time," the actions of Catholic Worker and CPFer Chris Kearns galvanized the Catholic Left and dramatically altered the tenor of antiwar protest. During a demonstration at Whitehall Induction Center in Manhattan, Kearns publicly burned his draft card—an action captured and published in Life magazine's 20 August 1965 issue. Indicative of the public's desire to attribute draft resistance to immaturity and youthful rebellion, Life identified Kearns only as a "student" and ran the photograph alongside a story belittling draft resisters. In fact, Kearns was not a student, but had lived in a Catholic Worker community in New York for seven years, serving as associate editor for the Catholic Worker. In spite of shoddy reporting,
the article proved particularly important. "Life magazine was a favorite in the Senate Barber Shop," Tom Cornell remembers with amusement. "When the Southern reactionaries saw that issue they went ape." Despite the peaceful nature of both the Assembly and Kearns' protest, an enraged Congress condemned the Assembly as a disruption staged by SDS—a leftist organization that played virtually no role in the protest—and responded to Kearns' action by passing new legislation outlawing draft card destruction and strengthening the penalties against violators.40

The swiftness with which the government reacted to draft card burning radicalized many Catholic activists and broadened support for nonviolent resistance. In a report to the Catholic Worker, CPF publications director Tom Cornell called for more draft card burnings. "Now the government is angry," Cornell revealed. "Of course this means we must have a public draft card burning soon." He was sure that burning draft cards in public "would be an extremely dramatic and effective way of manifesting . . . moral revulsion at our nation's Vietnam policy, as well as crippling a foolish and immoral law."41 Many members of the Catholic Left agreed with Cornell and considered the new law not only draconian, but offensive to religious sensibilities. It rendered the draft card a kind of secular sacrament of a civil religion that to Cornell's mind increasingly took precedence over "traditional real religion." Carrying a draft card signaled at least nominal acceptance of war as a means of conflict resolution and granted tacit support to America's intervention in Vietnam.42 Unwilling to tolerate the immorality of the new law and the violence of the draft and the war, Catholic activists embraced draft card burning as a potentially effective method of nonviolent resistance and began organizing more card burnings.

Lay Catholics took the lead in the draft card burning movement that arose after the passage of the 1965 draft card law. David Miller, a Catholic Worker and member of the CPF, went first, burning his draft card at a rally sponsored by the CPF and the Catholic Worker in October 1965. Miller became the first person to publicly burn his card after the new law made it punishable by up to five years in prison and a fine of ten thousand dollars.43 Tom Cornell followed Miller's lead. On November 6, after celebrating mass in his apartment, he and four other men proceeded to Union Square where they publicly burned their cards as pro-war onlookers chanted "Burn yourselves instead."44 Cornell and the CPF had publicly endorsed nonviolent resistance and had given birth to what the media would christen the "Catholic Left".

Many organizations would embrace nonviolent resistance and endorse draft card burning, but CPFers defined their nonviolent resistance using religious language and symbolism—a distinction that gets lost when movement chroniclers focus primarily on student-led or New Left organizations. CPFers characterized their acts of nonviolent resistance as prophetic witness.45 Unlike apostolic work, which relied on discussion, research, and writing, prophetic antiwar witness employed drama, theater, and action to jolt the public conscience and force American Catholics to assess the intersection of their religious and civic identities. Like the prophets of the Old Testament who risked social ostracism to remain true to God, CPFers engaged in dramatic, unpopular, and risky actions in an effort to raise awareness, publicly condemn immorality, and proactively work to eliminate evil in the world. While religious and non-religious resistors
alike expressed moral outrage over the war and used moral language to justify burning draft cards, the sacrificial nature of draft card burning, particularly in light of the recently-passed law, held special appeal for some Catholic activists.\textsuperscript{46} As Christ died to save humankind, so Catholic resisters believed they sacrificed their personal wellbeing to save others and witness to Christ's love. More than a means of questioning the legality of the draft or avoiding military service, CPFers hoped that burning one's draft card could help eradicate the social injustice of the draft and bring an end to the killing in Vietnam.

The adoption of prophetic witness by Catholic activists spurred a tactical shift in the antiwar movement. While the prophetic action built on the pioneering protest of Catholic Workers during civil defense drills, Catholic draft card burnings in the 1960s transcended the symbolic nature of McCarthy-era Catholic Worker civil disobedience. In refusing to go into fallout shelters during scheduled civil defense exercises, Catholic Workers had condemned the drills because they perpetuated a culture of violence. Like the sit-ins they inspired in the 1960s, Catholic Worker civil defense protests were, fundamentally, consciousness-raising actions aimed at forcing Americans to reevaluate their political decisions and admit the evil of nuclear weapons.\textsuperscript{47} By destroying their draft cards, however, Cornell, Miller, and Kearns went beyond denouncing the immorality of the draft and of war; they jeopardized the government's ability to rely on the draft and consequently, its ability to continue waging war in Vietnam. They aimed to cripple the machinery of war, not simply broaden disdain for it. If adopted by enough people, draft card burning could physically bring an end to the war, saving both American and Vietnamese lives in the process. This was more than nonviolent civil disobedience; it was nonviolent resistance. "With the draft card burnings, and the furor they stirred," the CPF's Jim Forest recalled, "a line of demarcation seemed crossed and, looking backward, one realized that the Resistance was born.\textsuperscript{48}

Evidence suggests that the moral message and prophetic character of Catholic resistance resonated with non-religious antiwar activists. As the 1960s progressed, the antiwar coalition as a whole gravitated away from merely expressing moral outrage and moved beyond marches and rallies to embrace more fully the concept of resistance. Although the larger movement continued to organize mass marches, demonstrators increasingly used marches to stage more dramatic acts of resistance like draft card burning. The actions of the Catholic Left fed this tactical shift within the antiwar coalition. More than contributing new tactics to the antiwar movement, however, the resistance of Catholic activists also inspired the development of a new prophetic dimension to antiwar protest. As James Farrell explains, by 1967 the secular antiwar movement had come to adopt the perspective Catholic protesters had held for some time—that "people had a moral obligation not just to disassociate from a system of sin, but to keep it from its standard operating procedures." These words, written in 1967 by members of The Resistance, a secular antiwar organization, embraced the values that underlay the CPF's move into prophetic protest in 1965 and the goals of the broader Catholic Left.\textsuperscript{49}

As Catholic activists helped transform the larger antiwar movement, the CPF closed the tumultuous year of 1965 by issuing what in a sense amounted to its manifesto. "Peace on Earth—Peace in Vietnam" ran as an advertisement in ma-
jor Catholic periodicals and was the CPF's first published condemnation of the war in Vietnam. The statement reflected the organization's dual commitment to apostolic and prophetic witness and a newfound confidence in the ability of lay Catholics to provide leadership on peace issues. Taking its name from John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris*, "Peace on Earth—Peace in Vietnam" called for a radical shift in American policy. Hoping to appeal to a broad range of Catholics, the CPF constructed criticism that highlighted how the conduct of the war not only violated their own pacifist values, but failed to meet just war standards—the basic, and more accepted Church teaching on war. Moving beyond this criticism, though, the CPF proclaimed that "men of conscience" could "neither defend nor support" the war in Vietnam. This was not the language of mere disagreement, but the language of noncooperation. In keeping with their apostolic mission, the CPF used the just war doctrine to educate and persuade American Catholics that the war was immoral. But they also hoped to inspire lay Catholics to action. Reflecting their developing commitment to prophetic witness and their growing confidence, CPFers argued that Catholics could not support the Vietnam War and that they were duty-bound as Catholics to resist the war effort. These conclusions had led Cornell, Kearns, and Miller to make the leap into nonviolent resistance. "Peace on Earth—Peace in Vietnam" importuned others to do the same.

Aside from its more confrontational rhetoric, however, "Peace on Earth—Peace in Vietnam" is important for the confidence it exudes and because it emanated from a predominantly lay Catholic organization. Even though the CPF's condemnation of the Vietnam War rested on doctrinal arguments, it came not from those who manned the pulpits in the American Church, but primarily from those who filled the pews. If the majority of American Catholics failed to follow CPFers' lead, continuing to defer to legitimate authority, the actions of the many laypeople that made up the CPF signaled the impact of Vatican II and the beginnings of change in the American Church itself. Moreover, while it grew out of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, the increased militancy the CPF exhibited in its advocacy of draft card burning and non-cooperation also reflected and fed a gradual shift away from passive nonviolence in the antiwar and civil rights movements. Instances of draft card burning and obstructive demonstrations such as stopping troop trains increased in the late sixties as many secular antiwar activists adopted nonviolent resistance. And, when members of the Catholic Left raided draft offices in Baltimore and Catonsville, Maryland in 1967 and 1968 respectively, the secular antiwar movement embarked on its own series of raids. While they may not have shared many of the CPF's religious motivations, by 1968 secular antiwar activists had eagerly embraced the tactical innovations of the Catholic Left and had come to agree that the time for simply speaking out against the war had passed.

**Catholic Reaction to Catholic Antiwar Protest**

It is difficult to gauge the impact one relatively small organization like the CPF had on attitudes among American Catholics about the war in Vietnam and about the dynamics within their own Church. Yet, while public reaction to Catholic antiwar protest during the Vietnam War varied considerably, the
actions of groups such as the CPF did initiate serious discussion within the American Catholic community about the role of the laity, discussions that reflect changing relationships within the American Catholic Church.

The liberal Catholic press generally responded positively to Catholic antiwar protest, quickly recognizing the religious character and importance of the new, more radical prophetic actions. The editors of Commonweal lauded the draft card burnings, believing that the resistance of men like Tom Cornell could help American Catholics reflect on the complex circumstances surrounding American intervention in Vietnam and their obligations as citizens and as Catholics. "Where the witness of [Catholic draft card burners] does help," the editors explained, "is in their insistence upon moral judgment. Nothing, absolutely nothing, not the government, not circumstances, not 'credibility' nor the necessity of 'honoring our commitments' nor 'national interest' can release the individual from making a conscientious judgment on the particular events occurring in Vietnam." Catholic journalists described draft card burning as a type of "liturgical ceremony," a telling analogy which demonstrated that they understood the connection between the ritualistic and sacrificial nature of draft card destruction and the Catholic liturgy itself, which symbolically commemorates Christ's Last Supper and crucifixion. The Commonweal editors understood that Catholics did not engage in prophetic witness simply to criticize the government or out of pure defiance; they burned their cards and went to prison because they believed their faith obligated them to act and because they envisioned their protests as acts of love.

Beyond revealing how members of the Catholic press interpreted the draft card actions, the reaction of the editors of liberal Catholic journals reflected new attitudes toward the role of the Catholic laity. The Commonweal editors did not simply interpret the draft card burnings; they condoned them. While the connections the editors drew between lay Catholic protest and the liturgy demonstrate the degree to which Catholic activists embraced the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council, the support editors gave to such activism signaled an acceptance of the political and religious authority of the Catholic laity apart from and perhaps even in contrast to the positions held by the established clergy. Hailing from a strongly hierarchical religious tradition, such an acknowledgment of the laity's power in religious matters marked significant change in the American Catholic Church.

The move into nonviolent resistance was not met with universal acclaim, however. Draft card burning and later, draft board raiding, sent tremors through the antiwar movement, creating anxiety in some organizations and fracturing others completely. Likewise, not everyone in the Catholic community felt comfortable with the adoption of prophetic witness. Thomas Merton, for example, initially worried that the destruction of draft cards conveyed a sort of cynicism and hopelessness to the masses of Americans struggling with the issue of war. He felt that by burning draft cards, Cornell and other Catholic men had abandoned hope in American democracy. Furthermore, he feared the radical and provocative character of prophetic protest might alienate the very Catholics he hoped the CPF would reach with apostolic work.

Merton's anxiety was not entirely unfounded. Many lay Catholics did in fact respond negatively to the tactics and public notoriety of the Catholic protesters.
Confronted by members of the Washington, D.C. chapter of the CPF, who were publicly begging for donations to buy medical supplies for North Vietnamese war victims, one Catholic parishioner at St. Matthew's Cathedral admitted to wanting to punch a female protester in the mouth. Another accused the protesters of treason and communism. Letters to the editors of Catholic journals and magazines also revealed widespread resentment of Catholic antiwar activism. Ed Tynan of New York praised the editors of the Catholic journal, *America*, for their criticism of peace demonstrations. Tynan lauded the editors for condemning the “current rage for burning draft cards.” “Your characterization of draft-card burning as ‘a gesture of contempt for the law under which the card destroyers live and whose benefits they are otherwise glad to share in’ hit the proverbial nail squarely on its head,” Tynan wrote. “I wish I had said it first.”

Responding to news that Catholic onlookers had attacked a Catholic nun named Sister Angelica during a public peace demonstration in Chicago, R. Zoppi and E. Restaino of New Jersey exclaimed: “Sister Angelica was stoned! What a pity! Would the fact that she was ‘demonstrating’ when she might have been praying have anything to do with her unfortunate mishap?” Although Sister Angelica was not a lay person, Zoppi and Restaino took issue with the fact that her actions breached the chain of command within the Catholic Church. Moreover, Zoppi and Restaino, along with another writer went on to conclude that Sister Angelica had “disgrac[ed] her habit” by participating in an action that violated civil law. As Zoppi and Restaino stated, “Christian law, moral law and civil law are homologous.” Clearly some lay Catholics felt that public protest of the Vietnam War was not only unAmerican, but outside the bounds of acceptable Catholic behavior.

Yet, even in the more conservative Catholic journals like *America*, lay Catholics expressed support for the peace demonstrators and a deep understanding of the religious nature of Catholic protest. Joan Mary Ouzounian of Los Angeles found the editors’ condemnation of Sister Angelica’s public protest “fantastic.” “It is assumed that she disgraced her habit and that she deserved what she got,” Ouzounian blasted. “From this we might conclude that Jesus Christ deserved to be spit upon, struck and humiliated before the crowd; that He also deserved much more than crucifixion.” Ouzounian clearly recognized the connection between Christ’s acceptance of crucifixion and the protesters’ willingness to endure public ridicule and go to jail. M. A. Marshall of Brooklyn reminded readers who condemned Catholic protesters that “Catholic theology teaches that action is prayer.” Embracing the prophetic character of Catholic protest, Marshall proclaimed that it was time for all Catholics, “bishops, priests, nuns and laity—to wake up and follow Him who was not afraid to ‘demonstrate’ against the evils of His time, and who has called us to follow Him.”

The rising numbers of Catholic men claiming conscientious objector status also suggests that the CPF was somewhat effective in changing Catholic attitudes toward not only the war, but a Catholic’s duty to his or her country. As historian Patricia McNeal demonstrates, while the numbers of Catholic men claiming conscientious objection rose from a mere four men during World War I to 223 men during World War II, the percentage of Catholic COs to the larger Catholic population remained relatively constant. Between 1964 and 1973, the Selective Service System classified 310,199 registrants as conscientious objectors.
And although the Selective Service did not keep statistics on the religious affiliation of claimants, the numbers of men seeking conscientious objection counseling from CPFers alone suggest a significant increase in Catholic claims of conscientious objection during the Vietnam War. In the first ten months of existence, Jim Forest estimated that the CPF had counseled some 500 Catholics "seeking guidance" about conscientious objection. By March 1966, CPFers were counseling between 40 and 50 men a week at its New York office alone.61

While the Vietnam War was admittedly far less popular than previous American wars, the rise in Catholic claims of conscientious objection cannot be solely attributed to the unpopularity of the Vietnam War or to objections to the draft as an institution. From its inception, the CPF devoted a great deal of time and energy to counseling young men who felt they had religious objections to the Vietnam War.62 As an organization the CPF worked diligently to publicize the Church's just war doctrine, printing and distributing pamphlets on just war and the right to conscientiously object to unjust wars. Although it is impossible to establish a direct link between a man's decision to claim conscientious objection and the availability of CPF literature, CPF pamphlets did work to dispel the notion that a Catholic owed unqualified support to the American government when it came to foreign policy decisions. While Cardinal Gibbons' remarks on Catholic duty to country may have successfully nipped Catholic conscientious objection in the bud during World War II, the numbers of Catholic men seeking CO counseling from the CPF during the Vietnam War suggest that old mandates to defer to legitimate authority were becoming obsolete. Conscientiously objecting to war was one of the most direct ways Catholic lay persons could both register their discontent with American foreign policy and witness to their faith. Both claiming conscientious objection and counseling conscientious objectors were actions that broke sharply with American Catholic tradition.

There is also quantitative evidence that the CPF was reaching ordinary, non-draft age Catholics with its message of Catholic nonviolence. Although the CPF did not keep aggregate membership statistics, the organization did compile lists of new members during the course of the Vietnam War. In 1965, the CPF recorded 144 new members. As its activities expanded and as the war heated up, CPF membership grew. For 1968, new CPF members totaled 462, a number that fell only slightly as America "Vietnamized" the war in the early 1970s. Even after the war ended, the CPF continued to draw in new members, although in much smaller numbers—evidence that the Catholic peacemaking message, not just disdain for the Vietnam War or the draft, appealed to some Americans. Such membership statistics also suggest that the idea of Catholic pacifism, not simply Catholic opposition to the war, was taking hold among the American Catholic population. The CPF was a pacifist organization whose membership application required prospective members to sign a statement pledging their objection to all wars—not only unjust wars.63

Assessing the demographic characteristics of CPF membership is more problematic. Records do not indicate factors such as racial-ethnic identity or class status. Moreover, because the CPF was an organization comprised of local chapters in places as different as Austin, Texas and Wooster, Massachusetts, the types of people involved varied considerably. National CPF leaders generally claimed a Catholic Worker background and were likely to hail from white immigrant
families with an interest in the labor movement. But the national leadership was not necessarily representative of CPF members. Preliminary examination of local CPF chapters indicates higher numbers of women than at the national level. Finally, national CPF leaders tended to be well ahead of their local counterparts and the larger antiwar Catholic population in terms of the levels of risk they assumed in their protest actions. 64

The Impact of Catholic Lay Protest on the American Catholic Church

If the CPF escapes the historical interest of most scholars of the antiwar movement and most scholars of American Catholic history, it is not for a lack of historical importance. CPFers provided a forum for American Catholic dissent during the 1960s—a time when established religion, indeed anything considered establishment, faced a crisis, particularly among young people disillusioned by the Vietnam War. Too often, the religious voices in the antiwar movement are crowded out by a disproportionate interest in radical student groups like SDS or in radical, but hardly representative, groups such as the Weatherpeople. The antiwar movement was incredibly diverse—a factor that contributed to its demise, but also to its ability to reach beyond the draft-age population. This diversity included an important faction of protesters whose primary objection to the war in Vietnam lay in its violation of their religious belief systems. While much antiwar protest was political, a good deal of it stemmed from religious values, just as was the case in the civil rights movement. Focusing on the CPF helps create a more balanced antiwar historiography, points to the important ways smaller, lesser-known groups shaped the movement, and illuminates the ways that many Americans integrated their civic and religious identities.

More than giving voice to Catholic antiwar attitudes, however, the CPF's importance also lay in the ways it reflected and contributed to the changing landscape of American Catholicism in the post-conciliar era. In popular memory the story of the antiwar movement and the sixties as a whole is a narrative of decline—the movement broke apart, activists burned out, the New Left crumbled under the feet of a resurgent Right. But that is largely the story of SDS. If one looks at an organization such as the CPF, one can see the ways in which antiwar protest, although admittedly unsuccessful in bringing the war to a quick end, had long term consequences in some segments of the American population. In challenging their Church's lack of leadership on the issue of the Vietnam War, the lay Catholics of the CPF helped negotiate a new role for Catholic lay people in the United States. Balancing a religious tradition that valued authority with newer reforms that empowered and called upon the laity to work for social justice, CPFers felt confident enough to use Church teaching and Church history to push the Catholic leadership away from automatic support for American foreign policy. Their efforts chipped away at the largely top-down relationship between the clergy and the laity that characterized the American Catholic Church and fostered more of a dialogue about both religious and political issues.

While most Catholics remained unaware of the CPF as an organization and many expressed anxiety about the Catholic Left, they nonetheless benefited from the CPF's foray into lay religious activism. Having placed themselves on the public political stage through their protest of the Vietnam War, lay Catholics were
in a stronger position to contribute to the institutional changes that came when the American hierarchy finally denounced the war in 1971 and developed a more activist peace agenda of its own. Because lay Catholics had taken the lead on the peace issue during the Vietnam War, they became crucial contributors to the development of nonviolent school curricula and the work of the Peace and Justice Commissions that arose in Catholic dioceses in the mid-1970s, and helped set the post-Vietnam War Catholic peace agenda. In the Brooklyn diocese, for example, lay Catholics of the CPF worked in coalition with other Catholic groups and clergy to stress "conflict resolution in the elementary schools," "nonviolent training and philosophy among older students and teachers," and to develop peace education packets about conflict resolution, nonviolence, political involvement, and alternative lifestyles. CPFers also disseminated information about voluntary poverty, political action, and nonviolence to the local level by developing "peace packets" that included a Study Guide for Justice, which CPFers developed in tandem with the Diocese of Memphis. The institutional cooperation the CPF received in developing its peace education packets and broadening support among the clergy led Tom Cornell to remark in 1974 that the CPF found itself "with an unexpected respectability, gained no doubt from the fact that we were 'prematurely' right on Vietnam."

CPF activity during the Vietnam War also prepared lay Catholics to assert a stronger lay presence at institutional meetings and conferences. In the late 1960s, CPFers and other members of the Catholic Left helped build lay organizations such as the National Committee on Catholic Concerns (NCCC), a coalition of Catholic organizations that pressured bishops to embrace social justice issues and the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. Perhaps more importantly, the lay leadership Catholics exhibited during the Vietnam War laid the groundwork for lay participation in the "Call to Action" conferences in the 1970s. Indeed, many CPFers gravitated toward "Call to Action," an attempt by the American hierarchy to formally consult with the laity about issues ranging from peace and justice to birth control and abortion. Largely on account of his previous experience in religious activism and peace work, Tom Cornell was chosen by the United States Catholic Conference as a delegate to the Bishops' Bicentennial Observance in Detroit in 1976 which made "Call to Action" its thematic focus. At the conference, Cornell and other lay activists who had taken the lead in protesting the Vietnam War formed a caucus of peace people, hoping to maximize the presence of the laity and push a peace agenda that emphasized everything from nuclear disarmament to conscientious objection counseling.

As John Carr notes, although the fervor of "Call to Action" quickly died under the weight of disorganization, disagreement and disillusionment, "it had solidified the central place of social justice in the life of American Catholicism, and it had experimented with a process of consultation [between the laity and clergy] on an unprecedented scale." For all its faults and shortcomings, "Call to Action" nonetheless reflected the degree to which the Catholic laity had become an integral part of shaping the social justice agenda of the American Catholic Church, and indeed shaping the Church itself in the post-Vietnam era. Antiwar activism among lay Catholics during the Vietnam War nourished a more confident and assertive lay participation in institutional issues and religious matters in post-Vatican II American Catholicism.
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Thus, while it may not have ended the Vietnam War, Catholic antiwar protest in many ways contributed to a shift in the American Catholic Church. The confidence with which CPFers wielded theological arguments against the Vietnam War and the boldness of their tactical approaches to peacemaking announced the political and religious maturation of the American Catholic laity. In protesting the war, often in the absence of strong clerical peace leadership, CPFers embraced the reforms of the Second Vatican Council and gave birth to a new, more equalitarian dynamic within the American Catholic Church. Although the Church remained strongly identified with an institutional hierarchy, the lay leadership of Catholic peace activism fostered greater dialogue between lay persons and clergy. And while the CPF remained a relatively obscure organization to most ordinary American Catholics, the mere existence of a primarily lay Catholic peace organization helped usher in a new age in American Catholic life. What Richard Carbray wrote of lay Catholic protest in the summer of 1965 easily applies to the importance of the CPF and its impact on the American Catholic Church. “Whether or not this new form of direct action will prove effective, whether or not it will influence the views of American bishops,” Carbray wrote, “is a secondary matter.” “It is sufficient . . . that they made the effort, that they testified to their beliefs, that they bore witness.” CPFers’ insistence on their right to use Catholic teaching in their activism helped maintain a religious perspective in the larger antiwar movement, helped popularize Vatican II reforms which empowered the laity, and helped establish new precedents for lay-clerical cooperation in post-WWII America.

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ENDNOTES

1. Tom Cornell to Selective Service System Local Board #16, n.d. [ca. November 1965], Catholic Peace Fellowship Records (hereafter CPF) 19/1, University of Notre Dame Archives (hereafter UNDA).

2. “Church” here refers to both the institutional Roman Catholic Church and the body of people that identify themselves as followers of the Roman Catholic Church in Rome.


4. Terry Anderson explains that he purposely uses the term “activist” because it is “a term free from race and gender,” promising to mention protesters’ race and gender “only when it is significant.” Terry Anderson, The Movement and the Sixties: Protest in American from Greensboro to Wounded Knee (New York, 1995), xv–xvi.

5. The Catholic Worker Movement was crucial to the development of the CPF and to Catholic protest of the Vietnam War. The scholarship on the Catholic Worker is extensive. See Jim Forest, Love is the Measure: A Biography of Dorothy Day (New York, 1986); Mel Piehl, Breaking Bread: The Catholic Worker and the Origin of Catholic Radicalism in America (Philadelphia, 1982); Anne Klejment and Nancy Roberts, ed., American Catholic Pacifism: The Influence of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement (West-


7. The issue of Catholic conscientious objection directly impacted and was particularly important to laypeople opposed to war and military service. Although many clergymen advocated Catholic conscientious objection, as clerics they were exempt from military service.


10. “A Week for Peace,” St. Vincent’s College press release, 14 February 1966, CPF 18/4, UNDA. Commentary on the “Week for Peace” can be found in the Catholic Peace Fellowship Bulletin, June 1966, Catholic Peace Fellowship Printed Material Collection (hereafter PCPF)1/3, UNDA. That same month the CPF sponsored a conference at Fordham University. See “Peace on Earth: The War in Vietnam and the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,” flyer, February 1966, CPF 6/1, UNDA. CPFers were also part of the initial series of teach ins in 1965, participating in a teach in at Hunter College in May 1965. Tom Cornell to Dorothy Day, 19 May 1965, Dorothy Day–Catholic Worker Collection (hereafter DDCW), Series D-1.1/Box 2, Marquette University Special Collections and Archives (hereafter MUSC).


12. Emphasis is mine. Thomas Merton to Jim Forest, 29 December 1965 in Merton, 291.


15. Cornell estimates that lay people constituted ninety percent of the CPF’s membership. Tom Cornell, interview by author, email correspondence, 20 February 2002.

16. A brochure distributed by the Wooster, Massachusetts CPF highlights the extent to which lay people dominated the CPF, as well as the degree to which lay Catholics took it
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upon themselves to discuss theological issues with their co-religionists. The Wooster CPF sent Catholic groups a list of people willing to travel across the country to speak on issues related to war, peace, and Catholic nonviolence. Of the sixteen people listed, twelve were laypersons. "Speakers List," Wooster Catholic Peace Fellowship, n.d., in possession of the author, obtained 27 March 2002. The author thanks Mary Maffeo of Phoenix, Arizona for sharing CPF ephemera.


21. Support for war among minority groups is a common theme throughout American history. See for example Willard B. Gatewood, Jr. Black Americans and the White Man’s Burden, 1898–1903 (Urbana, IL, 1975). Gatewood explains how the threat of racism and a desire for upward mobility generated support for the Cuban War for Independence among African Americans. See also Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, Peace Now! American Society and the Ending of the Vietnam War (New Haven, CT, 1999). Jeffreys-Jones examines the evolution of war support and opposition among women, African Americans, and the working class, concluding that many supported the Vietnam War in hopes of collectively climbing "the greasy pole of social advancement." Jeffreys-Jones, Peace Now!, 225.


23. CPFers received their share of anti-Catholic mail, reminding them that both their political and religious values made them targets for public ridicule. Horace Casselberry's letter to the CPF demonstrates how anti-Catholicism hinged on the belief that Catholics were unAmerican. "WHAT is a catholic, but a conditioned reflex of the idiotic bigotry of creed-crazy, god-bedeveled, bigot-begotten, idiot-infested old cabal of celibates whose religion-eering racket is pest and plague of Democracy's own Education in this Land of the Free, Home of Democracy!!" Horace Casselberry to the Catholic Peace Fellowship, October 1965, CPF 24/6, UNDA. CPFers also suggest that subtle forms of anti-Catholicism existed within the FOR. Tom Cornell remembers the FOR's John Swomley as a "dyed-in-the-wool anti-Catholic of the J. Bromley Oxnam-Paul Blanchard school of thought." Jim Forest recalls that "within the FOR one could easily find people who regarded the Catholic Church with disgust." Tom Cornell, interview by author, email correspondence, 14 August 2000; Jim Forest, interview by author, email correspondence, 14 August 2000.


25. O’Brien, Public Catholicism, 4, 16–17, 99. The major exception to this is of course the Catholic Worker Movement. Yet in the 1960s, the Catholic Worker was still a relatively recent phenomenon, having arisen in the 1930s.

26. Thomas Merton to Catherine de Hueck Doherty, 4 June 1962 in Merton, 18. For other examples of silencing, see Peter Riga to Jim Forest, 14 September 1964, CPF
73, UNDA; Bill Kennedy, "Albany's Father Bonaventure," National Catholic Reporter, 1 December 1965, 2.


28. For the importance of hierarchy and authority in the American Catholic Church, see O'Brien, Public Catholicism; Wilson Miscamble, "Catholics and American Foreign Policy from McKinley to McCarthy: A Historiographical Survey," Diplomatic History 1980 4(3): 223-40; Dorothy Dohen, Nationalism and American Catholicism (New York, 1967); and Jay Dolan, The Immigrant Church: New York's Irish and German Catholics, 1815-1865 (Baltimore, 1975). See also Thomas McAvoy's discussion of Bishop John Ireland, who epitomized the nationalist strain of American Catholicism in The Americanist Heresy in Roman Catholicism, 1895-1900 (Notre Dame, Ind., 1963). For the impact of middle class status on American Catholics, see O'Brien, Renewal of American Catholicism, 8.


33. Larry Raciappo to Tom Cornell, 22 April 1970, CPF 21/6, UNDA.

34. Catholic Peace Fellowship, "Petition of American Citizens to Pope Paul VI for Further Leadership in the Work of World Peace," n.d. [ca. 1965], CPF 11/1, UNDA.

35. The author thanks Gerald P. Fogarty, S. J. of the University of Virginia and David J. O'Brien of the College of the Holy Cross for helping place the petition in context.

36. American PAX, unlike the CPF, admitted non-pacifists to membership. Egan, however, advocated Catholic pacifism and was essential to Catholic peacemaking until her death in October 2000. For Egan's activities, see Eileen Egan, Peace Be With You: Justified Warfare or the Way of Nonviolence (Maryknoll, N.Y., 1999).

37. See Jim Forest to Dorothy Day, 28 June 1965, CPF 13/3, UNDA; Jim Forest to Eileen Egan, 28 June 1965, CPF 25/4, UNDA.

38. Tom Cornell, "Report to the Catholic Worker on the 'Washington Summer Action,'" n.d. [ca. August 1965], CPF 19/1, UNDA; Tom Cornell, "We Declare Peace ....", Catholic Worker, September 1965, 1, 6–7.

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40. Tom Cornell, interview by author, email correspondence, 2 October 2000; Tom Cornell, interview by author, email correspondence, 21 March 2001; "Protests on Principle and Some Practical Options," Life, 20 August 1965, 30–31; McNeal, American Catholic Peace Movement, 223. Halstead argues that the Assembly "marked the point at which SDS was bypassed on the antiwar issue." Halstead, 67–72.

41. Tom Cornell, "Washington Summer Action"; Cornell, "We Declare Peace . . .", 1, 6–7.


45. Although historians of the Catholic Left have not previously characterized non-violent resistance as prophetic witness, many Catholic activists used the word when describing the direct action protests of the Catholic Left and the acts of conscientious objectors who chose prison over military service. See, for example, Joe Mulligan, S.J., "Reflections on Resistance Against the War in Vietnam," St. Luke’s Journal of Theology 28 (September 1985): 277–294.

46. For example, the pledge distributed by the Committee for Draft Resistance, a secular organization based in San Francisco, stated that signers understood that "the fundamental immorality and increasing brutality of our nation's course in Vietnam" compelled them to "commit our lives to changing that course." Stephen Kohn, Jailed for Peace: The History of American Draft Law Violators, 1658–1985 (Westport, Conn., 1986), 77–78. For the many reasons draft-age men burned their draft cards, see Sherry Gershon Gottlieb, Hell No, We Won't Go! Resisting the Draft During the Vietnam War (New York, 1991).

47. Historian Patricia McNeal calls the civil disobedience of Catholic Workers in the 1950s "symbolic actions of non-violent resistance." McNeal, American Catholic Peace Movement, 124. I would argue instead that the Catholic Worker protests were examples of traditional nonviolence and had not yet moved into nonviolent resistance.

48. Jim Forest quoted in "In Time of War," in Catonsville Milwaukee Defense Committee, Delivered into Resistance (New Haven, Conn., 1969), 3. Todd Gitlin claims that draft resistance "started in earnest in 1967" and that the "ultraresistance" (a nickname for Catholics engaged in direct action) was primarily organized by "radical priests and nuns". Yet, draft resistance began with draft card destruction, something Catholic activists were doing well before 1967 and was an activity specifically planned and executed by laypeople. Todd Gitlin, The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage (New York, 1987), 291–92.


54. Thomas Merton to Tom Cornell, 5 December 1965, CPF 19/1, UNDA.


58. Both quotes are from "Letters to the Editor," America, 15 October 1966, 437.

59. Catholic COs represented only one one-hundredth of one percent (.0001) of the total American Catholic population during World War II. McNeal, American Catholic Peace Movement, 94.

60. The author thanks Alyce Burton, Public Affairs Specialist with the Selective Service System for providing statistics on Vietnam-era conscientious objection claimants.

61. Walter J. Fox, "The Peace Movement: 'Nun's Story' Changed Jim Forest's Life," National Catholic Reporter, 1 December 1965, 2; Jim Forest and Tom Cornell, Catholic Peace Fellowship Report to the National Council of the FOR, 8 March 1966, CPF 11/6, UNDA; Jim Forest to Dorothy Day, 16 December 1965, DDCW Series D 1.1/Box 4, MUSC.

62. Patricia McNeal argues that the draft and the right of individual conscience, not the war itself, was American Catholic peace movement's raison d'être during the Vietnam era. Although the draft quickly became the focus of the antiwar movement, Catholic opposition to the war transcended the draft and concern over the right of individual conscience. The CPF arose from a part of the peace movement that focused on the abolition of nuclear weapons—an issue not directly related to either the draft or conscientious objection. Moreover, the Catholic Worker, as well as the CPF and American Pax, opposed the war in part because militarism is inherently violent toward the poor. If the poor escaped the draft (which they disproportionately did not), they faced starvation, which occurred both as a result of crop destruction and because wars diverted funds from social programs. McNeal, American Catholic Peace Movement, 216.
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64. Without more specific membership information, the demographic characteristics of CPF members are purely impressionistic. CPF membership seems to have been predominantly white, although there were African American and Chicana/o members. If the bylines of the Catholic Peace Fellowship Bulletin are any indication of organizational importance, men and women shared leadership roles in the national office although men seem to have outnumbered women on organizational committees. Perhaps more so than other antiwar organizations, the CPF was very diverse in terms of the age of its members. When Mary Maffeo joined the local CPF chapter in Phoenix she was in her forties. Tom Cornell, a leader in the national office, was in his thirties during much of the Vietnam War while Jim Forest was in his twenties. Class status is more difficult to gauge. Since many CPFers voluntarily adopted poverty as a form of social activism, assessing class status is very difficult.


66. "Alternative lifestyles" referred to lifestyle changes Catholic activists hoped would result in a less violent world. War tax resistance and voluntary poverty were just two examples of how American Catholics might contribute to the development of a more peaceful and Christian world.


68. Tom Cornell to "Friends" of the Catholic Peace Fellowship, April 1974, CPF 13/2.

69. For information on the CPF's role in the NCCC, see Tom Cornell, "On Selective Conscientious Objection to War," Catholic Peace Fellowship proposal to the National Committee on Catholic Concerns, n.d. [ca. Spring 1968], CPF 17/2, UNDA.

