

SENTENCED TO DEATH FOR NOT KILLING
The Ben Salmon Story
By
Jack Gilroy

A Play In One Act
First public reading to be
at the Columbus (Georgia) Convention Center
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Icon by William Hart McNichols

Jack Gilroy

CHARACTERS

BEN SALMON, about 30 years old; WWI-era conscientious objector

ELIZABETH SALMON, about 30 years; wife of Ben

LYMONT MONTGOMERY BOWERS, in his sixties; business manager for Rockefellers

MARY HARRIS JONES (MOTHER JONES), in her seventies; union supporter

EUGENE DEBS, in his sixties; Socialist candidate for President

CARDINAL GIBBONS, leading American Catholic spokesperson

SISTER ELIZABETH SALMON, daughter of Ben Salmon

ORDERLY 1

ORDERLY 2

REPORTER

STAGEHAND (dressed in black)

SETTING

Very minimalist. WWI recruiting posters are displayed on walls leading into the theater, and the song “Over There” is played over and over as the audience is seated. Center stage, there is a screen capable of displaying video images. The stage features nothing but two simple wooden chairs, one stage left and one stage right, about twelve feet away from one another and angled toward the audience. (Other necessary props include a lightweight desk with a manual typewriter on it, a hospital gurney, and a barred prison door on wheels that can be easily rolled on and off the stage.)

SENTENCED TO DEATH FOR NOT KILLING

(As the lights come up, SISTER ELIZABETH SALMON is seated in the stage-left chair.)

SISTER ELIZABETH SALMON

I was only 7 years old in 1932 when my father died. I had no idea of his struggle with the United States Government, or of the strength of his convictions, until long after his death. My mom didn't want to talk about it. In Catholic school, I'd heard a little about Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement. But in high school, a friend showed me a newspaper article in which Dorothy Day called my father a hero. I was so astonished that the newspaper dropped to the floor. I scooped it up and stuffed it in my book bag. When I got home I excitedly showed the paper to my mother. She took the paper away, telling me, "That's all about the past, Geraldine, and we're not there any more."

(Lights fade out on SISTER ELIZABETH SALMON, who nonetheless remains sitting in her chair.)

(A desk on casters is rolled onto the darkened stage in front of the stage-right chair, and a manual typewriter is placed on the desk.)

(BEN SALMON is pushed onstage strapped to a hospital gurney, accompanied by two ORDERLIES. Then ORDERLY 1, his back to the audience, takes a sixteen-inch tube and appears to force the tube down BEN SALMON's throat as he thrashes and gags. ORDERLY 2, using a funnel, appears to pour a bottle of milk down the clear tube. In reality, the milk goes into a container strapped to the back side of the gurney)

ORDERLY 1

You don't have to worry about this sour milk, Salmon, we're by-passing your taste buds.

(ORDERLY 2 yanks tube from BEN SALMON's throat)

SALMON

(hoarsely, as the tube is withdrawn from his throat) I was hoping for chocolate or strawberry, but you guys aren't very creative.

ORDERLY 2

After 130 days of this, ya'd think your brain would kick in, Salmon. Your days are numbered, crazy man. Your body needs more than moo juice. Your throat looks like raw liver.

SALMON

Did you guys ever give any thought to giving up your job in this torture chamber you call an insane asylum—and get a life-giving job?

ORDERLY 1

We're not torturing you, Slacker. We're saving your useless life.

(The ORDERLIES unstrap BEN SALMON, who climbs gingerly off the gurney as the ORDERLIES push it offstage and EXIT. BEN SALMON walks to center stage; there's a few seconds pause as he makes eye contact with the audience. His tone is confident, faintly sarcastic but humorous.)

SALMON

My name is Ben Salmon. The United States Army kidnapped me after I refused to answer a questionnaire about possible conscription. I had already registered as required and informed them on the registration that I would not in any way participate in their killing machine. That was in late 1917. If you remember your history, our President Woodrow Wilson had decided to engage the United States in the European War. What a joke he turned out to be. I supported Wilson when he ran in 1916 for a second term. His slogan was "He Kept Us Out of War." And he had, of course. The Europeans had been killing one another since the Great War began in 1914 and I was delighted to support Wilson for his restraint. Besides, he seemed to have a greater sense for the working man than Republicans like Teddy Roosevelt, Taft and McKinley.

(SALMON wanders stage left, shaking his head and smirking before turning to face audience again.)

SALMON

We've all been fooled by people in power. But I have to admit that Professor Wilson really pulled the wool over my eyes. The real Wilson stood up for the profiteers. The pressure to reap the harvest of militarism was just too compelling for our dear Mr. Wilson. He did make a lot of people happy. Lots of work and 17,000 new millionaires were created during the war--in addition to the robber barons who already had stolen from the laboring force. If you are already rich, then guns and butter just add to your treasure. Those who did the dirty work, the soldiers, were paid \$30 a month for killing their fellow man. A soldier would have to save his total pay for 2777 years to become a millionaire. But bankers' sons weren't the doughboys manning the trenches. Of course, you must understand that the Great Slaughter was all for freedom. A war for democracy, don't you know?

(SALMON gives a hearty laugh.)

My sentence was for desertion from an Army I never joined. The other joke was charging me with propaganda! They must have had tongue in cheek with that charge. What a clever lying machine they used to dupe Americans.

(Large screen displays WWI propaganda posters – each image held in view for eight seconds – as the WWI song “Over There” is played.)

(Enter ELIZABETH SALMON from the stage right wings, dressed in the height of fashion for 1918.)

ELIZABETH

Ben, you don't need to go into the military—I'm your wife—a dependant. Just that alone could give you a deferment.

SALMON

Sure! And my mother is a widow and that also would be reason enough for a deferment. Elizabeth, the real issue is not a way to get out of military service but to resist evil. The military is evil. I need to do my part to overcome evil with good. Cooperation with evil is not overcoming evil. Being a soldier trained to kill is not the way to deal with evil. That's what I firmly believe as a Catholic Christian.

ELIZABETH

Ben, you know I'm pregnant. Doesn't that mean anything to you?

SALMON

Of course it does. It means I'm even more convinced to follow my conscience. What sort of father would leave a legacy of training to kill one's fellow man?

ELIZABETH

You could ask for a non-killing type of service. Ask for the medical corps, or do what you already know how to do — clerical work and office management.

SALMON

I'd still be co-operating with the profiteers, the generals and the colonels, the President that betrayed us and all those who bless death rather than life. Elizabeth, my love, please understand me. I can't co-operate with violence. I wrote the draft board a letter and told them to let me alone—to take only those who believe in wholesale violation of the commandment: “Thou Shall Not Kill.” Elizabeth, I'm in the Army of Peace. That's where I'll live or die.

ELIZABETH

When we married, Ben, we made promises to love, honor and obey one another. I sense you've given up on me and your only real concern is fighting a losing battle with the system. If you go to prison, our child will be without a father. Is that some kind of victory for you?

SALMON

Winning isn't possible in war. Winning a war would be like winning a hurricane or an earthquake. I don't want to be part of the madness. The only victory for me is integrity to my belief in nonviolence. Most people seem to be saying "It's okay to kill as long as the state tells me to," and I can't be a part of that. That may be okay with millions of people, but it's not okay with me.

ELIZABETH

I'm not speaking of millions of people, Ben. I'm speaking of our life together -- you, our child, our family.

SALMON

Marriage is a school of loyalty to truth, not to lies. I'm not disloyal to you because I refuse to cooperate with the lies of our government. My disloyalty is to the government -- not to you or our child.

ELIZABETH

You know I love you, Ben. But I'm not where you are on this. I want you here with me as my husband and father of our child.

SALMON

Don't let the government ruin our relationship! Think about the millions of men leaving their families to engage in violent actions. If we are separated, it won't be because I caved into the call for violence. Our separation will be testimony to the belief that good can overcome evil—that is what Christ taught. If that's not true, then Christ was a liar. And as I recall, Jesus said to love one another, not kill one another.

ELIZABETH

Ben, aren't you putting yourself above the Catholic bishops and cardinals who support the war? They all back President Wilson and the war effort. Cardinal Gibbons said that Catholics should cooperate in every way possible with our President and national government.

SALMON

The hierarchy usually backs whatever government is in control. It goes back to the time of Constantine. The Church leaders claim they are just rendering to Caesar, and they totally ignore the nonviolent teaching of Jesus. These fellows are supposed to be the shepherds of their flock. You don't protect your flock by handing them over to the wolves.

ELIZABETH

I think I need to get away for a while. Maybe go with my side of the family to think things out. I love you, Ben.

(ELIZABETH exits. SALMON paces the stage and addresses the audience.)

SALMON

Elizabeth's right about one thing -- I could have accepted an exemption to the military when I registered for conscription. I was married and had a widowed mother, and those things alone would have kept me out of the draft. But I deliberately wrote on the registration form that I was a conscientious objector and my only reason for registering was to inform the government that I would in no way render military service.

(Crossing to stage right, SALMON sits at the desk and adjusts a sheet of paper in the typewriter.)

I wrote President Wilson a letter and told him that I would not directly or indirectly participate in the killing of those whom God bade us to love. I explained my reasons based on religious, humanitarian and political grounds. A few thousand copies of this letter was published and distributed, mainly in Denver. I made it very clear that if I was called by the government to serve, I would not respond.

(A copy of this newspaper article -- or one resembling it -- appears on the screen behind SALMON.)

SALMON

On Christmas Day of 1917 I received a questionnaire that by federal law was to be filled out, signed and returned to the Local Draft Board within a certain number of days. Shortly after New Year's Day I was arrested at my home for refusing to complete the questionnaire. The Knights of Columbus learned of my arrest and were shocked that I wrote an article in which I criticized the United States Government for ordering young men to train to kill and to kill. I was expelled from the Knights.

(A STAGEHAND rolls a barred prison window, on casters, onto the stage and places it beside the chair. BEN SALMON gets up and paces the stage.)

After a time in the Denver jail, I was released on bail and two attorneys took my case to federal court based on my request for exemption--religious belief and my financial dependents---my mother and my wife. Instead of their granting an exemption, I was put on military trial and sent to Ft. Logan--even though I was never in the military. I had been kidnapped by the Army. I refused to wear a uniform and refused to work. So another trial was set up with charges of desertion and propaganda. I was first sentenced to death; then the court changed their decision to 25 years of hard labor at Ft Leavenworth, Kansas. So, there you have it. I was an enemy of the nation because I would not train or

in any way cooperate to kill. If I were a Quaker or a Mennonite or Amish--a member of a Peace Church--I may have been excused. My sin was being a Catholic.

(BEN SALMON sits down in the stage-right chair and starts to type – then stops, addressing the audience again.)

I have said many times that it is a duty, not just a right, as a practical Catholic, to question hierarchy. Yet Catholic shepherds and their sheep usually cooperate with whatever government they live under. They manage to find a way to fit them selves into a theology of Just War. For me, there was no such animal as a Just War – never has been, never will be. War is never about justice. It's all about economics and power.

(Lights go down on BEN SALMON, so now we have both Ben and Sister Elizabeth sitting in darkness. Suddenly, the STAGEHAND rushes onstage from stage left with an old-fashioned microphone. LAMONT MONTGOMERY BOWERS, wearing a fedora and a very expensive overcoat, strides in. The REPORTER enters and squats down a few feet in front of BOWERS, pencil and notepad in hand.)

REPORTER

Mr. Bowers! Mr. Bowers! What's your take on Ben Salmon, the Catholic man who won't go in the service? He says the war's all about greed!

BOWERS

What that man says is pure rubbish. There has been no economic system in history that has had the success that capitalism has had. Of course wealth is based on the performance of the working class. That's the key -- performance! If workers perform, do their job, strive for excellence -- they open up doors to a bountiful life. But all too often they listen to outside union agitators who are more interested in promoting their own sweet life than the good of the workers. What workers need today is respect for the capitalist system, the system that breeds life and blood into workers, the real union for humans to strive for are with our God and Savior, not with the claptrap of self-serving union organizers. Self reliance, not unionization of the rabble in our society -- that's the real direction, the real value.

REPORTER

What advice would you give a young fellow seeking to make his way in the world?

BOWERS

I'd tell him to work hard and keep his eye on the prize. Why, just look at me! I was born and raised in the village of Maine, NY, just a few miles away from the equally humble home of John D. Rockefeller. Many years later, I'd have the opportunity of working for his son, John D. Rockefeller Jr. Like the Rockefellers, my family struggled but learned how to survive under difficult circumstances. I drove sheep and cattle to market, walking all day for just 25 cents. But it was money well earned and I saved and saved until I was

old enough to attend Business School in Binghamton, NY. The Civil War was in full swing at the time and Binghamton was a growing town with new industries, trains and trolleys moving people and war materials from here to there. There was no excuse for not having a job. I was too young to be in that war and too old for the Spanish American war or the Great European War for Democracy. But I can tell you for sure, our freedom was preserved, and those boys who gave their lives died for the likes of Mr. Salmon, a slacker if I ever saw one.

(Enter MOTHER JONES wearing a long black dress and black wide brimmed hat. She exudes a commanding and sometimes stern sense of confidence.)

REPORTER

Excuse me, ma'am. I'm interviewing Mr. Lamont Montgomery Bowers. He's a very important man.

MOTHER JONES

Oh, I know Mr. Bowers. But I'm not sure I'd agree he's important.

BOWERS (sneering): If it isn't Mother Jones.

MOTHER JONES

What he doesn't tell you is that he's just a patsy for the Rockefellers and the bankers. I met him in Colorado in 1914, when I was a spokeswoman for the miners. Bowers and Rockefeller forced the miners, together with their wives and children, out of their company homes in the middle of winter. Families were evicted, children and mothers carrying babies through the snow and biting cold. Luckily, the Miners' Union knew well the nastiness of the likes of Bowers and Rockefeller. The Union had tents shipped in from the east and set up their own tent villages near the mines. But the coal companies were owned by John D Rockefeller with Bowers calling the shots. And it was God-fearing Bowers who called the shots on the tent village of Ludlow on Easter weekend in 1914.

(MOTHER JONES crosses the stage and gets right in BOWERS' face.)

MOTHER JONES

Tell the people about how you arranged to machine gun the tents of Ludlow, Mr. Bowers. Tell the people how your goons -- your mine guards and the US military slaughtered women, children, babies and men in order to maintain the wonders of capitalism you claim we have. Tell the truth, Bowers!

BOWERS

(to the audience)

Mrs. Jones likes to be called Mother. I call her a disgrace to American women and a threat to our system of life. The incident at Ludlow was a sad moment in the history of the American working man. I say "American" but few of the rebellious workers were

American. They were gangsters from the Balkans and misfit Italians armed with rifles, all willing to kill honest workers who crossed their strike lines. We had no recourse but to keep the mines open and hire brave men who were willing to work at the risk of confronting the hoodlums under the protection of outside agitators like Mrs. Jones.

MOTHER JONES

Listen to him. He spills hate for the very men willing to go into the unsafe bowels of wet, cold mines to extract coal for the Rockefeller steel mills and that great capitalistic system of which Mr. Bowers is so proud. The men asked for an eight hour day, better pay and safer working conditions. Hundreds had died in mine accidents -- accidents that Mr. Bowers could have helped prevent. So he hired scabs to work the mines, joined hands with the Colorado militia and sent soldiers into the tent colony with torches. Ask Mary Petrucci where her three little children are now, Mr. Bowers. I'm sure you don't know or care. After all, Petrucci sounds Italian and her husband was just one of the misfits and gangsters that Bowers had working for him and John D. Mrs. Petrucci somehow survived, but her children all died from the fires torched by your boot-licking soldiers. You can't ask the four women and eleven children -- all with foreign sounding names -- what happened, because they were burned to death by your gun-wielding goons. But that is what soldiering is all about, right, Mr. Bowers?

BOWERS

(trying to reassure the audience)

Mrs. Jones is off on another of her rants. Fires did occur and unfortunately, people did die. But I believe it was more accidental than intentional. This is what I wired from Denver to Mr. Rockefeller on April 14, 1914:

(BOWERS clears his throat, withdraws a small piece of paper from his inside breast pocket, unfolds it, and reads.)

BOWERS

(reading)

"Following withdrawal of troops by order of the Governor, an unprovoked attack upon small force of militia yesterday by 200 strikers forced fight resulting in probable loss of ten or fifteen strikers, only one militia man killed. Ludlow tent colony totally destroyed by burning 200 tents, generally followed by explosions showing ammunition and dynamite stored in them."

REPORTER

But what about the women and children? Your note doesn't mention them.

MOTHER JONES

I tried to get to the miners but Bowers had me arrested and put in a stinking Colorado prison. When I was released, I went directly to Washington to testify on behalf of the miners who wanted an open shop, a condition that would allow them to participate in the movement to improve their working conditions and get a small piece of the huge pie going to those who own the mines. But John D Rockefeller Jr. beat me to it. His

testimony came before mine. It was exactly what the barons of capitalism wanted to hear – since the Senators were paid off by the barons. Rockefeller told the Congressional investigators that he would lose his entire fortune before recognizing organized labor.

BOWERS

Mother Jones fits well into the riffraff she defended. I informed the Wilson administration of the true condition of the miners. They had good working conditions, were well paid and happy to have work to support their families -- until Mrs. Jones and other anarchists used guns and threat of strike upon our mostly non-union miners.

MOTHER JONES

(directly to BOWERS)

That's bull and you know it. You've been wallowing in it since your boyhood drover days and your idea of truth isn't worth two bits. President Wilson urged you to negotiate with the miners and you, Bowers, told the President that the mines were not owned by the federal government and that you were the voice of the owner, John D Rockefeller Jr.

BOWERS

I don't deny that Mr. Rockefeller gave me complete authority over the workers and the mines – in fact, I'm proud of it. His actual words to me in the struggle were: "We are with you to the end."

MOTHER JONES

The end is near, Mr. Bowers! Your goons with guns won't stop miners who seek justice. They need to support their loved ones. The Ludlow massacre should have sent a message to you, the Rockefellers and their greedy ilk. The message is that workers would rather die fighting for their families than die in death-trap mines producing more wealth for the rich. It means that the whole nation is on the verge of revolution.

BOWERS

Those are more of Mrs. Jones's dreams. There will be no revolution. In fact, President Wilson agreed with us and sent federal troops into Colorado after the Ludlow incident. Miners were sent back to work and reason prevailed. No negotiations, no raise in pay and the Federal Government enforced a ban on strikes. Our company was very pleased with Mr. Wilson's arrangement.

MOTHER JONES

For now, Mr. Bowers. For now.

(Lights dim, BOWERS, MOTHER JONES, and the REPORTER exit, and Woody Guthrie's "Ludlow Massacre" is played behind a Howard Zinn commentary. Stage right lights come up, illuminating BEN SALMON sitting next to – but not behind -- his prison bars.)

SALMON

I followed the events before, during and after the Ludlow massacre. It was a front page story, not just in the Denver Post, but all over the country. Mother Jones was an inspiration. I guess there's something about the Irish that makes them revolutionaries for justice. Mother Jones, born in Ireland, had to leave because of British violence that included a vicious occupation of her country for hundreds of years. The Brits stripped the little country of its timber and when famine struck in the 1840's, the Brits continued to send Irish-produced food back to the United Kingdom. Mother Jones and her family, like my own father and mother, fled to Canada to survive.

(SALMON gets up and begins to walk around.)

But Mother Jones suffered more than the Salmons. Her husband and children were wiped out by yellow fever in Memphis in 1867 and then just a few years later in Chicago, as she was getting her life together again, her sewing business and home were destroyed by the great Chicago fire of 1871. Mother Jones taught me to stand up to the powers, to continue to fight for the working man, to organize, to demand and to expect difficult times. Some newspapers, corporate and political leaders called her the most dangerous woman in America. Such newspapers and magazines were of course, tools of the rich. Their comfort zone was threatened by the attention Mother was bringing to the plight of the working class. So, they carried smear stories of Mary Harris Jones, even depicting her as a Madam in a brothel.

Mother was a Catholic but not a click-your-heels-to-the hierarchy Catholic. Mother Jones knew where the power of the church was and it wasn't with the working people. I attended a workers' rally given my Mother Jones after miners were told by their Catholic pastor to go back to work. Why? Because man was made for work and God gave the mine owners the right and the means to create work so families could survive. He told the men that the real goal in life was to work to achieve everlasting happiness after we leave this earth. After Mass, Mother Jones had a rally in a field across from the church. She told the men not to pay attention to the Sky Pilots but to struggle for a little bit of heaven here on earth. She reminded the men to "pray for the dead but fight like hell for the living."

But even Mother Jones caved in to the powers when Wilson called for war. She and most other Irish Catholics felt they had to prove their Americanism, had to be patriotic. One of every three soldiers was a Catholic. At least that's what they identified themselves as-- and 16,000 Catholics were slaughtered on European soil--for the good of democracy, don't you know? Thousands more are in hospitals or dying at home from poison gas or loss of limbs. And then there's me. First I was sentenced to death for not killing, and later, on a reduced 25 year sentence, I was sent to St Elizabeth's lunatic asylum in Washington DC -- a Catholic hospital for crazy Catholics.

(SALMON returns to his chair, stage right, next to his barred door.)

This is the 11th incarceration institution I've been in since my arrest in January of 1918. Now, over two years later after shuffling in irons from jails to stockades to prisons, I'm where all good conscientious objectors to government sponsored killing should be -- in a nut house. I've been in solitary confinement for so long that this place is almost swell. I can go to Mass each Sunday. I'm amused at the sermons preached. The priest, good soul that he is, assumes we're all crazy so he speaks down to us. I've tried to talk to him after Mass on a couple of occasions. He told me he knows of my case and gave me a nice little smile and a friendly paternal pat on the shoulder. It seems he knows I'm a different sort. He deals mainly with shell-shocked Army survivors.

The election of 1920 is soon to happen but I can't cast a ballot. If I could it would be for Eugene Debs -- he's running for President on the Socialist Party ticket even though he's in prison. It would be good to hear his story.

(Lights fade on BEN SALMON. Lights up center stage; enter EUGENE DEBS, wearing prison garb.)

DEBS

Eugene Debs here. Yes, I know about Ben Salmon's case. Who doesn't? The front pages tell of his forced-feeding and his long hunger strike. To me he's a hero, but to many he's a traitor, a slacker, a coward with a yellow stripe running up his back -- or just some kind of nut.

I also know the treachery of types like Lamont Montgomery Bowers and his Rockefeller bosses. I'll take the moral reasoning and the courage of conscience of Ben Salmon any day. Maybe I should have taken on Ben as my running mate. I expect to do quite well at the polls considering the circumstances. I'm on the ballot for President so we'll see just how the American people respond to a guy who was silenced by the powers. If Ben and I can generate so much interest that the profiteers' system is endangered, then our imprisonment will continue for some time.

As you may know, I've been very critical of not just Wilson's war government, but all Democrats and Republicans. No difference between them. What Ben Salmon said about Wilson could be said of any of the whole lot of them -- Taft, Wilson, Roosevelt. They're all bombastic supporters of the war profiteer system.

(RE-ENTER REPORTER)

REPORTER

Mr. Debs, what do you say to the fact that my newspaper, the Denver Post and most other respected newspapers in the nation like the Wall St Journal, The New York Times and Chicago Tribune all oppose your socialist plans for the United States?

DEBS

I've run for President before -- always as a Socialist, a candidate to speak for the people. I know very well that most people read the capitalist papers and take their lies for gospel truth. A good socialist knows how to read these capitalist papers and to believe exactly the opposite of what the papers say. I'm a realist. I won't win but I expect to prick the

conscience of America. Just imagine if I was able to poll a million or so votes while wearing this convict uniform? I think I can pull that off.

REPORTER

But Mr. Debs if you and people like Ben Salmon are not in tune with the people, how can you lead? How can people like you and Salmon, so different in religious ways learn that the culture just doesn't agree with your take on war and peace and distribution of wealth?

DEBS

Ben Salmon and I have a lot in common, but we have our differences too. I'm not religious like Ben. But he's a Single Tax Socialist and religion and socialism go hand in hand. Jesus was a Socialist -- that should be good enough for Ben Salmon.

They may put young men like Salmon in jail but they can not put the Socialist movement in jail. The bars may separate their bodies but the souls of those they jail are alive and active. Ben is simply standing erect and seeking to pave the way to better conditions for mankind. I like to think I'm doing the same.

REPORTER

Mr. Debs, you and Salmon are in prison because you broke the law. Don't you respect the laws of our nation? Some say men like you and Salmon are cowards, hiding in jail so you won't have to go to war.

DEBS

I'm in prison because I told the truth. I challenged the system that takes young men from their families, teaches them to kill their fellow man with guns, with cannon, with gas, even to bomb people from the air -- all supposedly for democracy.

In a speech to my brothers and sisters of Socialism in Canton, Ohio in June of 1918, I denounced the entry of our country into another capitalist war. I knew that speaking one's mind in exercising the constitutional right of free speech was a dangerous act. Like Ben, I'm a thousand times more willing to be a free soul in jail than a self-serving coward in the streets. If it had not been for men and women who in the past have had the moral courage to go to jail, we would still be in jungles.

REPORTER

Mr. Debs, you are a citizen of the United States so why not just follow the rules of our Federal Government? The courts have ruled against you, aren't you just thumbing your nose at our system of government that protects our democracy?

DEBS

Federal courts are a farce. Who appoints federal judges? The people? Guess again!

In all the history of this country, the working class has never named a federal judge. Every one of the federal judges holds his tenure through the influence and power of corporate capital. The corporations dictate their appointment and when those judges go to the bench they go to serve the corporations, not the people.

Recently, these federal judges ruled the child labor law unconstitutional. A law that we worked to achieve for decades! Yet, the corporate lawyers who are known as the Supreme Court of the United States wiped that law from the statute books. This is an example of our so-called democracy that continues to grind the flesh and blood and bones of little children into profits for Wall Street.

REPORTER

Mr. Debs, my editors asked me to ask you why you have become a traitor to our national cause—our war on the Kaiser. Do you consider yourself one who lacks patriotism?

DEBS

I was judged to be a traitor because I told the truth. For telling people in Canton, Ohio that all wars are for conquest and plunder and the feudal lords of Wall Street are no different than those barons of the Middle Ages who increased their power and wealth by using miserable serfs to burn and kill. The serfs had been taught to revere their masters -- to believe that when their masters declared war upon one another it was their patriotic duty to cut throats for the profit and glory of their feudal lord.

That's war in a nutshell. The master class has always declared the wars; the subject class has always fought the battles. The subject class have been trained that it is one's patriotic duty to slaughter on command. But in all history the people have never declared a war.

Yours is not to reason why; yours but to do or die.

(Lights off DEBS and REPORTER and up on SALMON, still sitting beside his prison window.)

SALMON

Eugene Debs may not be a very religious man but he's Christ-like in his love and respect for his fellow man. In that same speech that sent him to prison, he noted that Jesus was an agitator who was accused as being a false teacher and that he was stirring up the people. The ruling knaves had him jailed, tortured and killed as an enemy of the state. Debs doesn't preach salvation, and miracles are not on his agenda. He says things that threaten the power brokers and, like Jesus, he's become an enemy of the state for inciting people to think.

Jesus was opposed to violence! He was an advocate of the poor, the sick and the dying. He was not patriotic; he was people-centered, not state-centered. Don't you think that Catholic Church leaders in Germany support the same Just War principles as the Catholic Church leaders in the United States? Doesn't it stand to reason that the war itself is wrong?

(Lights up stage left, revealing SISTER ELIZABETH SALMON sitting in her chair.)

SISTER ELIZABETH SALMON

My father was well aware of the growing war support by leading Catholic hierarchy. As early as 1915, Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore openly supported the League to Enforce Peace. The League said it did not want war but would go to war if necessary. The Baltimore Sun questioned if “anywhere in the world-wide territory in which his Church has raised the cross can there be found one who touches humanity at so many points as Cardinal Gibbons? The Cardinal exercises influence among persons of every class and condition, believers and unbelievers.”

There was good reason for the respect given to Cardinal Gibbons. He had a gentle and kindly manner and was perceived to have sound judgment. He loved people and embraced all his fellow American citizens.

So, when in 1916 Cardinal Gibbons supported universal military service, not just Catholics listened. Gibbons said that military discipline would help develop young men's character and improve their physical condition. Ex-President Theodore Roosevelt said of Cardinal Gibbons in 1917: “Taking your life as a whole, I think you now occupy the position of being the most respected, and venerated, and useful citizen of our country.”

Cardinal Gibbons lived a short distance from Washington, DC but never visited my father. If he had, their meeting might have gone something like this.

(SISTER ELIZABETH extends her hand toward BEN at stage right. As she does so, her lights fade out and his come up. Now there is a second chair sitting by the prison window. Enter CARDINAL GIBBONS, wearing red vestments and a red beanie on his head.)

SALMON

(falling to his knees in shock)

Cardinal Gibbons!

CARDINAL GIBBONS

No, no, dear boy, get up. I came to bless you, but I also want to say that I pity you and I seek to understand. You had a chance to serve your country with dignity and patriotism, but you chose instead to leave your family for prison. The newspapers are full of stories about the way you've been forced-fed with milk for many months -- the tube shoved

down your esophagus, your nose pinched to force you not to reject the nourishment. All this is disconcerting -- but Mr. Salmon, you could have cooperated. Shortly after your incarceration, the Army noted that you had excellent office skills to use. You were offered the rank of Sergeant and you could have had your own office staff, far removed from a war zone. But you refused that and left your family in a state of shock. Letting one's family down is not a very Christian act.

SALMON

I very much respect Catholic priests and I must say I'm delighted to have the opportunity to speak to the most powerful Roman Catholic leader in the Western Hemisphere. Thank you, Cardinal Gibbons, for coming to see me. May I hold off on your criticisms of why I've done what I've done, and instead ask your opinion of some issues of peace and justice and the role of the Catholic Church? I've been troubled by what I've been reading in the Catholic Encyclopedia made available here at St Elizabeth Insane Asylum. I relish the opportunity to have you clarify not just what is said in the encyclopedia but also what you and other Catholic clerics have been saying about the Great War, and war in general?

CARDINAL GIBBONS

My dear Mr. Salmon, I am not a supporter of war. My ministry has been of peace and love of my fellow man. This most recent war was different, though, Mr. Salmon. You must remember how I worked for peace. I did everything I could to prevent war. Even when the *Lusitania* was sunk by the Germans in May of 1915 and we lost 128 American citizens, I opposed those who called for war. I expressed sorrow for the families and prayed for President Wilson. I called for prudence, for popular sentiment is not a standard to be followed too hastily.

SALMON

So you waited a couple of years before giving your blessing to American troops trained to destroy and kill.

CARDINAL GIBBONS

Mr. Salmon, consider what did happen two years later. The Germans declared unrestricted submarine warfare and in March of 1917 three American ships homeward-bound were attacked without warning and sunk by German submarines. President Wilson called for war some days later and I rose to the occasion to support our President and our country. I said that in the present emergency it behooves every American citizen to do his duty, and to uphold the hands of the President and the Legislative department in the solemn obligations that confront us. The primary duty of a citizen is loyalty to country. This loyalty is manifested more by acts than by words -- by solemn service rather than an empty declaration. It is exhibited by an absolute and unreserved obedience to his country's call.

SALMON

So, Cardinal, you were saying that when it comes to obedience, Christians should value the flag over the cross?

CARDINAL GIBBONS

Please don't put words in my mouth, Mr. Salmon. I did not say that. I was speaking to the duty of citizens to their leaders. Render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. In this instance the duty of Americans was to the emergency proclaimed by their leader, President Wilson.

SALMON

But weren't your Cardinal colleagues in Germany committed as well, to tell their flock the same message you extended to Americans – to obey your government, even if it means murdering your fellow man?

CARDINAL GIBBONS

Mr. Salmon, you seem to overlook the difference between a war and what we define as Just War. Our war against Germany was not one of conquest and power but of the need to come to the aid of those unjustly overrun by the forces of the Kaiser.

SALMON

Cardinal Gibbons, I've had the opportunity to read the curriculum of a leading Catholic Jesuit institution, Boston College. I copied word for word their teaching of war, capital punishment and self-defense. Curiously, the teachings of Jesus Christ were conspicuous by their absence. How do you explain that, Your Eminence?

CARDINAL GIBBONS

Catholic tradition of Just War is based in the solid teaching of our revered Saints, Ambrose, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. They were realists. They set down a series of conditions that would allow Christians to engage in war. I'm sure you know this, Mr. Salmon. And I can't accept that any Jesuit institution would not teach the rules of war.

SALMON

Let me see if I understand what you are saying, Cardinal. We should accept not what Christ taught, but rather what Ambrose, Augustine and Aquinas taught?

CARDINAL GIBBONS

Once again, Mr. Salmon, you twist what I said. You are an absolutist and real life is not one of absolutes. There are exceptions to consider in life and unfortunately, war is one of those. There comes a time to defend one's family, to defend one's land and resources, and therefore Church fathers set rules of engagement that would be used only in extreme circumstances.

SALMON

Excuse me, Your Eminence, but isn't the basic rule of Christ to overcome evil with good?

CARDINAL GIBBONS

There are times when the evil is so extreme that extreme measures must be taken to overcome evil. As difficult as loss of life may be, we need to consider damage inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations. Surely, Mr. Salmon, you had to be aware of what the Kaiser's Army did to the people of Belgium? Torture, destruction, death in an overwhelming display of force.

SALMON

Yes, of course, I did read much of that and all of that came by way of the British and French news services. The German Press was blocked out, which is too bad, because I would have been interested to read their account. Your Eminence, do you know our Federal Government has hidden many acts of torture? Do you know of what we did to the Filipino and Dominican people? Did you learn about our method of water torture? Or tourniquet torture? Or slow burning to extract information of our so-called enemies of the occupation? Or Catholic Priests placed in dungeons for protesting these cruel acts perpetrated by American soldiers? All this happened long before the German nastiness in Belgium. Did you wage protests against these United States actions? Or are they excusable under the Just War principles of the Church?

CARDINAL GIBBONS

I knew none of this at the time, but some disturbing information has leaked out. I admire your concern. Mr. Salmon. If these claims are true, of course, they are unjust and those responsible must be punished.

SALMON

But the Great War that ended in 1918 was Just?

CARDINAL GIBBONS

Yes, for the Americans and British and French. You need to understand, Mr. Salmon, that the Just War principles outlined in Catholic Catechism stipulates that the use of arms must not produce evils and disorders greater than the evil to be eliminated

SALMON

So, we produce weapons to eliminate potential enemies?

CARDINAL GIBBONS

That is precisely the point, Mr. Salmon.

SALMON

War profiteers of every nation must love this Just War principle. One nation sees another nation increasing their war armaments -- so naturally, greater production of guns, bullets, ships, tanks, planes and other materials of war make some people very rich.

CARDINAL GIBBONS

But you miss the point, Mr. Salmon, the evil of the Kaiser was overcome by the good of the Western Powers. Justice did prevail. Lives were saved, peace has followed.

SALMON

Excuse me, Your Eminence, but only two years have passed and 14 different wars in Europe are in progress. A massive civil war, resulting from the Great War is being waged now in Russia.

CARDINAL GIBBONS

Yes, a war of those who are defending God and the atheistic Bolsheviks -- Godless Communists of Lenin and his ilk. I pray for the White Russians.

SALMON

Your Eminence, have you ever known a country that was attacked, bombed, decimated, yet said their attackers were justified?

CARDINAL GIBBONS

Of course not, Mr. Salmon, but once again you are deviating from the central argument of the Just War theory. True, Christ taught us to not use violence but to turn the other cheek. In Matthew 5/9, Jesus says: "If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other side." And in the Beatitudes, it is said: "Blessed are the peacemakers." From these verses, I believe you and some few others conclude that Christianity is a pacifist religion and that violence is never permitted. Yet, in Luke, 22:36, Jesus says "let him who has no sword sell his mantle and buy one." And when one apostle showed him two swords he had, Jesus said "That's enough!"

SALMON

I'm surprised you don't see the literal versus the figurative meaning of that passage, Your Eminence. Jesus was disgusted with their belief that they needed weapons to protect themselves. He said "that's enough" in disgust. Surely he didn't mean two swords were enough to go to war or challenge the Romans. Jesus never told anyone to use violence. He did just the opposite. He told his followers to do good to combat evil. He rebuked Peter for using the sword. He clearly stated that those who live by the sword will die by the sword. Jesus could not be clearer on his rejection of violence. Your Eminence, I have a lot of time to research our early Fathers of the Church. Have you ever read Tertullian?

CARDINAL GIBBONS

I believe I have heard of him. What should I know, my dear man?

SALMON

Tertullian, a leading Church Monastic and writer of the 3rd century, discussed the violent act in which Peter cut off an ear of the Roman soldier. Tertullian said that Jesus disarmed every soldier when he said "Put down the sword!" Your Eminence, it seems that you do not subscribe to this principle of putting down the sword. Instead, you search for loopholes to override that admonition of Jesus in the New Testament, and you find them, thanks to Saints Ambrose, Augustine and Aquinas.

CARDINAL GIBBONS

They were all leading Church fathers and the Church made them Saints.

SALMON

True, but that was centuries before the long and exhaustive research that must be done today to confirm a canonization of a Saint. Augustine's Just War principles made the Church hierarchy feel comfortable about supporting medieval conflicts. I think it's likely that if his support of war was truly studied today, Augustine would be shown to be out of synch with Christ's rejection of war.

CARDINAL GIBBONS

I came here to bless you, Mr. Salmon, but instead I feel you have blessed me. I admire your intelligence and I'm quite impressed with your intense study of scripture and your profound understandings of the nonviolent teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. I believe I've been converted to the nonviolence of Christ by an eighth-grade Catholic school graduate. I plan on starting a major reform in our seminaries and all Catholic schools to emphasis Catholic Social Teaching and the absolute nonviolent teaching of Christ you so clearly understand.

(CARDINAL GIBBONS has SALMON kneel.)

CARDINAL GIBBONS

(blessing SALMON)

In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.

(Lights off SALMON as he continues to kneel. GIBBONS goes to the left center edge of the stage, smiles and winks at the audience, and removes his red beanie.)

CARDINAL GIBBONS

The man is a pleasant sort but there's no denying this institution is where he needs to be.

(GIBBONS removes his red vestment and reveals a T Shirt with the caption: Baltimore Chapter-- Knights of Columbus. He walks offstage. When lights come back up, they reveal BEN SALMON once again typing next to his prison window. He stops typing and walks to center stage.)

SALMON

(cheerfully)

Well, the war to end all wars came to an end on November 11, 1918. 1919 rolled on and I continued to fight the system. By 1920 I heard through the grapevine that things were beginning to liven up in the world beyond these prison walls. It all sounds pretty crazy, but hey, I'm the last war objector left in federal prison — what do I know about dancing?

(Play programmed visuals and audio of the Roaring 20'S Dance Craze. SALMON returns to his typing. Lights come up on the

opposite side of the stage, again highlighting SISTER ELIZABETH SALMON sitting in her chair.)

SISTER ELIZABETH SALMON

The American Civil Liberties Union was founded in Washington in 1920, and it was no coincidence that one of the first acts of the fledgling organization was to secure the release of Ben Salmon the day after Thanksgiving that same year.

(A STAGEHAND comes out and rolls SALMON's barred prison door offstage. SALMON smiles at him gratefully but continues typing as the lights on his side of the stage fade out.)

SISTER ELIZABETH SALMON

The torture my father endured in Federal Prison had an adverse effect on his health. He wasn't welcome in his home town of Denver where he was known as a "Slacker," a coward who wouldn't support his country. So he went to Chicago and found work there. My mother and brother Charles left Denver to join my father. My sister Margaret was born in 1923 and I was born in 1925. After my Dad died in 1932, my mother took us back to Denver.

It's been 90 years since my father fought the system and little has changed. The torture afflicted by the government on people at home and abroad is still going on. We just got rid of a President and Vice President who not only waged war to make money but smiled through it all. Now, they're enjoying their retirement as un-prosecuted war criminals.

Our major foreign exports are now war materials. We make the best killing machines of any nation. General Electric, Boeing, Lockheed Martin and Halliburton are joined by many other parasites thriving on American militarism. As least there was an attempt at honesty back in my father's time. War manufacturing parasites then worked for the Department of War. Now we mask our aggression and call it the Department of Defense -- as if it were somebody else's fault.

And Catholic Bishops? Well, they still protect the criminal profiteers and their government partners. When I was serving the poor in the Philippines, Cardinal Spellman of New York used to pass through on his way to Vietnam to bless the troops, tanks and bombers. The silence of Catholic Bishops on war is understandable. Pastors around the nation call for weekly prayer for our troops who are out to kill their fellow men, women and children. Bishops of the 21st century still cling to the Just War Theory of the Middle Ages. These same Bishops keep secret the crimes perpetrated against children in their own countries by their own priests and Bishops.

But what about women like me? I've always wanted to be a priest but as a woman, I don't have the physical qualifications. Mind, heart and soul are discounted by the males in power. A Maryknoll priest friend of mine was recently excommunicated because he supports the idea of women becoming Catholic priests. I'm 85 years old now. I'd like to think that the Church I have loved, and the mission to help others, will continue in others

younger and stronger than I. But honestly, I don't foresee much change in the established Church. Can a Church founded on love and nonviolence but shrouded in secrecy and power continue to exist?

What do you think?

The End

(Play Roaring Twenties Dance Craze music as lights come up. Life does go on....)

Followed by open questions and discussion based on the audience's reactions to the content presented.

SOURCE NOTES

It should be noted that the content is very close to the actual words spoken and/or written by the characters portrayed. Sister Elizabeth Salmon provided over 200 pages of her father's writings, written while he was committed at St Elizabeth's Asylum in Washington, DC in 1920.

The story of Lamont Montgomery Bowers was obtained from his archives at Binghamton University in Binghamton, NY.

The *Writings of Eugene V. Debs* came from Red & Black Publishers of St Petersburg, FL. This is a collection of speeches, pamphlets and writings including the speech that led to his arrest and imprisonment.

There are many biographies of Mary Harris Jones (Mother Jones). The one most helpful was *The Most Dangerous Woman in America* by Elliott Gorn.

The Life of James Cardinal Gibbons by John Tracy Ellis was very helpful in tracing the position of Gibbons before and during the Great War.

Blood Passion: The Ludlow Massacre – Class War in the American West by Scott Martelle was the best book found on this little-known but significant historical event. The first books to draw my attention to Ben Salmon were *Plowing My Own Furrow* by Howard W Moore. Moore was a prison-mate of Ben Salmon. Moore wrote the book when he was 95. A very good piece by an agnostic opposed to war on basic humanitarian principles.

Following the reading of Moore's book back in the 1980's, I came across the work of Torin R. T. Finney—*Unsung Hero of The Great War*. A terrific source and the first real study of Ben Salmon. Finney, now a teacher in California, was a student of Gordon Zahn at Boston University. Zahn led Finney to Salmon and Finney did amazing research and very good writing to publish *Unsung Hero of the Great War*. (Go to Amazon to find a used copy. It really should be published in paper back for wider reading.)

William Shannon's *The American Irish*, has good background material for the political and religious movement of the Irish who worked to be accepted by the dominant Anglo-Saxon Protestant powers in corporate and political America.

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