

On Pilgrimage - July/August 1972

Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, July-August 1972, 1, 2, 6, 8.

Summary: Reports that the Internal Revenue Service, convinced of their religious convictions, has absolved them of back taxes and penalties. Describes the trees growing in the neighborhood and repeats the idea of the sacrament of the present moment. (DDLW #523).

Dear fellow workers in Christ,

Good news first! On July 11th we received absolution from the U.S. Government in relation to all our tax troubles. In the May **Catholic Worker** this year we told of the notice we had received—that we owed the government nearly \$300,000 in back income taxes which included penalties for “late filing and negligence.” The examining officer of the Manhattan District had arrived at these figures through the reports we had obediently made to Albany on our appeals for funds, which we send out once or twice a year. We accept this compromise with our local state because we are decentralists, personalists, anarchists (in addition to being pacifists). When we first thought about Federal income taxes, most of which go for war or “defense,” we simplistically considered ourselves exempt because we had no income; no salaries are paid at the Catholic Worker, nor ever have been since we started in 1933. I myself have been questioned because of my writings, and lecture fees which were not really fees but offerings made to the work which covered all expenses of travelling and supported the work besides. A crowd of people living together as we do, in houses of hospitality, has to give something of an account to each other as to how well we are living up to our profession of voluntary poverty. We are always bound to have healthy guilt feelings about that, and keep trying to do better. Certainly a number of us do work on the side to provide what we need for books or rent on cheap apartments in the neighborhood, since our house at 36 East First Street is always so crowded.

But with the growing tax resistance throughout the United States, the government has become concerned. Telephone calls and official visits made us realize that trouble was impending. And we have been having it and have reported on it in both the May and June issues of our paper.

Now we are happy to report the outcome. In a conference in late June with William T. Hunter, litigation attorney from the Department of Justice, one

of the Assistant Attorney Generals of the United States, we reached a verbal settlement couched in more human and satisfactory terms than the notice we later received.

“They” were willing to recognize our undoubtedly religious convictions in our conflict with the state, and were going to drop any proceedings against us. They had examined and looked into back issues of the **Catholic Worker**, and they had noted the support we had from the press (the **New York Times** news story and the editorials of the **Times** and the **New York Post**), and had come to this conclusion that ours was a religious conviction. They had come to the conclusion also that it was not necessary that the Federal Government seek for any other kind of a “conviction” against us.

The conference took place in a law office in Manhattan, 9:30 of a Monday morning. John Coster, our lawyer, Mr. Hunter and Ed Forand, Walter Kerell, Patrick Jordan, Ruth Collins and I attended. There were no hostilities expressed. As peacemakers we must have love and respect for each individual we come in contact with. Our struggle is with principalities and powers, not with Church or State. We cannot ever be too complacent about our own uncompromising **positions** because we know that in our own way we too make compromises. (For instance, in having a second-class mailing privilege from the government we accept a subsidy, just as Mr. Eastland does in Mississippi!)

It was Jesus who said that the worst enemies were those of our own household, and we are all part of this country, citizens of the United States and share in its guilt.

I think Mr. Hunter (our opponent) shared with us the conviction that you could not kill an idea, and that we would continue to express ourselves and try to live the Catholic Worker positions as best we could, no matter what steps were taken against us by government. To **resist** and to **survive**—these are growing convictions amongst the best of our youth, also. We see it in all our Catholic Worker groups. Harder for the aged and ill, but many of those among us have had a background of practice through the Depression, unemployment and war.

It was a good confrontation we had for those three or four hours with the lawyers. We left to celebrate with a lunch at the Automat before we returned to the office and work. Ed Forand, who half the time now prepares the soup for the “line” which is supposed to sit down to eat from ten to eleven thirty but somehow keeps on dribbling in all through the day, did not partake of our extravagance. He hastened off to a half-time job which enables him to pay the rent for an apartment across First Street.

Yes, we would survive, I thought to myself, even if the paper were eventually suppressed and we had to turn to leafleting, as we are doing now each Monday against the I.B.M. Wall-Street offices, trying to reach the consciences of all those participating by their daily work in the hideous and cowardly war we are waging in Vietnam.

And Landlords

Jan Adams, who is at present home visiting her family in Buffalo, has been in charge of putting out 6,000 leaflets every Monday, ably assisted by Steve and Martha and others. She has a story on it in this issue, and she has also written about the situation of tenant and landlord, a more than usual tragic account since it involves our fellow Catholics, even the Church itself, as a religious order of Sisters is the offender. Many of our young people have worked at Columbus Hospital.

In speaking of harassment of tenants, she did not mention that the landlord of the house where she lives, across the street from our St. Joseph's House, has harassed the tenants by turning on the heat, as has also happened in the house where Ed Forand lives, when the outdoor temperature was over ninety degrees. Happening in the night, one is driven to the streets to breathe.

First Street Column

With a number of our family here suffering summer colds, no one got down to writing the column which tells of the doings on First Street, which is a continuation of the columns **Mott Street**, **Chrystie Street**, etc. So I am incorporating it in my own column **On Pilgrimage**. I did indeed make three pilgrimages this summer, one a weekend to Oakridge, New Jersey, the Paulist novitiate which was turned over to Catholic Peace Groups for conferences all during July. I attended the PAX Conference there and rejoiced at seeing the large number of peace workers from the Washington D.C. Center for Creative Non-Violence with Fr. Ed Guinan in charge. Emmaus House workers and the Catholic Peace Fellowship assisted nobly. Monica Cornell had charge of the kitchen, her three children there with her, lots of other children besides. In fact quite a swarm from our Tivoli Farm also enjoyed this vacation.

My two other pilgrimages meant trips to Tivoli for a week and another week in Vermont with my daughter and the four children who are at home. Visitors are always coming and going there. Becky and her husband and baby Lara dashed up from Virginia for the July 4th holiday, and now Susie and her three-year-old Tanya are there. Is it really a farm? Well, not really. There are a bantam hen and a dozen chicks, and a mother duck and a dozen ducklings, a Siamese mother-cat and her three beautiful kittens (for sale but no buyers), couple of bedraggled old farm cats, four dogs, two steers and a heifer grazing on the hillside, being fattened for Eric and his friends (construction workers and meat eaters). But there is a big garden and lots of fresh vegetables, home-made bread, and milk from a neighboring farmer. I'll be going back for a visit during what New England calls the "color season."

In the City

The only livestock I glimpse now as I wake up mornings and glance down from my third-floor window to the roof of a factory, is a few very dirty white cats, and a couple of brindle ones. A black one has trespassed on this territory and there are occasional howlings (or is it really a concert I am hearing?). There is also an ailanthus tree which has grown up in our ten-foot-deep back yard which waves its frond-like beautiful green leaves with every slight breeze. A neighbor from Jersey has brought us in some more earth and some pachysandra, which is doing very well indeed. Paul has put in four ivy plants and two geraniums.

That factory which comes within ten feet of our house is one-story high and takes up what used to be four back yards of houses on First and Second Streets. Out of the few feet of what remains of one back yard on Second Street there is another taller ailanthus tree, a feast of green. On the roof of our own five-story building, someone a year ago left an old mattress and out of that piece of waste there have grown two more little ailanthus trees, almost two feet high now, and they will continue to grow, hopefully. "If that mattress is cotton," someone said, "it makes a mulch. Cotton is organic." As I look at these trees gratefully, I think of the delightful dialogue in **Uncle Vanya** between Sonya and Dr. Astrof about planting trees.

I must not forget the beautiful young ghinkgo tree which we purchased from the city last year, and which we planted in honor of Carmen Mathews, herself a great lover of the countryside (and of drama). She rescued us from a foreclosure when a first mortgage fell due and so has become part of this house on First Street, and of the bits of greenery back and front of it. The fact that prisoners on Riker's Island so I have been told, grow these trees which brighten our streets makes that tree especially dear to me. When I pass it, I make the sign of the cross on its bark, to encourage it to grow fast and strong. Maybe we can plant another this year in gratitude to God for saving us from the hands of the tax gatherers. Fr. McNabb, the French Dominican, said that when Jesus left his apostles, "Peter could go back to his nets, but Matthew could not go back to his tax gatherings."

The ghinkgo, according to my encyclopedia, is native to the Orient, and a living fossil, sole survival of a large group of trees from geologic times. Its form has not changed in millions of years. It is a sacred tree in China and planted near temples.

Sacrament of the Present Moment

I dwell on little things like this because Fr. Joseph McSorley, my first teacher in the faith, to whom I used to go in the large Paulist church near Lincoln Center, introduced me to this idea many years ago. I thought of it this morning when I looked out of the window, depressed by the increasing horror of the world today.

Last night I saw a film on television about the rock group, Rolling Stones, and their free concert at Altamont, California, some years ago, which ended in the knifing of one of the audience which in its hysteria and frenzy seemed to me a vision of damned souls in hell.

Bits of old proverbs come to mind, about “chickens coming home to roost.” A recent comment in the **New Yorker** reads, “There are all kinds of factories, and the American machine in Vietnam is a death factory. We are its workers and its consumers, our ships and planes its moving parts, and the Vietnamese its raw materials. In this new guise the war has become so much a part of our lives that we scarcely notice it any longer. In a way, those who claim that the United States is no longer active in Vietnam are right. The war cannot now be seen merely as something we are doing; it is what we are.”

Dear God, let us not accept that judgement, that this is what we are. Enlighten our minds, inflame our hearts with the desire to change—with the hope and faith that we all can change. Take away our hearts of stone and give us hearts of flesh.

And even as I say this prayer, I recall a selection from Thoreau’s **Yankee in Canada**:

“It is important to preserve the mind’s chastity . . . Think of admitting the details of a single case of the criminal court into our thoughts, to stalk profanely through their very sanctum sanctorum for an hour, ay, for many hours! to make a very bar room of the mind’s inmost apartment, as if for so long the very dust of the street had occupied us—the very street itself, with all its travel, its bustle, and filth, had passed through our heart’s shrine. Would it not be an intellectual and moral suicide?”

Letter from the Internal Revenue Service:

From: District Director, Internal Revenue Service, Department of the Treasury,
PO Box 3100, Church St. Station, New York, N.Y., 10008

To: The Catholic Worker Movement, 36 East 1st Street, New York, N.Y. 10003

July 11, 1972

Gentlemen:

After examining your financial records and reviewing your activities for the above years, we find that you are not required to file annual returns for the years shown, and no further action is necessary regarding the proposals in our letter of January 17, 1972.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely yours,

District Director

Form L-259