

On Pilgrimage - February 1948

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Writing from her daughter's farm in West Virginia, comments on the cold and kid's play. Reports on her travels through the Southwest, Seattle, San Francisco, St. Louis, and Minnesota extolling the need for supporting the family and a return to the land. Distinguishes types of anarchism and the need for study. Wants more priests to have a vision of a new social order. (DDLW #464).

Berkeley Springs, W.Va.

To write this, I must sit in a cold upstairs bedroom in this old farmhouse twelve miles from the above-named town which numbers 1,500 inhabitants. Downstairs the babies are rampaging around and if order is heaven's first law, then it is not a heavenly scene below. But if order means first things first, then all is well because the two babies, having a tea party with some of my own good whole wheat bread and some of our neighbor's blackberry jam, have made a mess of themselves and the room. Susie waves her spoon wildly and the cocoa falls where it may. Becky is neat and tidy, but she has a taste for writing, and page after page of an old note book are covered with neatly lined scrawls and then tossed to the winds. It reminds me of a selfportrait I saw in the last number of the *Weekly Review* which Belloc's son-in-law edited, of Chesterton as a distributist, with everything tossed hither and yon.

More Snow

My daughter awaits her third baby—any moment now, and the weather keeps us anxious. Yesterday it was fourteen below zero. Two days before that a blizzard raged and the roads were covered so that we could not get to Sunday Mass. Last night it turned warm and there was the heavy sound of snow melting and sliding off the roof at all hours of the night. The neighbors predict more snow, but today the sky shows blue through the clouds and I look out of my window through the lacy branches of an old cherry tree to a wooded ridge that is a lavender blue in the distance. The beauty of the scene from the two windows, and the lovely sense of space around one makes up for the meager heat thrown out by the old oilstove at my side. Thanks to a wonderful woolen coat dress which my friend Catherine Temple of Portland, Oregon made for me for a Christmas present, I am quite comfortable. It has spacious pockets, in which Beckie is always hiding things from Susie, so I will dip into them now for my little note book and try to finish off my travelogue of the early part of the winter.

Penance

My last On Pilgrimage column giving a report of my travel, concluded with Houston. From there I went to San Antonio, and the bus was crowded that night so that I had to stand part of the way. (Such occasions are good practice for persecution. We pray every day for the “freedom and exaltation of holy Mother the Church” but meanwhile persecution rages in many countries and it is becoming a common thing to bear once more great sufferings for the cause of truth. I have read somewhere that one of the milder forms of torment is forcing the people under interrogation to stand in one place by the hour. And then of course there are the queues in England and other countries, not to speak of our own breadline waiting by the hour for soup and bread. As Irene Naughton said when she had to bathe one of our women who had come in drunk and vomitous, “Thank God we have handed to us a bit of penance once in a while, since we have little strength to do it ourselves.”)

Later on when I did get a seat it was beside a young Bohemian girl who was on her way to spend a long weekend on her mother’s farm. She was working in an office in Houston, had been a Wave during the war, and was wondering what she was doing in the city, working like a factory slave before a typewriter six days a week when she was longing for the land. “All I get is enough money to pay my board and room, lunches and buy my clothes,” she said. “And when I get home to my own room, I am too dogtired to get out, so I have lonely evenings.”

She loved the land and would like to stay on it. And I gathered that she had not met that kind of man who loved the land in her journey in the world.

I told her about the Grail school and told her to write to them; on her G.I. Bill of Rights, she would be able to pay for the year’s course there, and being a good Catholic, as all of her nationality were in that section of Texas, she would get a view of life as a Catholic that she had not had before. In general, in my travels I never find our Catholics questioning our capitalistic urban pattern of life.

State Help

One of the reasons for this column lengthening out is that I want to make so many comments. As to State aid, for instance. We of the Catholic Worker have never accepted help from city or state, and that have always tried to make a point of personal responsibility. Nevertheless, as the Holy Father has said, in times of crisis it is necessary for the State to give help and relief to the poor, to aid victims of famine, flood, pestilence or disaster, etc. Our present plight under our capitalistic industrialism is such a disaster that it is only with the help of the state that our young people are going to be able to get back on the land or get homes for their families. As a recent issue of *Life* magazine pointed out, nothing is done for the family except make a little allowance for them in regard to income tax. Peter said once that we should try to have that kind of

surroundings in village or country which make it easy for people to be good. As it is, the family is penalized, everything is made difficult for them, all industry is geared for profit, for producing luxury goods, rather than what people need, homes, food, clothing. Martin Paul, former leader of our Minneapolis House of Hospitality, former head of St. Isidores's farm in Minnesota, said that the only thing that was making it possible for him as a family man (he and his wife have two babies now) to get on the land, was the G. I. Bill of Rights, under which he had a loan, and income to keep living while he got started. It is a case of failure to help the family all around. Parents who are able to help, do not give their children the right start in the way of a trade, homes, a dowry; the church has not helped them (indeed, they have kept the families in the cities which is the graveyard of the family) and the state has only helped in the case of the returning soldier.

Farm Commune

For those interested in studying farming communes, the Missions of San Antonio, which was my next stop, are most interesting. Brother Raymund Witte, who is the historian of the National Catholic Rural Life movement, took me all over San Antonio to visit the missions, one of which has been restored in all its beauty. One is still an active parish though its buildings are falling down, surrounded by tiny Mexican homes and acres. These missions were made to house hundreds of families, besides storehouses, mills, sheepfolds, weaving rooms, and in the center, the beautiful parish church.

Outside the walls of the mission, the shack towns, the trailer camps are a sad commentary on life today.

Peter Maurin's vision of a farming commune reminds one of the agronomic university of early Ireland, the Franciscan missions of the Southwest, the Paraguay reductions of the Jesuits, the anarchist cities of Catalonia, and the cooperatives and communes of present day Palestine. (*Thieves in the Night*, by Arthur Koestler, gives a good picture of the latter.) All of them presuppose an authoritarian regime voluntarily accepted. All of them were and are combatted by the modern state, huge centralized power as it is. All of them were and are attempts to see God's will being done on earth as it is in Heaven.

Speaking of Anarchism

I wish people would not be so afraid of words, such as the word anarchist. I wish people would study more the early principles on which our country was founded. I wish they would really read and study and discuss as the Russian Jews do on the east side in the public squares and in the cafeterias, not to speak

of the way the communists do in their worker's schools and cell meetings and caucuses. And remember, these talkers also put in an eight-hour day at work at a machine. "There can be no revolution without a theory of revolution," Lenin said. To go on speaking of farming communes, or agronomic universities, as Peter used to like to call them, we are distressed to say that the type of people we have attracted to this idea has often been the anarchistic type in the wrong sense, those who submit to no authority, talk of property as community property when it concerns someone else and as private property when it concerns them and their families; who want to live as members of a religious order and yet as a family; to be priest and judge, and not a worker; to indoctrinate rather than to toil by the sweat of their brows; to live off the earnings of others, in a system which they excoriate. We do not deny that the family needs subsidy in this present social order. And there are many single ones in the Catholic Worker movement who are working at honorable jobs, who could be helping more the family men who are finding it almost impossible to make ends meet.

The New Order

In the coming crisis, of war and revolution, during the break-up of cities in case of atomic war, farming communes will be a necessity. The missionary priest all over the world is working along these lines now. If the priesthood studied distributism as a long-term movement and did not play two ends against the middle by endorsing the present capitalistic system, we would be ready for what the future would bring. Priests as well as laymen have bodies as well as souls; they live and work through their senses; our problems are their problems. Without good families there will not be a good clergy. The spiritual and the material cannot be divorced. Neither can they say, "there is no time for anything but love," (and is not that the words of an old sentimental popular song?) as one priest I know did and then proceeded very practically to have his church redecorated. Priests have a great opportunity to do these things because they are not "burdened with families," as the saying is. They have security, their daily living, so that they are not immediately burdened by bills for the most part. They are the vanguard who are the first to be persecuted, though often it is true they are persecuted for upholding the old order rather than working for the new.

And the Cold!

I must continue downstairs because now, the next day, it is eight above zero, and even in the living room one's feet are cold. The children are on top of me and to continue I must remember Jane Austen, who wrote in a crowded living room; or Cervantes, in a house full of women with no room of his own.

There are so many friends I would like to have seen on this trip, but it was the Alma Savage Lecture Bureau which had arranged my trip, and I had to go from engagement to engagement, skipping many cities I wanted to get to. I could not see Karl Her man of San Diego, or Ammon Hennacy of Phoenix, Arizona. If he had stayed in Albuquerque, where he had lived for some years, we could have had a visit, because I spent a day there with Fr. Hessler and Monsignor Garcia, his host, who keeps a veritable house of hospitality in his rectory. He entertained Claude McKay there for some time, and regular discussions were a feature in his living room in back of the church.

Catholic Action

It was there I attended my first authentic Catholic Action cell meeting which Fr. Hessler started, made up of a group of young Spanish-Americans. To write about this would take a whole article and certainly would demand more concentration than I can give it here. I still insist as I did in a former article on The Church and Work, that a clergy not only informed in the technique of Catholic Action, is necessary, but one with a vision of another social order than a Christianized Marxist socialist order which we are tending towards, upheld by the use of force.

A Brief Visit

I spent only a couple of days in Los Angeles where I spoke at the Immaculate Heart College on the latest Pulitzer Prize winner (which gave me an opportunity to talk about the Southern Agrarians as a group.) I spent a few days in San Francisco and Nevada City where I went on working on the Peter Maurin book.

In San Francisco I spent many stimulating hours with Dr. James Hagerty who teaches at St. Mary's College which is run by the Christian Brothers. (I spoke also at Old St. Mary's, the Paulist Church). Dr. Hagerty and some of his friends have study groups of five couples each, meeting at each others houses (this demands baby-sitters, and where are our single women in the apostolate to take this job?). They read and discuss during the course of a winter. *The Odyssey*, *Aristotle's Politics*, *Confessions of St. Augustine*, and the *Hound of Heaven*, ending with a Cana Conference. a day of recollection.

The bus trip from Nevada City to Portland was unutterably beautiful, travelling on a bright moonlight night, through state forests, past gleaming water falls, through a snow storm. I had no speaking engagement in Seattle, though all our old group got together for an evening meeting at St. Teresa's hotel, where I was the guest of Isabel MacRae, who kept the house going in Seattle during the war. Here again, most of the group are married and raising families.

Maryhouse

I made a long jump from Seattle to St. Paul, this time by train so as to make an engagement at St. Catherine's. (Some of the best literary criticism in the country is in "*Books Abounding*," a monthly sheet gotten out there). I stayed at Maryhouse for the night and had a brief visit with the dozen workers there, but did not have time to get out to their diminutive farm, twelve miles out of the city in Little Canada. Here is a cell of Christian Living, and a happy place it is. I got to St. Louis in time to spend a week of Advent in Monsignor Hellriegel's parish, where the life of the Church in its feasts and fasts is lived in all its fullness. There the whole congregation sings the Mass, and there is a schola made up for two score of school children, and there is a daily homily, and a reading of the epistle and gospel every day by one of the boys of the eighth grade. Never is there so royal a welcome as one gets at Monsignor Hellriegel's. There hospitality is practiced in all its joyfulness. From all over the country priests come to visit this parish which is half rural and half city (it is Baden just outside of St. Louis) and the only thing to be desired there is a large hospice for pilgrims who come to offer adoration, praise, thanksgiving and petition with all the whole souled fervor that man craves to express where he loves. Here is indeed a Church! And indeed a pastor!

Church

And here too are quotations I have come across recently showing two aspects of the Church. Newman wrote, "Religion without a Church is as unnatural as life without food or raiment." And Guardini, "The Church is the Cross on which Christ is crucified, and Christ cannot be separated from his Cross."