

On Pilgrimage - September 1963

Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, September 1963, 1, 2, 6, 8.

Summary: With a busy summer over, she ruminates about family and second generation Catholic Workers. Reproves those who advocate sex without responsibility but extols "sex in its right order." Keywords: abortion (DDLW #806).

How often in the spring I have thought exultantly to myself, "the winter is over and gone, the voice of the turtle dove is heard in our land." I forget then how wonderful are those first days in September when the summer is over and gone, with its conferences, its stream of visitors, vacationers, parents with children, students, the sick, the lame the halt and the blind – all energized by the warmth of summer to set out in search of something. But with September, right after Labor Day, things begin to settle down. I think, as I sit at this typewriter, that now, for the next month, or three weeks, after I have written this account of the last month or so, that soon I will be able to get at the stack of mail, two folders full, before it is time to write the next column, the next article.

Today I am at the beach house, finally vacant after being occupied by eight families, and this last week, by a flock of men attending the Labor Day conferences at the farm. Before coming down to the Island, Kathleen, Helene Marie and Susanne and I tackled the apartment in front of Marie's and mine – the one where the girls and women come and go, and which needed a thorough overhauling. It has been a great year for bugs! Marie says, "I never leave a crumb for them. Nor a drop of grease. If I see them come in under the door, I shoo them out." They were more hospitable in the front apartment!

At the farm there was more housekeeping to be done, Deane and Frank were baking huge batches of bread and delightful smells began to dominate over fish on Friday and the soap and disinfectant smells. Such physical labors leave one beautifully tired but numb in the head. I thanked God there were plenty of speakers. Besides audience participation was such that the meetings went on in the dining room which is also the library, music-room, living-room, and even occasionally sleeping-room, until after one-thirty in the morning. Millions of words, stimulating words. "It makes me to think!" Peter used to say. How he would have enjoyed it, or rather how he was enjoying it if he listens to us now and again, from his new life. "Life is changed, not taken away!" Month by month we have occasion to repeat these words to ourselves. This last month, my old friend Peggy's husband, Howard Conklin, died. May he rest in peace.

Fr. Joseph Kiely, friend of both the Conklins and the Peter Maurin farm family brought him great comfort before his death.

Tamar and Vermont

During the summer I had a week's visit with Tamar and the children in Vermont, and it was so cold that we had to have a fire morning and evening. I had a good drive to Burlington to bring Mary and Margaret home from Camp Tara where a priest and seminarians and young college students take care of scores of children during the summer months. After all the other children were gone, we had a get-together to discuss **The Catholic Worker** and the social order for about four hours, while the two little girls waited patiently on the porch or in the car. How angelic children are when they are away from their home! But making them wait that way made me think of the times their mother melted away in the bath tub, of an evening at the age of seven while I entertained priests and seminarians at our early headquarters on East Fifteenth street! Margaret at ten is a reader but Mary at twelve is more a do-er. When we left finally we went to the Bob Spencer's for the night in Jericho, Vermont where there was more talk. But the kids went to bed after we all had a short form of compline in Bob's study. There were four other visitors besides us three, but there is always room for one more at the old governor's mansion which Bob and Edith occupy and where he also has his offices. He is assistant to the President of St. Michael's College in Winooski Park this year, and Becky, Tamar's oldest, together with the Spencer's second oldest, is starting her freshman year at the University of Vermont in Burlington nearby. Becky is the first of the Hennessy children to be away from home, though the two oldest girls, Becky and Sue have worked the past two summers. The two boys, Eric and Nicky had vacations from home this year, Nicky on a farm south of Rutland, and Eric for a week with me on Staten Island where he and Jimmie Hughes renewed acquaintance. The two of them left for the Cardinal Cushing High School in West Newbury, Mass., a few days ago – their first year away from home too. Jim is starting high school and Eric is in his second year. Both are good students.

So now Tamar has only seven at home, and six of them in school. She herself is studying to pass her high school equivalency tests, so that she can prepare herself for working when the children are in school. Cathy is only three now. Tamar is interested in science especially, perhaps to work as a laboratory technician, and any advice on the subject from our widespread CW family will be appreciated. Also books that would be of help. Her address is Perkinsville, Vt.

More about Family

When I speak of Catholic Worker families, I mean all those who have worked with us and who married, and are raising children and are encountering all the

difficulties of supporting large families, and seeking to earn a living in our social order where automation has put so many out of work.

We have been seeing a lot of the second generation CW this summer, and even some of the third. For instance, of the Frank O'Donnell family, Damien, Martie, Peter, Michael, Tommy and Joe – I do not know whether they are in right order – five of them are working on the new Verrazano bridge. Two of them are my godchildren, but besides praying especially for them I pray for them all and I believe I will never look at one of our great bridges again without praying for them. They are a handsome lot, this second generation, and all married but one.

Then there is Elin Paulson, from the Upton Farm, and Monica Ribar whose mother and father helped with the house of hospitality in Cleveland with which Jack English, now a Trappist priest was associated, initiated by him I believe when he was in College.

Dorothy and Bill Gauchat, the story of whose work at Avon, Ohio with crippled children appeared last month in **The Sign** (a chapter from my book **Loaves and Fishes** was in the same number) visited us and later sent two of their daughters for a vacation which turned out to be for them just a change of work. They are as hard working as their mother and father, and I do not know how I could have done without them in cleaning up to get ready for the Labor Day week end at Peter Maurin Farm. Sue is just eighteen and Helen Marie nineteen and what a comfort they were! Their father started the first Cleveland house. Ed Lanvermeyer, second generation, from St. Louis Catholic Worker group also visited for a bit. His father came to our earliest week ends in '34 and I remember the conferences he attended were chiefly on the liturgy in our first summer place in Huguenot, Staten Island. The rented house we had there was suitable for weekend conferences and were organized by Tom Coddington. They were crowded every weekend. Cecily Coddington, is another second generation CW who visits us. Her mother, Dorothy Weston Coddington was the first associate editor to work with me. She is now in Switzerland, a publisher's representative.

Wide Range

When I look around and see the wide range of interests in the lives of former Catholic Workers, it makes me realize more deeply the function of the Catholic Worker, and that is to be, as Peter Maurin wished it to be, a kind of school for the clarification of thought. We try to keep the articles in the Catholic Worker reflecting this wide range of interests, and also of style. An article such as this column is sometimes a travelogue, an account of what others are doing throughout the country. For instance I regret very much that my new book, **Loaves and Fishes**, which will be out October ninth, does not contain the chapter on the South which I wrote, telling of my travels and contacts there, on my speaking trips. But some of the book had to be sacrificed to make room for the wonderful selections of photographs which illustrate it. It is too bad the cost,

\$4.95, is prohibitive for many students, but let us hope that parents will buy it, at their local book stores, or directly through Harper and Row, the publisher.

Peter Maurin always stressed the need for a new synthesis, recalling the synthesis at the time of St. Thomas Aquinas, whose preoccupation also was the Common Good. One of the first books Peter used to discourse on, was *The Thomistic Doctrine of the Common Good* and now our beloved Pope John, God rest him, also stressed the Common Good in his great encyclical *Pacem in Terris*.

So we try in each issue of our paper to bring our aspects of our secular life in poetry, literature, science, philosophy, sociology and even theology and when we get top heavy with pacifist articles I feel it my duty to write such a column as this, – news of the apostolate, of the family, reminders of books to read, and lectures to attend.

I can think for instance of articles I would like to write, if only there were more women to help at the Catholic Worker, women who can do housekeeping, taking care of shopping at the farm, planning meals, hospitality, laundry, secretarial work which means filing, typing, taking dictation and so on. There are but a few of us in town and country, however, compared to the number of men. While there is a population of twenty-five at the Peter Maurin Farm right now, only three are women, for instance, and they are Deane Mowrer who bakes and writes, and sees people. I write of this, meaning in it a most profound sense, that she will sit and talk with them, and discuss problems and take part as far as she can in not only discussion but agitation and demonstration.

There is also Peggy and Agnes both of whom contribute greatly to the common good and are beloved by all. In town there are more volunteers who come by the day, but women certainly have a fundamental desire for their own home, and we have right now no women taking care of hospitality for women, taking charge, I mean. There are individual women with us, a dozen among many men, but no one woman will be responsible as we have had in the past in a Julia Porcelli, Jane O'Donnell, or Beth Rogers. Without Marge Hughes who has her own family in one of the beach houses, we would not be able to carry out our summer work there, and indeed her hospitality extends throughout the year and in its warmth and generosity she sets an example to all of us.

All of this is a hint that women volunteers are needed. We do have volunteers who come as they think, for a good long stay and they see the reality and their illusions vanishing about voluntary poverty and manual labor, they leave after a day or so. Others have come for a day and remained for months to give days of hard work. Like Greta Mitchell, for instance.

Bede Griffiths

I hope this paper will reach those in the New York area so that they can hear Dom Bede Griffiths, O.S.B. who will lecture on *THE MEETING OF EAST*

AND WEST: The Church and Emergent Asia, on Wednesday, September 18, 8 p.m. at Carnegie International Center, 345 East 46th St. Admission one dollar and the whole staff of the CW is going to get there. Dom Bede's book, *The Golden String* is one of the best stories of conversion I have ever read. Many have read his articles in the *Commonweal* and know of his positive work for peace in starting an Ashram in India where there are now 18 monks.

I had so wanted to get to the 26th of July meeting this summer, the reception at the United Nations' Lounge which is held every year at the Cuban Mission to the United Nations celebrate what to them is their day of liberation. It is like our Fourth of July. But I was on retreat and since Father Casey had not been able to come to us for some years, I could not miss this opportunity when he did.

I wanted to go to give evidence of my conditional interest and respect for the attempts made in Cuba to build up a better society "where it is easier for men to be good," as Peter Maurin put it so simply. Also it was easier to stress our differences when one seeks for concordances. Peter Maurin used to say "Find the good and build on it."

Cuba and Sex

I am reminded some more of Cuba when I read an article last month in a pacifist paper entitled "Forget about Gandhi!"

The author writes about the "indigenous improvisatory character of Negro non-violence:" and about "the asceticism and puritanical practices of the Black Muslims with their bitterness and overtones of violence." But "in Birmingham the motto seems to be: Let's eat, drink and make love tonight, because tomorrow morning we will be in the white man's jail." One man told me with obvious glee, that when some of the imprisoned demonstrators were released from jail because friends or relations had posted bond for them, he heard one of them say: 'Don't worry; I'm just gonna take a bath and get some sugar from my honey. The I'll be right back in.'

"When the Committee for Non-violent Action" the writer continues, "organized an integrated peace walk through a portion of the South last year, it required all participants to take a pledge of celibacy and abstinence from alcoholic beverages for the duration of the project. But a pacifist who went South last month to take part in a Freedom Walk, and who fasted during his entire imprisonment, told me that the day before they went out to face almost certain brutality and arrest they had a gala party at which the whiskey flowed like water. 'Pacifism was never like this,' was his happy comment just before he set off for the South once more, thoroughly prepared to face whatever mortifications of the flesh lay in store for him but obviously feeling liberated by the realization that he would not be required to add his own mortifications and punishments to those imposed by his opponents."

There is a certain arrogance about this writer's attitude giving the white man's stereotyped picture of the Negro. And also evidence of his own belated adolescent retreat from the Protestant Puritanism of New England forebears. I am reminded when I hear these middle aged liberals sounding off on sexual and other fleshy freedoms, of some of the men of the same middle-class, middle-aged liberal background who used to hang around Greenwich Village probing into and inciting the young people about them, to a free sex life as though hoping youth would not miss these ardors that they perhaps feel that they missed. Or perhaps they had not missed them but their pleasure in sex had been dimmed by just that sense of sin natural to man when he lets his lower nature take over irresponsibly. Some men have incited their own children to gratify their desires and to get rid of the fruit of their intercourse by abortion, as I know happened in two families. It is one thing not to judge others, and it is still another thing to expect men and women to live according to right reason, to seek wisdom and live by it. The wisdom of the flesh is treacherous indeed.

Cuba is held up to us as an example of the Puritanism of the Marxist-Leninist, and dismal pictures of her are painted. No more houses of prostitution, no more gambling halls, no gay bars! When someone implied that Fidel Castro might have a mistress, (to use old fashioned language) the students with whom I was talking during my visit to Cuba last September looked shocked. "There is no time in his life for that kind of playing around," they said, and the girls looked as though mud had been thrown at their idol, regarding such a question as a desecration of a hero.

There is the story in Scripture of King David who remained behind in Jerusalem when the army of Israel were fighting in the Ammonite country. One day he had risen from midday rest and was walking on the roof of his palace, when he saw a woman who came up to bathe on the roof of the house opposite, a woman of rare beauty. She was the wife of Urias who was away at war. King David sent for her and when she was brought to him, "he mated with her." When she found that she had conceived, she told King David. Whereupon the King sent for Urias, and when he arrived from the scene of battle, he questioned him for a while asking him how the battle was going, and so on, and told him to go home and refresh himself. "So Urias left the palace and the king sent food after him from the royal table; but Urias slept the night at the palace gate among his master's attendants; go home he would not. Then David, learning from common talk that Urias had not gone home, said to him, Thou art newly come from a journey; why wouldst thou not go back to thy house? What? Answered Urias, here are the ark of God and all Israel, and all Juda encamped in tents, here are my Lord Joab and all those other servants of my master sleeping on the hard ground; should I go home and eat and drink and bed with my wife?"

King David kept him a few more days, made him eat and drink until he was bemused with wine, but still when he left at night he slept at the palace gate. "So David sent for his General Joab to put Urias in the first line where the fighting is bitterest, there to die by the enemies's hand."

Recently during the Profumo scandal in England there was much talk as to how much freedom a man should take to himself in public life, how much freedom to love, to drink and to make merry.

Certainly food, drink and sex are good, in their proper order, in their place. In time of battle, such a strange and mighty battle as is going on now between armed and unarmed forces in our country and we too on the unarmed side with our Negro brothers, the weapons of the spirit certainly do not include the strong drink and sexual license celebrated by this pacifist leader.

I know one of the white demonstrators who told one of our group that when he was arrested he was so “hung over” from a party the night before that he was glad to be arrested and thrown into jail, that he could not have walked another step in the march he was undertaking. He was one of those too, who wished to get “some sugar from their honey” before they went onto jail. A far cry from Urias!

I have been asked to express myself on these matters, especially since there has been a pamphlet published in England by the Quakers which is said to condone premarriage sexual intercourse “if the parties are responsible.” My reaction to this is that of a woman who must think in terms of the family, the need of the child to have both mother and father, who believes strongly that the home is the unit of society.

Sex is a profound force, having to do with life, the forces of creation which make man god-like. He shares in the power of the Creator, and, when sex is treated lightly, as a means of pleasure, I can only consider that woman is used as a plaything, not as a person. When sex is so used it takes on the quality of the demonic, and to descend into this blackness is to have a foretaste of hell, “where no order is, but everlasting horror dwelleth.” (Job x.22) Aldous Huxley has given us a glimpse of this hell in “After Many a Summer dies in the Swan,” showing the sexual instinct running riot like cancer cells through the body, degenerating into sadism and torture and unspeakable violence. I speak in extreme terms I admit. But long before I was a Catholic I felt how prevalent was the demi-vierge attitude. I certainly felt that the teaching of Jesus, “He who looks with lust after a woman has already committed adultery in his heart.” There is no such thing as seeing how far one can go without being caught, or how far one can go without committing mortal sin.

On the other hand, the act of sex in its right order in the love life of the individual has been used in Old and New Testament as the symbol of the love between God and Man. Sexual love in its intensity makes all things new and one sees the other as God sees him. And this is not illusion. In those joyful days when one is purified by this single heartedness, this purity of vision, one truly sees the essence of the other, and this mating of flesh and spirit, the whole man and the whole woman, is the only way we know what the term “beatific vision” means. It is the foretaste we have of heaven and all other joys of the natural world are intensified by it, hearing, seeing, knowing.

And here I would like to recommend COUNSELLING THE CATHOLIC: Modern Techniques and Emotional Conflicts, by George Hagmaier, C.S.P. and Robert Gleason, S.J. Published by Sheed and Ward, New York, 1959.

When I became a Catholic forty years ago, I felt with joy that my faith brought me what scripture calls “a rule of life and instruction.” So I recommend also the Gospels which are so potent, so grace-bearing, that the priest says when he has finished reading the Gospel, “By the words of the Gospel may my sins be blotted out.”

I finish this writing down at the beach house with the waves pounding on the beach in a foretaste of an equinoctial storm. It is only September 6th and there are probably two more months of warmth ahead, and these months are quiet months as no other months are quiet. One rests between the tumult of summer and winter. In October I shall be travelling. I hope with the money I earn speaking, to travel still further to England to attend the peace conference at Spode House. So expect a couple of travellogues these next two months, but not much letter writing will be done. I shall take to post cards!