

On Pilgrimage - Our Spring Appeal

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Appeals for help and answers the question "What is it all about, this Catholic Worker movement?" Describes the Catholic Worker as a school, a family, and a community of need. Says they are anarchist-pacifist, which is distinguished from nihilism. Asserts the primacy of conscience and "The most effective action we can take is to try to conform our lives to the folly of the Cross, as St. Paul called it." Keywords: Catholic Worker philosophy, non-violence (DDLW #500).

"Now delights the virgin in dance/and young men and old together./I turn their mourning into joy, I console and gladden their woe/I refresh the souls of the priests with delight/and my people are filled with my good things."

Who would know that the above is Jeremiah speaking, the prophet who advocated nonviolence, indeed appeasement, and was thrown into a noisome prison for his plans? I am writing this on a brilliant spring day, with the sun shining gloriously and three little children playing on the lawn in front of the old house at Tivoli. As I look out of the window I see Dan wandering up the road to the house. Dan was brought up here as a child when this place was an extension of an orphanage in Yonkers, a camp in summer and an agricultural school. He loves the place so much, his roots are here, so he has taken over an unused corner of the old mansion, where he sleeps. Already in April there are a dozen people living in the mansion, several of whom lived there through the winter without plumbing or heating. It meant a great deal of wood chopping for all. Dan takes his meals out, even in cold weather, and eats under the trees in some spot sheltered from the cutting spring winds. He washes the pots in the kitchen and there is never a word out of him. Three other men of the road are with us, and there are two silent hermits whom we seldom see though they have been with us for years.

One of the new men who came recently had worked with us fifteen years ago at the farm we had near Newburgh. Another had been with Louis Murphy at the Detroit house and the farm at South Lyons, Michigan. Mothers and babies, young and old, students on the road from California to New York and back again, during vacations, two of them staying with us because they can't afford the expensive housing hereabouts.

When I consider our Catholic Worker houses and farms, I think of George Orwell's **Road to Wigan Pier** and **Down and out in Paris and London** where he speaks of the need for decent hospitals in the city and places on the land where men could plant a garden and raise some of their own food. Communes, yes, but communes for the poor, for the down and out.

Priests talk of loneliness. Of course everyone needs a family. The family is the basic unit of society. Cardinal Terence Cooke recommends that the rich parishes

help the poor ones, and wouldn't it be a good idea if our cities were dotted with houses of hospitality, strategically placed between the rich and the poor, with priest living in them with such a ready-made family, made up of young and old, mothers with babies, students with problems—and who doesn't have problems? It's the way we learn. And of course in connection with such city houses there could be communes in the country.

May Day Issue

With this May Day issue of the **Catholic Worker**, which is an anniversary issue since we sold the first issue of the paper on May Day, 1933, I'd like to reaffirm my belief in the non-violence of poverty, chastity, and obedience as a means of achieving our ends as far as we can achieve them in this world. Of course I believe in working for the here and now, and not a pie in the sky. St. Catherine of Siena said, "All the way to heaven is heaven, since Jesus said, 'I am the Way.'" When the disciples came down from the mountain after the Transfigurations, "they saw only Jesus." You love God only as much as the one you love the least. That takes some pondering. Maxwell Bodenheim once said in one of his poems, which he used to declaim to all who would listen in the old village days.—

"I know not ugliness,/it is a mood which has forsaken me."

Of course we know suffering. To love is to suffer, but to love is joy. One should read that mysterious book by Georges Bernanos called **Joy**.

Appeal, Appeal

Ed Forand and Walter Kerell, who are our steady "responsibles," have been at the Spring Street, Chrystie Street, and now the First Street homes for the last ten years, in charge of office and funds and ordering of paper and supplies. They initiate most of the things, including begging food at the Hunts Point market, which the students and volunteers take up and carry on. And they are the ones who beg for me to write the appeal this month "for the front page, so that everyone will read it—not the second page as we usually do. We don't want to mail out an appeal—it costs too much: three thousand dollars."

We used to use newsprint for paper, and our printer did the job, not mechanically, but putting his heart into it. In the early days, when he sent the bill the bookkeeper wrote, "Pray—and pay." I was glad they got the point; that prayer should precede action. I pray before I write an appeal, before an "On Pilgrimage" too.

One of my grandchildren once talked of "honeybums," and when I mentioned it, Marge Hughes said that one of her children used to talk of the "bread-lions." Lou Murphy's daughter, Sheila, as a child, said solemnly, "Bum is a bad word. We don't say it in our house."

Some of the students going home for Easter vacation were wondering how the work at First Street would get along with so many of the young ones away. I

reassured them most joyfully. The Catholic Worker has carried on for years and in many a crisis and through the Second World War by the work of men among the “bread-lions.” Those men who have come to us and made our family in many of houses in different cities over the years have kept things going. “Personal responsibility” is not a cliché.

“What is it all about, this Catholic Worker movement?”—so many ask us this question by mail or in person; there are so many people beating a path to our door, I usually try to explain it in simple terms. “We are a school not only for the students, the young, who come to us, but for all of us. We are also a house of hospitality, for worker, for scholar, for young and for old. There are racists, patriots in both the good and the bad sense, nihilists, anarchists and socialists. There are alcoholics. An agency nearby tried to send one over to us for care and when we explained that personal responsibility also meant that each one of us should take on the burdens encountered, the worker replied, “I thought you specialized in that sort of thing.” The New York *Times* usually identified us a people who run some kind of a mission on the Bowery. The **Daily News**, more discerning for once, looked us squarely in the eye and identified us as a group of pacifist-anarchists.

Love One Another

But what we really are, and try to be in all the Catholic Worker houses around the country, is a family—and gentleness and loving kindness is the prevailing mood. The other day Chris was on hand in the basement room where the “bread-lions” were waiting for soup and one pulled a knife on another. “Put it away!” Chris’s voice was strong enough so that we could hear it upstairs. “All the men have knives,” Mary Galligan, who sits behind the desk from eight to four every day, said calmly. There is liquor and there are drugs. The young ones are generally under the influence, in a leaping, laughing state as they come in to eat. But they are all hungry, black and white together, young and old, and the soup is good. I often wonder if they read the beatitudes which Rob lettered on the white stone wall or if they look at the cross, a bit on the slant, which Jimmy, who has a beautiful African hair-do, painted on the wall, black with a black Christ, an unself-conscious primitive.

I wonder how many of our readers have read Knut Hamsun’s book **Hunger**. Or remember the incident in James Baldwin’s **Another Country** where a young lad almost sells himself for a hot meal, and a place to sleep.

Judge Not

There is a statue on top of my bookcase which a young boy whom we took care of some years back, gave me. He had lived this life on the streets. To prevent such things, even for a time, is something. I. F. Stone in his recent

Weekly commenting on the bomb tragedy on Eleventh Street, said, “Man himself is obsolete unless he can change. That change requires more altruism, more kindness, more—no one need to be ashamed to say it—more love.”

Love shows itself in gentleness, in tenderness, and manifests itself physically in serving and accepting service from another. Hans Tunnesen, our Norwegian seaman cook, uses the word **gentle** as his highest form of praise. When he says a man is gentle, he makes us all realize how good a word that is.

We are, too, a community of need, rather than what sociologists call an “intentional community.” When people ask us how long people stay with us, meaning “the poor” (thought we are all poor), we say, “for life”; one of the works of mercy is burying the dead, and we remember them all as we say compline in the country, and vespers in the city, each night.

And certainly too, praying for the living as well as the dead, we are remembering all those who answer our appeals, and send us what we need to keep our two households going. “Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you.” We have had these prayers answered too often for us to doubt now.

I never know, when I am quoting scripture, what translation I am using, whether King James, or Douey, the revised editions or the new translations. It would take more time than I have to check on this. So please excuse.

To answer simply the question, “What do you mean by anarchist-pacifist?” First, I would say that the two words should go together, especially at this time when more and more people, even priests, are turning to violence, and are finding their heroes in Camillo Torres among the priests, and Che Guevara among laymen. The attraction is strong, because both men literally laid down their lives for their brothers. “Greater love hath no man than this.”

“Let me say, at the risk of seeming ridiculous, that the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love.” Che Guevara wrote this, and he is quoted by Chicano youth in **El Grito Del Norte**.

One must write about these things now when in these last weeks three young people were blown to bits in a house on Eleventh Street, just off of Fifth Avenue, reportedly in an attempt to make bombs to blow up banks, department stores, the offices of giant corporations, all those impregnable homes of high finance in this affluent society. One can only use cliches to express these things it seems. That is one reason perhaps for the use of those four-letter words which shock by their contempt and hatred almost for life itself, for the ecstatic act which is part of the beginning of new life on earth.

Anarchism and nihilism are two words familiar to the young and now attractive to them. They do not believe in building a new society within the shell of the old. They believe that the old must be destroyed first. That is nihilism. In a way it is the denial of the “here and now.” Perhaps St. Paul defined The Catholic Worker’s idea of anarchism, the positive word, by saying of the followers of Jesus,

“For such there is no law.” For those who have given up all ideas of domination and power and the manipulation of others are “not under the law.” (Galatians 5). For those who live in Christ Jesus, for “those who have put on Christ,” for those who have washed the feet of others, there is no law. They have the liberty of the children of God.

But, my God, what a long and painful process this is, and yet how powerful! How long enduring!

“If there is no law,” I have been asked many times, “then why are you a member of the Roman Catholic church, the authoritarian church?”

I can only quote Newman in answer to this, and strangely enough, in a most peculiar context? I believe it was during a time of war for England and he was asked a banquet whether he would go against his country if the Pope called a war unjust. He answered that if he were asked to drink a toast it would be to **conscience** first, and then to the Pope. During the second Vatican Council it was again affirmed:

“In the depths of his conscience man detects a law which he does not impose on himself but which holds him to obedience . . . For man has in his heart a law written by God. To obey it is the very dignity of man. According to it he will be judged . . . Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of man. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths. In a wonderful manner conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbor.”

One must follow one’s own Conscience first before all authority, and of course one must inform one’s conscience. But one must follow one’s conscience still, even if it is an ill-informed one. All those young ones and older ones, who are committing themselves to violent revolution as the only way to overcome evil government, imperialism, industrial capitalism, exploitation—in other words evil—are not only following their conscience but also following tradition.

All Men Are Brothers, that Chinese classic which inspired Mao, and the Buddhist and Hindu classics tell of the gigantic struggle between good and evil with profound faith in the eventual triumph of the good. Even that fool for Christ, Don Quixote, setting out on his donkey with lance in hand, was trying to overcome evil, to right wrongs. It is all another concept of the Incarnation, an acting out in flesh and blood, and in the shedding of blood, man’s hope against despair, the believe that physical activity, violence, the pitting of all one’s life forces in the only path that is open to us today. This is the way young people are reasoning. To do otherwise is to betray one’s brothers, they believe, to leave them to slow and agonizing death in wary or by cold, hunger and disease.

So we cannot **judge** the young. But we are challenged to answer.

Jesus said, after he had washed the feet of his disciples, “What I have done, you shall do also.”

No one coming into contact with this Man fails to be affected by Him. In a

recent **Commonweal**, John Deedy quoted from the Communist Roger Garaudy's article about Christianity in the Franciscan review *Evangile Aujourd'hui*:

"About the time of the reign of Tiberius, no one knew exactly where or when, a person whose name was unknown made a break-through in man's horizon. He was neither philosopher nor tribune, but one who lived in such a way that his life signified that every one of us can, at every moment, begin a new future.

"In order to proclaim the good news to the very end, it was necessary that he announce that every limitation, even the supreme limitation, death itself, had been conquered. Thus his resurrection.

"Various scholars are able to challenge every fact of this existence, but that changes nothing in regard to the certainty which changes life. A fire has been lighted.

The fire was first of all a rising of the poor, without which, from Nero to Diocletian, the 'Establishment' would not have persecuted to the extent it did. With this man, love was to be militant, subversive; if it weren't he would not have been crucified . . . His death was like the birth of a new man.

"I look on that cross, and I think of all those who have expanded man's horizon—John of the Cross, who teaches us by dint of having nothing; Karl Marx, who has shown us how we can change the world; Van Gogh—these and others who have made us realize that man is too great to be sufficient unto himself.

"You the receivers of that Constantine stole from us, you men of the church, restore him [Christ] to us. His life and his death are for us also, who have learned from him that man has been created a creator.

"The power to create, the divine attribute of man, is there—it is, my friends. It is present every time something new is born to augment the human form: in the most passionate love, in scientific discovery, in poetry, even in revolution."

During the civil war in Spain the story is that the workers draped a statue of the Sacred Heart in a public square with the printed inscription on the Red Flag: He is ours. You cannot take him from us.

The justification for a Christ who urges militant action is the story in the New Testament of how he drove the money changers out of the temple. Over and over again, when I am speaking in colleges and universities, this incident is brought up. There are many strong denunciations of the oppressor, the hypocrites, the whited sepulchers the lawyers, of all those who put heavy burdens on men's shoulders and do nothing to share them or lighten them.

I can only answer in these other words of His: "Let him who is without sin among you, cast the first stone."

The most effective action we can take is to try to conform our lives to the folly of the Cross, as St. Paul called it.

Take and Read

Mike Cullen and his wife Nettie came by this week and wanted to know what he should read while he is spending the next few years in jail. There is first of all the New Testament, but one has to do a good deal of praying for light while reading it. In a way we have heard it too often. One has to dig for the treasure. One has to give up many things to buy the field in which the treasure is buried. There is Father P. R. Regamey's **Nonviolence and Christian Conscience** (Herder and Herder) and **Christianity Versus Violence** by Stanley Windass (Sheed and Ward, London). And nothing has explained the Old Testament to me like Father John MacKenzie's **Two-Edged Sword** (Bruce). Unfortunately prisons demand that books be sent new from the publishers and these books may be out of print, so we cannot send them from our library. But as far as I am concerned, the Holy Spirit is always putting into my hands the things I particularly need at the moment, food for the mind and food for the soul.

“Come Holy Spirit and fill the hearts of thy faithful and kindle in them the fires of thy love. Send forth thy spirit and they shall be created (new men) and Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.”