

Msgr. Barry O'Toole

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Eulogizes Msgr. Barry O'Toole, a friend of the Worker since its origins. Remembers him as a talkative teacher, founder of a house of hospitality in Pittsburgh, and defender of the right to be a pacifist and conscientious objector. (DDLW #402).

In my missal, on a separate piece of paper, there is a list of the dead for whom I pray daily, and now added to that list is Monsignor George Barry O'Toole, since 1933 a beloved friend of THE CATHOLIC WORKER. Two months ago, Arthur Sheehan wrote of his death in the paper and I was shocked and grieved to see the news. Last month I was busy writing of my daughter's marriage, so I neglected, as I had wished, to tell our readers a little about Msgr. O'Toole.

There are many memories of him in my mind. I can remember one hot summer afternoon on Fifteenth street—the first year of our existence—when we all sat out in the backyard where there were a peach tree, a fig tree, privet hedges, spider plants and petunias to cut the wet heat with their freshness.

We sat there on boxes and chairs—the whole office forces—and listened to Msgr. O'Toole talking about everything under the sun—the Chinese whom he loved, the poor whose cause he espoused, the state against which he waxed indignant.

He was a great talker. His eyes would shine, he would laugh loud and often at his own and others' jokes; he was quite oblivious to differences of opinion since on some so many points there were staunch agreements. He did not mind being argued with.

I remember on one occasion when he came in the morning and the talk went on all day. I went to the printer in the afternoon, stayed out to dinner and, when I came back, the talk was still going on.

Sometimes he seemed to ignore questions. Yet we soon found that at the next meeting those questions would come up again and Msgr. O'Toole would have light on the subject, and would bring with him quotation and book to illuminate. He was truly a teacher.

Catholic Radical Alliance

It was he and Father Hensler and Fr. Rice in Pittsburgh who formed the **Catholic Radical Alliance**, which was in effect a branch of THE CATHOLIC WORKER. Peter Maurin had always favored the word *radical*. He was always

trying to get at the roots of things. So Catholic Radical Alliance it was. It was this group that caused consternation in this huge industrial area by appearing at street meetings and speaking from soap boxes. These were the three who called together laymen to start the first House of Hospitality in a store in Pittsburgh, St. Joseph's House of Hospitality, with Fr. Rice in charge of it, as chaplain, is the largest House of Hospitality in the country and occupies what was formerly an orphanage and it covers almost a block along Tannehill street, up on the hill above the business section, in the Negro section. The group moved into it room by room, stunned by its vastness. It was at this time that he wrote *Christian Wheat and Marrian Cockle* and *The Liberal Illusion*.

It was not long after this that Msgr. O'Toole went to the Catholic University at Washington to teach philosophy. It was from there that he wrote his famous series of articles, *War and Conscription at the Bar of Christian Morals*, which appeared in this paper. He was not a pacifist himself, but he held to the right of a Catholic to be both a pacifist and a conscientious objector to war and conscription. At a time when other men who had written glowingly on peace were reversing their stands, Msgr. O'Toole retracted never a word that he had written.

Senate Hearings

During the hearings before the Senate Committee in Washington, on the conscription bill, his was the lone clerical voice in behalf of the layman. I shall never forget his sturdy figure, standing before the senators seated impressively around the raised desks above a room full of dissenters, holding his paper in his fist, and reading with great emphasis and saying at the end—"Any Question?" His position was not questioned by senators.

His, too, was the brave voice shouting out the iniquity of our sending scrap iron to Japan to bomb Chinese women and children to death.

We all of us loved Msgr. O'Toole, and his death is a grave loss. When any of us go to Washington again it will not be the same place as before. We ask you, our readers, to remember him in your prayers. May he rest in peace.