

On Pilgrimage - February 1960

Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, February 1960, 2, 7, 8.

Summary: Shares reactions to an article by Thomas Merton and a biography of Charles de Foucauld. Notes we have hardly begun to understand the gospels. Tells stories of feeling fear and the senseless cold war. Tells of the work of religious and lay groups in Minnesota. Says "we need to pray for vocations, all kinds of vocations." (DDLW #761).

Little Canada, Minnesota

January 22. Friday. Last night I stayed awake until four a.m. after reading too stimulating an article by Thomas Merton, a reprint from the Winter issue of **Thought**, the Fordham University Quarterly. The name of the article is THE PASTERNAK AFFAIR IN PERSPECTIVE, and it is a long analysis, a thirty-two page article in fact. In it Merton not only analyses the Communist concept of man, but goes on to talk of the attitudes of the West. The concluding paragraphs of the article are what caused my happy sleeplessness. Merton had written on the cover of the reprint, "To Dorothy Day and the Catholic Workers with all blessings and affection in Christ and in union of prayers." Signed Fr. Louis. The concluding paragraph was:

Pasternak . . . "is just as likely to be regarded as a dangerous writer in the West as he in the East. He is saying that political and social structures as we understand them are things of the past, and that the crisis through which we are now passing is nothing but the full and inescapable manifestation of their falsity. For twenty centuries we have called ourselves Christians, without even beginning to understand one-tenth of the Gospel. We have been taking Caesar for God and God for Caesar. Now that "charity is growing cold" and we stand facing the smoky dawn of an apocalyptic era, Pasternak reminds us that there is only one source of truth, but that it is not sufficient to know the source is there—we must go and drink from it, as he has done."

"Do we have the courage to do so? For obviously, if we consider what Pasternak is saying, doing and undergoing, to read the Gospel with eyes wide open may be a perilous thing!"

It was not only Merton's article but also Anne Fremantle's *DESERT CALLING*, her biography about Charles de Foucauld that kept me awake. It is a wonderful book, and the more I read it the more I get from it. I was repelled at first by it, because of the picture she painted of de Foucauld as a young man, harsh, repulsive, a fat, self-indulgent youth, and my reaction was that since I had the read the magnificent biography of Rene Bazin, why read a further account, why dwell on an aspect of his life that he put far behind him so soon, so early? But Anne Fremantle not only had access to all his letters to his family and to his spiritual adviser, and their letters to him, but she knew the country, many of the people there who helped her, and she had the intuition of a woman throughout, to get to the heart of the matter. Her insights, her understanding are marvelous. It is wonderful that we have such a biography in English, the first to be written in English, and I am only afraid that it is out of print, as **Seeds of the Desert** by Pere Rene Voillaume is out of print. These two books surely deserve to be put in pocket editions, by one of the big publishers and made available to students throughout the country. But they are dangerous material and might start a revolution!

Anne Fremantle points out that the spirituality of Charles de Foucauld was nearer to the east than to the west, in his love of poverty and abjection. I could not help but remember another fascinating book, **"The Humiliated Christ in Russian Thought"** by Gorodetsky, published in England by the Philosophical Press, as I read.

How utterly and completely Brother Charles tried to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, and how little we ourselves do to rejoice in mockery and contempt and misunderstanding, As a matter of fact, how fearful most of us are! Just a few Sundays ago Judith Gregory and I were coming from eleven o'clock Mass at our parish church, St. Patrick's old cathedral on Mott street, and as we walked down Mulberry street to get to St. Joseph's Loft on Spring street (which is between Mott and Mulberry) we suddenly felt objects whizzing past our ears. I thought it was snow balls thrown by small boys, because we had had snow the week before and there was still a little in the corners of the buildings. But as I turned another missile flew past and Judith said, "Those are meant for us all right," and went to investigate the broken mass where it had struck against a garage door, and found it to be bits of hard-boiled egg. Two had been flung at us as we passed, and I was literally afraid to turn and look, for fear some would hit me in the face. I should have been delighted, as Charles de Foucauld was when he was pelted in the streets of Nazareth, but my feeling was one of fear, just as it was when I was shot at at Koinonia. It was fear in the flesh, the fear of the flesh, and I am glad I have it because it helps me to understand the fear that is eating at the hearts of the people in the world today. No one is safe. We are no longer protected by oceans separating us from the rest of the warring world. Yesterday the Russians fired a rocket 7,760 miles into the central Pacific which fell less than one and a quarter miles from its calculated target. The U.S. Defense department confirmed the shot's accuracy.

Anywhere, at any time, we can be reached. Leaders of governments say that none but a madman would launch a war today. But there are many madmen, human senses are faulty, men may think they see and hear approaching planes, bombs, rockets and the button may be pushed to set off a counter offensive. Everything depends on the human element.

Fr. Brennan, president of St. Thomas College in St. Paul came to dinner last night and we talked of many things, starting with the new president of University of Minnesota who is a practicing Mormon and keeps the dietary laws; going on to Bishop Hunt and his problems in Utah and the very efficient and rigid economic set-up of the Mormon Church which never needs to turn to the State for aid, which sends out missionaries, young people, who support themselves for two years traveling to far distant parts to spread their gospel; and on to the work of Fr. Kaiser, a young priest who has an immense parish who sleeps in a tiny cell built on the church, eats around at ranchers' homes, who drives two hundred miles to visit another priest,—who literally lives in a desert.

It is so much a part of the teaching of the spirituality of Charles de Foucauld the contemplative life, the life in the desert, austerity, voluntary poverty and fraternal charity. As Fr. Gustave S.J. said, the three things necessary in the Church today in America are austerity, awareness of God, and awareness of men.

Before I left we were all talking at **The Catholic Worker** of the different kinds of fear, fear of people, bodily fear and spiritual fear, and Judith brought out the idea of “panic” the sudden extreme and groundless fear which Pan was supposed to cause. Which one can come upon in the desert perhaps, and stand in the way of our relationship to God. Joe Zarrella confessed to this fear once, when he, a city youth, felt himself surrounded by the woods on the top of the hills of Easton. To be alone with God it is a matter of terror for poor weak man if you get right down to it. And yet many of our friends have adopted the motto which they put at the top of their letters, “God alone.” And would they not be terrified if suddenly they were confronted by “God alone.” The Jews had this sense of awe, of His power.

(Knowing our frailty, God the Father sent us His son, Jesus, a man like unto us in every way save sin. Suffering hunger, thirst, fatigue, homelessness, fear even,—all temptations. And His blessed mother besides, through whom we can go to Him.)

Yes, there all kinds of fear, and I certainly pray to be delivered from the fear of my brother, I pray to grow in the love which casts out fear. To grow in love for God and man, and to live by this charity, that is the problem. We must love our enemy, not because we fear war but because God loves him.

Mike Wallace

Mike Wallace asked me that question, – Does God love murders, does He love a Hitler, a Stalin. I could only say, “God loves all men, and all men are brothers.”

There is so little time on a broadcast, in an interview, little time to answer or to think. I could have said, “Christ loved those who broadcast, in an interview, little time to answer or to think. I could have said,” Christ loved those who crucified Him. St. Stephen loved those who stoned him to death. St. Paul was a murderer. We are all murderers."

Deane Mowrer and I knelt by the side of women who were charged with murder and who were awaiting trial, the last time we were in prison in New York, put in the corridor with those awaiting trial, because we would not give bail. There were four homicide cases on that corridor, one a very young girl, one a somber very dark Negro who had hired someone to kill her husband, it was said, and just opposite us, a sad Puerto Rican woman nearly forty, mother of many children, who had been beaten by a drunken husband so many times that on the last occasion, as he held her choking over the kitchen table, she reached behind her for a knife and struck at him any place she could so that he would release his strangle grip upon her throat. How many of us would not do the same. I remember seeing my own daughter as a child, and again one of my own grand children casting a heavy block at one of the others, and realized how any gesture of anger can kill. Thank God for our guardian angels, thank God for all the evil we are delivered from. And oh how close we need to be in pity and in love to such a woman, thrown into jail, separated from her children for many months. In spite of the promise of a speedy trial, the right to which is guaranteed by the bill of rights, people stay long period in jail, eight months, ten months, awaiting trial.

But of course Mike Wallace was not talking of such murderers, of whom we may feel no fear. He was speaking not only of the Hitlers and the Stalins, but of such men as those accused of putting bombs in aeroplanes to collect insurance.

What to do about them? I remember asking Fr. Roy how God could love a man who came home and beat up his wife and children in a drunken rage, (there was one such in our midst) and Fr. Roy shook his head sadly and said, “God loves only Jesus, God sees only Jesus.” A hard lesson to take, to see Jesus in another, in the prodigal son, or members of a lynch mob. Have we begun to be Christians?

Such attitudes can come about only by prayer and fasting. And how much of that are we doing?

Charles de Foucauld, praying each day for martyrdom, warned us against fear. The Little Brothers of Jesus knowing man's fragility, knowing that it is not good for man to live alone, go out two by two, holding each other up. I know myself how valiant I can be when we are a group. Also, I was offered a very potent remedy which I recommend to our readers. Once I suffered an inexplicable

attack of fear and dread when I went to picket a federal prison with a group on West Street and I stopped at St. Veronica's church on Christopher Street to pray. I remembered Abbot Marmion saying that the remedy for fear is to make the Stations of the Cross, so I did it with that intention and have never been frightened on a picket line since. Prayer can strengthen the weak knees and fill the heart with courage.

Fr. Durand's parish has about six hundred families and there is a new Church and school with as many lay teachers as there are sisters. Father is an energetic priest who wears himself out with fasting and prayers during Lent and Advent, and all through the year his energy drives the parish on to greater efforts, not only to pay off the building debt, but to pray more. There is real participation in the Mass, which the late Holy Father asked for, and the priest prays slowly enough and loud enough so that the parish can follow and make all the responses clearly. The Latin seems to be no obstacle. This morning I turned on the radio to get the time, –it was Sunday and I heard Lutheran church programs announced in Estonian, Latvian and Finnish. We Americans make too much of language barriers, and hesitate to learn one other language where a European would learn several in the course of his life. Missionaries are always learning new languages and think nothing of it. So the Latin responses come easy enough. Of course I am in favor of the vernacular. But the people who are so ardently favoring the vernacular ought to do something about the mumbled and hasty prayers at the foot of the altar after Mass, and about the hasty reading of the gospel. Charles de Foucauld had so great a reverence for the word of God that he kept his Bible on the altar in his little chapel, the Word of God in the Book, as well as the Word of God made flesh in the tabernacle.

Father Durand introduced perpetual adoration 5 months ago (without exposition) and two hundred and fifty have responded, –going to the church which is always open night and day, for one hour a week. There is one young school boy living on a farm nearby who comes at three a.m. every Monday morning, then goes back home to do chores and returns for Mass before school. There are many other instances of such devotion.

Today, Sunday, Fr. Edward Grzeskowiak (they call him Father Ed) came to breakfast. He had recently attended the meeting in Chicago to consider the plight of the migrant workers. He teaches sociology at the minor seminary, and has always been interested in agricultural problems and in the plight of the minority groups. We talked about the work on the Indian reservations throughout the state of Minnesota, and how little contact they had with the priest who could often go to them only in the summer. Fifty per cent of them are Catholic. On or near one reservation the Bulova watch people had set up a factory nearby and hired 120 workers, eight per cent of whom were Indians. Contrary to expectation there had been no turnover in the years it existed, and the work was well done.

Employing Indians on road work and lumbering operations had not been so successful though the wages were high, but the work was still heavy perhaps. Though they could get as much as a hundred and twenty a week, they left the job and the turnover was great. Probably they earned what they needed to live and then left the work; or perhaps drink had something to do with it. Or perhaps, one suggested, they were as averse to construct heavy labor as we ourselves are.

Fr. Ed talked about the reservation system and said the ward system under which the Indians now lived was doomed; but he saw no reason why Indians had to be moved to big cities as they had been, and forced to leave their changed, but they could still operate under a communal or cooperative system. But all over the country Indians were being moved into cities. Here in Minneapolis there were entire apartment houses crowded with them, living under the poorest conditions, one family moving in on another and crowded families living in unspeakable squalor. Edmund Wilson had a wonderful series of articles on the Iroquois and their system of government, and their present status, running in the **New Yorker** and it has now come out as a book. I remember in one article he spoke of the poverty of the home he visited of one of the leaders. He brought out too, the world feeling of the colored races, the ferment that was going on, the desire to assert themselves and their rights, their feeling themselves part of the movement towards justice, the desire to right the wrongs perpetrated upon the Indian, the Negro, and all those of mixed color.

To become part of this, to share in their poverty and suffering, this is the strong desire on the part of many today, in the movement of lay apostles, who are trained to serve as teachers, nurses, engineers, doctors and must follow those vocations. But many who have no special talents can just go and live among the poor as the little brothers and sisters of Jesus do, finding the most abject, the most abandoned and living under these squalid conditions, and going out to work at factory jobs, or day labor.

I have visited the Little Sisters in Montreal, in Boston, in Washington and in Chicago and hard work has made them clean, some cheap linoleum on the floor has made them bright, and discarding all that is not essential, there is a sense of space and beauty, in spite of the destitution of the surroundings.

We talked of other things that could be done, the little ways of social change that could begin here and now. I told of Fr. McCarthy down in Santa Fe and his work among the Indians and Mexicans, starting credit unions, which rescued them from the toils of the loan sharks, or helped them to achieve ownership of their tools of work. And of Fr. Ganey in the Fiji Islands whom I first met at Pendle Hill, the Quaker house of studies in Wallingford, Pa. He had come to talk of his work in the British Honduras along these lines. When the governor general of Honduras was transferred to the Fiji Islands, he asked for Fr. Ganey to be sent there, and his provincial allowed his transfer.

“Those are the only ways which will be effective,” Fr. Ed said. “Not Federal Grants, not unionization, but the small way of working through education, from

the bottom up.”

The problem is too large on the one hand so that wherever I speak, people say the Government, the State, has to step in. And on the other hand, the solution is too simple, too small, so people end with a sense of futility. What is the use?

How we need to pray for vocations, all kinds of vocations.

January 29

Today I spoke at St. Thomas college at ten thirty and had lunch with some of the faculty. Monsignor Shannon is a young president and most approachable, available to men, one might say. He makes all feel perfectly at home so that one can always be frank and open with him. I talked about the difficulties of reaching people today, due not only to our prosperity, but also to the fear inspired by Russia and everyone’s feeling of the need for preparedness. You can talk all you want about what the Popes have said about the “fallacy of an armed peace.” About doing away with conscription, about means and ends, about the statements of John XXIII, that war today is “massacre and suicide” but the very questions asked show how little our point of view is understood. The argument from the Gospel teaching is not enough for them. One boy at St. Mary’s in Winona, wanted to know if all this was not against the teachings of the Church.

On the way home, driving with Fr. Eddy and his mother and the Monsignor we began talking about Sister Peter Claver. Fr. Eddy wanted to know if I knew her, so I recounted her life and adventures as far as they concerned my contact with her, extolling her warmth and loving kindness. And then Msgr. Shannan began asking Fr. Eddy how He knew her. His story as far as I can remember it is this.

He was teaching French and English at Robbinsdale and met a young priest there, Fr. Garrelts, who made a great impression on him. He preached a sermon on the kind of security he should be looking for and Clyde Eddy knew that as a laymen he has intended to keep to his teaching job at Robbinsdale on account of his desire for security. He met Dorothy McMahon who invited him to join a Scripture class there he encountered Fr. Harvey Egan who was giving the course. Fr. Egan was a young priest at St. Olaf’s who was an ardent friend of the **The Catholic Worker** since his seminary days and through the paper had made the acquaintance of Sister Peter Claver, who in turn had introduced him to Fr. Giri of the Birmingham diocese who came north to meet the other young priests in St. Paul and to look for vocations.

When Clyde Eddy decided that he wished to be a priest, he was afraid the St. Paul diocese would not have him because he had had only one year of Latin. Fr. Giri persuaded him to go south to study at the New Orleans seminary which he assured him would be much easier.

On the contrary, Clyde Eddy found that the books and teaching were all in Latin and he was totally at sea. But Fr. Giri did not give up. “Come over to Mobile,”

(his present headquarters) and spend the summer studying Latin for eight hours a day and begin again in the fall. Sister Peter Claver, who had charge of the charities of the Mobile diocese found housing for him, but of course she found work too. Between these zealous people he was to be well occupied. Fr. Giri coached him in Latin. Sister Peter Claver on encountering an old deaf man, had learned the sign language in order to instruct him, and her day class increasing to about sixty, she introduced Clyde Eddy also to study and assist her. Studying the sign language and Latin gave him a busy summer.

“Sister Peter Claver on occasion gave great trouble to her sisters in religion,” he said. On one occasion she took in a couple of “ambassadors” off the road and fed them and put them up for the night in the guest quarters where Clyde Eddy stayed, which were old slave quarters of the southern mansion which housed the charity offices and sisters.

At nightfall the two “ambassadors” wanted to go to town. Dorothy McMahon, Jane Judge, Rose McDonnell and Marion Judge had all come for a few months to help Fr. Giri in his work among the Negroes as a beginning to the work they intended to do in Minneapolis. Dorothy tried to persuade the men to stay in. They said they wanted coffee. She said she would make them some. They said they wanted to send a telegram, and she asked them how much money they had. They said they would send it collect, and disappeared.

Late that night, the two men reappeared, lost their way, could not find the slave quarters, and went to the convent instead, which was so crowded that some of the sisters had to sleep on the porch. When the men started banging on the door, shouting that they had been given a room there, very insistently, the two sisters on the porch telephoned the pastor, who telephoned the police who picked up the men and took them to jail.

Next day Sister Peter Claver was at the court, interceding for the men, telling the judge it was all her fault they had been imprisoned, and begging for their release. The judge told her if she would get them out of town by night all he would let them go, so that afternoon, Sister Peter Claver packed two nice lunches (a lunch packed by a convent will last for several days) and then asked the men how they had arrived. By box car, they told her, so she called the railroad and asked when the next freight was pulling out and put them on it.

Monsignor Shannon, president of St. Thomas College in St. Paul gave us the use of his car while I am in the St. Paul area. He was going to Conception, Missouri, to give a retreat and would not be back for a week. A little blizzard had started Sunday night as we came out of church after making our holy hour, and I thought I would have to take the bus, which would mean going back into St. Paul and starting out again from there. We were already on the way north, in Little Canada, and it was good to wake up yesterday to sunny skies and a clear road. Mary Hlabain and I set forth, with a lunch packed by Lucille Lynch, and by noon we were already in Sandstone, which is more than half way to Duluth.

It was an easy trip and we enjoyed first the level prairie, snow covered completely flat at first, and bare of trees and then the increasing woodlots of birch and pine. The scenery became rolling as we reached Duluth, and when we tried to turn off to go to Superior without going through Duluth, we got lost. The two cities are rivals and always have been. Duluth is built on hills, and is a beautiful little city on the lake, and last time I passed through, Georgia Kernan, who was a school teacher in Proctor, on the outskirts, met me for a few hours between buses and we went down by the lake and watched the big ore boats coming in. Superior is an inferior city in beauty, but Sister Bernice, my friend who is the superior of the convent of Franciscan sisters who teach in the high school told me that she loved the people here most especially. "They are very good and responsive" she said, "and the children are bright and lively. This brisk weather (it was ten below outside) fills them with high spirits. Tremendous vitality."

We finally found out the way over from route sixty one to route twenty three and came through great hills and past deep gullies and finally into the flatness of Superior. We came over the St. Louis River on a wooden bridge, with railroad tracks overhead. The bridge which leads into Duluth, the only way over, has been condemned for a long time, and the new bridge is slow in opening. There are traffic snarls every night. There is more work in Duluth and many Superior people commute. Both cities are picking up, however, on account of the St. Lawrence seaway and the city already feels the difference. The men who load and unload the boats however, complain that the foreign crews are now doing the work that they used to do, and at far lower wages. For a long time there has been unemployment due to the steel strike all through this area. The mines of the Mesabi range are about exhausted, they say, which will mean more unemployment. Now that natural gas has been brought in the gas companies assure the public that now industry, having cheap fuel, will follow. The question of unemployment is an ever present menace however.

When Ammon was here last week he visited the I.W.W. hall in Duluth, where he found Finnish comrades who welcomed him. The ideals of the I.W.W. are still alive, though industrial unionism and the giant unions of the CIO-AFL have taken over the workers and the leadership is far from the idealistic leadership of the Wobblies, who took little salary, refused overtime when other men were out of work, and had Wobbly halls where the pot of mulligan was always on the stove and brother was served not in charity in its modern sense, but in justice. It was the I.W.W. who organized the Mesabi range as well as the ships and lumber industry and their search for justice made many martyrs.

The Franciscan Sisters here are truly poor. They are called the School Sisters of St. Francis and they teach and care for the sick. Their mother house is in LaCrosse and there they have perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, day and night. Motherhouses always have the appearance of comfort of a well run college, but when the sisters go out on the mission they have crowded quarters, as crowded as the poor who live in our slums in New York. Here in Superior, they occupy, and have for the last thirty years, an old building which used to

be a chancery office, and the rooms are divided up by sheets for curtains, and four beds are crowded in a bedroom which is a decent size for one person, if that one person was a student, a teacher who had much work to prepare for his classes and mark papers. There are a few rooms where the sisters have desks back-to-back all around the room and even in the center of the room where they do their home work. The chapel is on the attic floor and they too they are crowded together. This morning and every morning there is a sung Mass at a quarter after six (the sisters have been in the chapel since five-thirty) and since they specialize in music in all their schools, the Mass is a thing of beauty.

After Mass there was a quick breakfast, and then we went to the Cathedral which was about six blocks down the street. It was the mainstreet and during the Mass there was the sound of shifting gears, trucks starting and stopping, motorcycles roaring by just as in New York. The sisters went out in fifteen degree below zero weather with nothing but their mantles on, and a woolen shawl, scantily clad, one would say, for such rigorous weather. But the houses are all warm, almost too warm for me, used to as I have been to our beach and the east wind blowing through the summer houses we have there. Even winterizing them has not brought them up to normal warmth.

Mary Hlebain comes from a farm family near St. Stephen, which is on the way to Collegeville. St. Joseph is the name of the town where the great woman's college, St. Benedict's is situated; and at Collegeville, there is a St. John's College and the seminary. St. John's has had a great influence on all the priests in this section of the country, indeed in all the country. But the priests here have gone thoroughly into the work of teaching the laity to participate in the Mass, and there are more sung Masses than in other parts of the country in which the congregation can participate. Another thing, when the priest distributes Holy Communion he says clearly each time he places the wafer on the tongue of the communicant, "Corpus Domini nostri Jesu Christi custodiat animam tuam in vitam aeternam. Amen." Even when there is an entire school receiving as they do at Monsignor Durand's.

Mary, one of the Maryhouse women, says she doesn't know she became interested in secular institutes. She met Fr. Egan while she was working in a wealthy home and he suggested she join the group which had already formed Maryhouse in Minneapolis. Some of the others had gone to him, saying like St. Paul, "Lord what wouldst thou have me to do?"

Ten women got together, pooling their savings, and bought the house in an old run down neighborhood, with the intention of helping the pastor work among the Negroes, catechizing and performing the corporal works of mercy. One of the girls died of leukemia and there were grave rumors around the section that the girls led too rigorous a life, denied themselves too much and so on. They were scornfully called the "detachers" because they tried to detach themselves from the world to follow Christ. But certainly they were women of good solid sense, with a background of hard work and a readiness for sacrifice. Two of the women left to work on their own, one went to the South to a group in

Greenwood, Mississippi, to work with the poorest of the Negroes (Alma was a great musician and gave music lessons and tutored anyone who asked.) Seven remained, of whom Dorothy McMahon teaches, Jane Judge, Lucille Lynch and Rose McDonnell nurse, Marion Judge is a receptionist and Mary Hlebain is a housekeeper. They pool all their resources, take simple promises of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience from year to year and now live in this delightful rural spot, of Maryhouse, Little Canada, living the contemplative life in the world, the beginnings of a secular institute.

It was through Sister Peter Claver, and through the famous Father Roy, and the Fr. Hugo retreats that we all met, and have been closely associated in many ways since. Six of them have spent many months helping us out on our former Maryfarm, Newburgh and one flew east last month to help us nurse the sick.