House of Hospitality,
Conclusion ==========

By Dorothy Day

1939, Conclusion, pp. 257 - 275.

Summary: Reflecting on the themes cover in the book, she acknowledges all that has been accomplished and distinguishes the role of the State and personal responsibility. Enumerates the many strikes they supported. Calls for a greater use of prayer and the desire to be saints. Speaks about what individual workers are doing in New York and is encouraged by houses around the country. Concludes by recalling Peter Maurin's fundamental ideas–voluntary poverty and the works of mercy. Prays that they continue on "the downward path which leads to salvation." (DDLW #450).

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AS I READ through the foregoing pages, I feel that I have given no adequate account of the work, that it is very much a day by day record of little events, of my own conflicts and meditations.

It is true that at times when much work was being done and progress was being made, little writing was done. There are large gaps in the account of our activities. In telling of the immediate works of mercy, I feel that I have neglected a great deal of our work in the labor field throughout the country from coast to coast. Naturally during those times when I was travelling and speaking before labor groups throughout the country, and when we were participating actively in strikes, there had to be gaps in the record.

Even in presenting a picture of life in a House of Hospitality, the story is not complete. I find the pages crowded with people, but in respecting their situation and their desire for privacy, I cannot go into details about them, what they look like, how they have come to be with us, their backgrounds and their tragedies. I must leave the book as it stands.

We have never faltered in our conviction during these six years of work that hospices such as our Houses of Hospitality are a vital necessity in times like these.

We do not deny that the State is bound for the sake of the common good, to take care of the unemployed and the unemployable by relief and lodging houses and work projects. Pope Pius XI pointed that out very clearly. He lamented that so much money was spent in increased armaments that should be spent on the poor. He urged the "press and the pulpit throughout the world" to fight the increase of armaments, and added sadly that "up to this time Our voice has not been heard."

No, we are not denying the obligations of the State. But we do claim that we must never cease to emphasize personal responsibility. When our brother asks us for bread, we cannot say, "Go be thou filled." We cannot send him from agency to agency. We must care for him ourselves as much as possible.

And we claim that as Catholics we have not sufficiently cared for our own. We have not used the material, let alone the spiritual resources at our disposal. We have not drawn upon our tremendous reserves of material and spiritual wealth. We have scarcely known or recognized that we possessed them.

Approximately twenty-five million Catholics in the United States! It would be interesting to know how many of them are on relief, trusting to State aid. If we took care of our own, and relieved the government of this immense responsibility, how conditions would be transformed! Then indeed people could say "See how they love one another!" Then indeed we would be "bearing one another's burdens." But of course, we would not be limiting our care only to our own. We would inevitably be caring also for others outside the faith.

This would also point the way to a solution of the industrial problem. As Christian masters freed the slaves who had converted them, because they recognized their dignity as men made in the image and likeness of God, so the industrial slaves of today can find freedom through Christianity.

Certainly this is an upside-down way of looking at the problem from a worldly standpoint. But we are fools for Christ's sake. We are the little ones God has chosen to confound the wise. We are the least of His children, yet through us He has done great things. Surely the simple fact of feeding five thousand people a day, in all our houses month after month for a number of years, is a most astounding proof that God loves our work.

We are down in the slums, but we can never be as poor as Christ, or as those ragged and destitute ones who come to us in the mornings to be fed. We are constantly overcome with a sense of shame because we have so much more than these others.

Christ was a man so much like other men that it took the kiss of Judas to single Him out, as Mauriac says in his *Life of Jesus.*He was a man like those others on our bread line. We must see Christ in each of them.

Our work in the labor field takes place not only in the Houses of Hospitality. To reach the organized and the great masses of unorganized workers we have had to go out on the streets, to the public squares, to the factories, waterfronts and picket lines.

The hardships of the migratory worker and the sweatshop worker are even greater than those who are on the bread lines and in the lodging houses. They are the family men and women who are trying to care for others. They are those who are seeing their dear ones go without essentials in the way of medical care and food, who are seeing their children grow up to find unemployment awaiting them.

In the first chapter I gave a summary of the field****covered by Houses of Hospitality. Here is a brief review of some of the labor issues we have dealt with during the past six years.

Again and again we have helped workers on strike regardless of all talk as to whether the strike was just or unjust. We have done this for two reasons: first, it is never wrong to perform the Works of Mercy; secondly, because in a time of industrial warfare it is easy to get in touch with the workers by meetings and by widespread distribution of literature. It is a time when the workers are thinking and struggling; they are enduring hardships and making sacrifices, they are in a receptive frame of mind.

The first number of the paper came out in May 1933. that issue we featured a story of the Negro labor on the levees in the South which was being exploited by the War Department. We also wrote about women and children in industry and widespread layoffs of men.

In the second issue we took up the farmers' strike in the West and wages and hours of restaurant workers. In the third issue, child labor in the textile industry, as well as a two-page synopsis of labor struggles during the month. In the fourth issue we had front page stories on the coal strike and the milk strike. In these first issues of the paper there were also stories on the race issue and the condition of the Negro in industry and in professional work. In the sixth issue of the paper we****were already combating anti-Semitism. In the same issue we showed up some profit-sharing plans of industrialists as a further move to exploit labor.

By the second year, our circulation had jumped from****2,500 to 35,000 copies, and our readers included workers and students throughout the country. In the second year, 1934, the seamen's strike on the West coast, the strike of the rural workers in the onion fields, a silk workers' strike in New Jersey, the textile strike, took up many columns in the paper. In New York City we helped Orbach's department store workers in their mass picketing, and called upon our readers not to patronize a store where such wages and long hours prevailed. We helped to defeat an injunction–one of the chief weapons of the employer to break strikes–which was handed down against the picketers. Our participation in this strike and in the National Biscuit Company strike cost us many readers. Our circulation was by now 65,000, but many church and school groups cancelled their orders because of the pressure of employers' groups. There were 3,000 on strike in the National Biscuit Company factory on 14th Street, and every day there were mass picket lines and scuffles with the police.

In the March 1935 issue there was printed a speech in regard to the Child Labor amendment which Dorothy Weston, Associate Editor, had made over the radio. Our endorsement of the Child Labor amendment also cost us many subscribers, as a majority of Catholics were opposed to it, for fear of government interference in the education of our youth. But in spite of the consistent opposition (which, as we have always pointed out, is very good for the clarification of thought), our circulation rose to 100,000 at the beginning of the third year.

When the Borden Milk Company the next year attempted to foist a company union on their workers, the editors took up their cause and called public attention to the unethical conduct of the employers. We called attention to the intimidation of Borden drivers by gangsters and thugs, and urged our readers not to use Borden's milk while unfair conditions prevailed. As a result of the story we ran, the employers attacked *The Catholic Worker*in paid advertisements in the *Brooklyn Tablet*and the *Catholic News.*This dispute also cost us some thousands of subscribers.

A few months later the spring strike of 1936 started among the seamen on the East coast. Because we had moved into our larger headquarters on Mott Street we were able to house about fifty of the seamen during the strike. In the fall strike, we not only housed some of them, but also fed thousands of them daily in the store we opened on Tenth Avenue, which we kept going for about four months. At that time we printed our "Stand on Strikes" which has been widely circulated in pamphlet form among labor unions throughout the country.

By publicity and moral support, we encouraged the organization of the steel industry when the C.I.O. began its activities. In the same year, our workers assisted the marble workers' strike in Vermont, the fishermen in Boston, the sharecroppers in Arkansas, the auto workers in Detroit. We covered the sit-down strike in Michigan, and the five and ten cent store strike in New York, the steel strike in Chicago. We also helped in the organization drive of the stockyards in Chicago.

That was the tragic year when ten workers were killed and scores more wounded in the Memorial Day massacre. One of our staff had a friend killed in that tragic episode. Our workers in Chicago had been helping in the soup kitchens and marching on the picket lines as well as distributing literature.

Many of these strikes I covered personally, in order to get a complete report to our readers, and also to speak to the workers at their meetings. I was one of the few newspaper reporters allowed into the Flint Fisher Body plant to visit the hundreds of sit-down strikers who had been in the plant for forty days. By this time we had groups of Catholic Workers in many big industrial centers throughout the country.

In the labor field the Pittsburgh group was most prominent, headed as it was by Fathers Rice and Hensler. They were the first priests to go out on the picket line and on sound trucks at street corners. Their example led many other priests to become active in the labor field.

The Lowell textile strike was interesting from several angles. When our workers began to distribute *The Catholic Worker*to the strikers and the public, and to start a food kitchen, the officials of the town telephoned the Chancery Office in Boston to find out if we were all right and were assured that we could go ahead. (On the other hand, we know of an occasion when a speaking engagement at a church in Jersey City was cancelled because of Mayor Hague's opposition to the paper.) The local paper proclaimed in their headlines that the entrance of *The*

*Catholic Worker*into the Lowell strike marked the turning point in the conflict and led to prompt negotiations between the workers and the employers.

Often the immediate work in the House of Hospitality in caring for the unemployed kept us from work farther afield. It was of course impossible to answer all calls for help or to supply lay apostles wherever they were needed. We could only do the work which came to hand.

At the same time, we covered a pretty wide field. I notice in looking back over the old issues that Eddie Priest put in some months in a machine shop in Brooklyn, John Cort in a brass factory in New York, Julia in a five and ten cent store, where she did a good deal of indoctrinating and organizing by the distribution of literature and attendance at union meetings. Stanley Vishnewski covered many picket lines and Bill Callahan covered the Newspaper Guild strike in Brooklyn and the auto strike in Michigan.

We tried to cover not only city industrial plants, but also country plants. Certainly the Seabrook farm of four thousand acres in New Jersey with their own canning plant, is an industrial setup. The plant is so huge that two airplanes are used to fly over the fields to spray them against insects.

There is not much difference between this farm and the collective farms of Russia except that the latter are owned by the State. The Communists would make no changes in setup, admiring "bigness" as they do. They would merely take them over, they say, and run them for the benefit of the workers.

Some of the boys from *The Catholic Worker*farm in Easton went down to Seabrook and worked for a while**,**talking with union officials and workers and spreading literature. During the summer we plan to repeat this venture more intensively, giving almost a complete issue of the paper to discussing corporation farming as opposed to "farming as a way of life," and upholding the small landowner and co-operative owner against the State as well as against the industrialists. It is not only in California and in the South that horrible conditions exist for migratory workers and relief workers. We have them here in New Jersey, just outside the door.

An article on the natural and supernatural duty of the worker to join his union, appearing in the September 1937 issue found a widespread circulation. In New Orleans, where organization activities were bitterly fought at the time, it was circulated by the thousands, also in New England among the textile workers.

During this last year the truck drivers' strike, the sharecroppers' strike, the Newspaper Guild strike in Chicago, the tanker strike and the miners' strike have been covered.

In the past six years we have had many interviews with Catholic industrialists and many of them were not too cheering. Not wishing to increase class war attitudes, we did not publish many of them.

During these past years, former Governor Murphy's stand in the auto strikes, and Sheriff Boyle's and Mayor Michael Sewak's stand in the steel strike in Johnstown

were highlights. By moral force rather than by armed force, these men prevented violence and bloodshed and stood out not only against the industrialist but against a campaign of public vilification and condemnation. Because they resolutely refused to use armed guards against the workers, and insisted upon arbitration–because they upheld human rights above property rights–they were termed spineless and yellow-livered, not only by atheistic capitalists but by many of their fellow-Catholics. Their courage and leadership in public life have been an inspiration to others and a message of hope to the workers. May God raise up other men like them.

The great problems in the labor movement today are the conflict between the A. F. of L. and the C.I.O., and the unemployment situation. It is still a struggle to organize; in many industries only small beginnings have been made.

There is too much agitation about Communism in trade union ranks. This situation can be remedied only by education of the rank and file and by earnest and unambitious participation of Catholics in their trade unions. By "unambitious" we mean a participation which does not look towards personal advancement and official positions. There has been too much of that already on the part of Catholics in politics and trade unionism.

The day calls for a new technique. We must make use of the spiritual weapons at our disposal, and by hard work, sacrifice, self-discipline, patience and prayer (and we won't have any of the former without the latter), work from day to day in the tasks that present themselves. We have a program of action and a philosophy of life. The thing is to use them.

We have been criticized for holding up the counsels of perfection as norms of human conduct. It is sad that it is always the minimum that is expected of lay people. On the other hand, we get too much praise from some for performing work which is our plain duty. If we have a vocation for the work (and the joy we take in it is one of the proofs of our vocation), then we deserve no credit. Indeed we deserve censure for not having done more, and for doing what we have done so badly, given the opportunities we have had. Through the help of His friends, God has given us the means and the opportunities to be closer to the poor and the outcast and the worker than any other group in the country today. That we have not effected more with those we have reached is our fault, which we must acknowledge and recognize without discouragement. We must make a greater use of prayer.

As Leon Bloy wrote: "There is only one unhappiness, and that is-not to be one of the Saints."

And we could add: the greatest tragedy is that not enough of us desire to be saints.

2

It is a hot summer night, nearly ten o'clock. Here on Mott Street, the noise of children, of grown ups and of radios will continue until after midnight, so I might as well sit up and write. The telephone bell keeps ringing and visitors keep coming in, but Gerry Griffin and Joe Zarrella are downstairs to attend to both and I can sit upstairs here and finish this account. *Finish*scarcely the word, however. An account of this kind is never finished. The work goes on, the little work of feeding people, and clothing them and housing them and talking to them. It continues here and in all the other houses throughout the country in one form or another. We may meet with failure on every side, but still the work goes on. And when I speak of failure, I am not cheerless about it. We have the failure of the Cross always before us. After all, we are sowing the seed and why should we be looking for any results. It may not be for us to reap a harvest. We are told to cast our bread upon the waters, which may seem a most profligate way of sowing, but we are assured that it will bear bread, so it is up to us to have confidence and to go ahead.

Gerry and Joe carry most of the burden of the New York house. Bill Callahan makes up the paper and does a lot of speaking; Eddie Priest has charge of the printing of pamphlets and leaflets and has gotten out 20,000 in the last year; Peter Carey and Victor Smith have charge of the Union of Unemployed which is made up of men from the bread line and has been going on for the past year. Through their Monday afternoon meetings they have kept a credit union going (a miracle when you consider it is made up of men who have come in from the bread line) and have started three cooperative hostels, one of which is named after St. Joseph and the other after St. Patrick. The men are off relief and support themselves by odd jobs, helping each other out in every way they can. Frank Datillo, Jim Smith and Kate Smith take care of the circulation department and right now Shorty, Kate Travis and John Pohl take turns in the kitchen. Peter Clark and a group of other men have charge of the bread line. But everybody helps everybody else and men come and go to take jobs and others take their places. Still, the ones I name have been with us for quite a time now.

The greatest inconvenience we suffer is lack of space. Out in the back yard these summer days we have set up a shoe repair shop and supply the leather and tools for each man to mend his shoes. We have a tailor who sets up his machine in any corner he can find and mends suits. The barber also operates in the back yard in the summer and in the store in winter. The card files, the letter files, the editorial office, the library, the reception room, are all one and the same apartment on the first floor and often it has to be a bedroom too when the house is crowded.

But somehow the work goes on. Here and everywhere is Peter Maurin, the guide, the teacher, the agitator. He has no office and shares his room with Joe and Gerry. He has a book case but no desk. He carries on his indoctrinating wherever he happens to be, in the office, on the street corner in the public square or on

the lecture platform. These past eight months he has been travelling constantly throughout the far west and the south, and when the winter comes he will set out again, "stirring up the people". People are not the same, after meeting Peter. They read his book, *Easy Essays,*which is made up of many of his writings for *The Catholic Worker,*—or they**hear him speak, and he stirs them to think, to read and to act. He never stirs them to unthinking action. The new social order with him is based on the knowledge and practice of the teachings of the Church and the study of the Gospels, history, and tradition.

One of these days we are going to write a book about Peter and call it "Conversations with Peter." All of us will write it and we will give the background of those conversations, the people with whom he is talking, the situations that have arisen to bring forth those conversations.

But right now as I contemplate the unanswered letters on the desk, the copy for the next issue which is coming out next week, the proofs for this book, a retreat on the farm in August for members of all the groups who can make it by the thumb route, a trip South in the fall and another to the far Northwest this winter,–it is hard to figure out when that piece of work will be done. I have scarcely written twenty-five pages in this note book the past year.

A few weeks ago I returned from a month's trip through the middle west where I visited fifteen of the houses. There has been news recently of two more houses opening in Baltimore and Buffalo and I shall have to visit them. Even now I have not visited the Troy and Burlington places.

I have found many things to cheer me on the way. For one thing, the utter poverty of the houses. They all depend on the voluntary and occasional contributions of the readers of the paper in those particular cities. In some cities there are only a few active workers who can contribute their time and some of the money they earn. For instance in Washington, the Blessed Martin House is run by a Negro, Llewellyn Scott, who works for the Government and earns about twenty dollars a week. Out of this he supports a mother and sister in a little apartment where they take in a roomer who helps bear the burden of the rent. He also supports the House of Hospitality there, putting up as many as twenty-five men and feeding about fifty every day. There are not only colored men but white men in the house. It is miserably poor and ramshackle and he somehow manages to find the twenty-five dollars a month rent. He wrote us the other day that just as all the food in the house gave out he went down to the alley where the entrance of the house is to tell the line of men that there was nothing else for them. And there just inside the door he found a big box of sandwiches that someone had left!

In Harrisburg the House of Hospitality has been used to shelter evicted families until they could be sheltered elsewhere. Mary Frecon who has charge of it is sheltering a mother and two children in her own home in addition to having the care of the House on her hands.

The House in Harrisburg sheltered Lucille, too. She was a colored girl, twenty-

three years old. She was found dying in an empty house next door. She had grown up on the streets. She and her brothers and sisters had just prowled around, living as best they could. For the last few months, ravaged with syphilis and drink, Lucille had been cared for by an old colored man who lived in an abandoned shed down an alley. He gave her his cot–that and a chair were the only things he had–and he slept on the floor and waited on her as best he could. But the flies were eating her alive, huge horse-flies, and in her agony she crawled out and sought shade and relief in an abandoned house next to ours where another old colored man camping there had taken care of her. He too knew the uselessness of appealing to agencies. Then the neighbors told Mary Frecon about it and she found Lucille moaning and crying and trying to beat the flies away that fastened themselves upon her open sores.

She was brought to the clean bare rooms of the House of Hospitality and taken care of by the women of the Harrisburg group.

Not a hospital in Harrisburg would have her and it was only after five days that the doctor got an ambulance and sent her to the House of the Good Shepherd at Philadelphia where they deposited her without a word and with no papers about her case. The House of the Good Shepherd is not a hospital, but it is for such girls as Lucille had been. So they took her in, nursed her and there she died not many weeks later.

While she was lying in the Catholic Worker house she had been baptized and anointed by one of the priests at the Cathedral. Our slums are full of Lucilles.

In Cleveland there are two Houses and the one on the East Side in the Negro district was woefully poor. They had to pay twice as much rent as the House in the white neighborhood–this is always the case–and they didn't have one third of the room. The men there were sleeping in the cellar for lack of bed space upstairs and heavy rain had caused an open sewer pipe to overflow, filling the place with stench. As I went down the stairs to this desolate dormitory a rat brushed across my ankle. I was dizzied by the smell and by the contact with the rat and sat down on the edge of one of the neatly made-up beds. They had put linoleum down on the cement floor, and they had cleaned and whitewashed the place. They had put broken glass in the rat holes about the basement but even so as I sat there two more rats dashed across the room. It seemed unbelievable that these men, mostly colored, should welcome such a hole****as a shelter. It indicated what they had been forced to accept before.

Poverty is one thing, and destitution still another. We have always made that distinction. Some of our houses have a decent poverty, which means that the men are reasonably fed and sheltered in a certain amount of poor comfort which they mainly make for themselves. The Houses in Toledo, Akron, Milwaukee, Chicago and St. Louis are a sample. There, through the work of the men themselves, who have come in to get help, the places have been improved. Plumbing has been repaired, heating has been provided through the mending of dilapidated furnaces, windows have been made fast,–and in some cases so much work has

been done by the jobless that those who come to visit the houses think the men are living in too much comfort!

They do not see them as they come in, ragged, haggard and hopeless. They see only the comfortable House that they have made, they see now men who are halfway decently clothed and fed, men who bear some semblance to their own fathers and brothers and husbands, and they say,

"What are these men doing here, enjoying this comfort? Why don't they go away to make room for the destitute?" They do not realize that these same men were the destitute only a few weeks before.

It is true that these men have been removed from the class of the destitute. Now they are able by their initiative and their hard work, to feed and help others. They are the ones who keep the houses up, who do the cooking, the cleaning, the repairing.

In his book, *The Poor and Ourselves,*Daniel Rops points out clearly the distinction between the destitute and the poor. The destitute are so hopeless, so removed from ordinary life, that it is as though they had a wall around them. It is impossible to reach them, to do anything for them except relieve a few of their immediate needs. As soon as they have begun to work, to think, to read,–no matter whether they are penniless or jobless, they are removed from the ranks of the destitute.

Yes, there are many things that cheer me, as I travel around the country. Down in Missouri, one of the CIO unions bought a piece of land for the evicted sharecroppers and has enabled them to made an experiment in cooperative farming. Here is an experiment in mutual aid, in personal responsibility, in education.

In Southern Illinois, a Chamber of Commerce in a little town has bought an abandoned mine, and removing some of the machinery which is expensive to operate, has put the miners back to work, giving them a chance to buy back the mine by deducting the price from their pay. Evidently this is being done with the cooperation of the miners' union, and is another example of mutual aid and personal responsibility.

Not everyone in the country is looking to the Federal government for help.

Certainly, leaving out of account Divine Providence, revolution is inevitable. But trusting to Divine Providence, may we not work with hope, that despite politics and the gigantic bureaucracy which is built up through out the country, the people will themselves settle their problems?

Certainly without poverty, without an acceptance of poverty, and by that I mean decent poverty, with sufficient food, shelter and clothing, we cannot get out of the morass we are in. Certainly too, we can do nothing without the works of mercy,–an expression of our love for our neighbor to show our love for our God.

So we come back again to Peter Maurin's fundamental ideas. "Reach the people through voluntary poverty (going without the luxuries in order to have the essentials) and through the works of mercy (mutual aid and a philosophy of labor)."

It is hard for us ourselves to become simple enough to grasp and live with these ideas. It is hard for us, and hard for our readers and friends throughout the country. We still are not considered respectable, we still are combated and condemned as "radicals".

"We are fools for Christ's sake ... we are weak ... we are without honor ... we are made as the refuse of this world, the offscouring of all, even until now."

And following St. Paul, I am certainly praying that we continue so, because this is indeed "the downward path which leads to salvation."