

Creation

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Meditation on the struggle between heaven and earth, between God and man, and between worship and action. Juxtaposes images of an atomic bomb test, the mentally ill, the Mass and worship, and quotes from writers. Argues for decentralization of government services, most especially for the decentralization of mental hospitals, and personal responsibility over state aid. Explains how all must atone for sin through suffering. (DDLW #707).

The front page illustration this month is of Creation because it is June “when if ever come perfect days, when heaven tries earth if it be in tune and over it softly her warm ear lays and whether we look or whether we listen we hear life murmur and see it glisten and every clod feels a stir of might, a power within it which stretches and towers and reaching above it and searching for light, climbs to a soul in grass and flowers.”

The lines of Lowell learned in childhood and probably misquoted come to mind at the freshness and beauty of this picture, with Adam emerging from the earth, and yet so much a part of it and still so close to it. Americans are reaching for the moon now, and our planes climb to unbelievable heights, and it is not just a desire to seek the womb, to return to the earth when we say that it is necessary as never before, for man to kiss the earth from which he sprang, and which has been so ennobled by Christ who took on our humanity. Man must become humble and know that it is God who created him and all the beauty around him.

In the midst of this beauty yesterday, on Pentecost, the hydrogen bomb was dropped from the air over a Pacific island. The flash was equal to 500 suns, and according to one reporter it was like a nightmare in broad daylight, the most horrible part of which was “a giant super earthly cloud that kept climbing and spreading outward and outward until it appeared that it would envelope the entire earth. For more than an hour the cloud kept growing in all directions, a mushroom cloud of many colors, rising until it towered over all its surroundings. The sun rose to the right. It seems puny by comparison with what had been seen some forty-two minutes earlier.”

The contest between man and God! It was as though man were trying to shut off the earth from Heaven, from God himself.

The last most powerful explosion was the one over Bikini in March 1954, which led to a fall out of radio active dust 7,000 square miles around and sprayed the Japanese fishing vessel and resulted in the death of a poor fisherman.

The story of the test ends on an enthusiastic note. Not only can we make pocket sized bombs now, but also “here comes one of the greatest miracles of

the hydrogen bomb that makes its production possible at an amazing low cost in terms of destruction!”

Destruction of what? People? Entire islands which are their habitation? No - - the reporter means the destruction of the valuable materials that go to make a bomb, which are not only **not** destroyed, but increased and can be increased indefinitely. A miracle, the scientists cry out, and the writers are hard put to it to explain all these scientific facts which will reveal not too much for the enemy but enough to stimulate the scientists who are our allies, not to speak of the ordinary reader of the newspapers.

It is an interesting fact that there was a repeated call over the radio recently for “writers” who would be able to translate into ordinary intelligible speech, the works of the physicists of these days.

Another headline of today, on the first left hand column to match the right hand column about the bomb test read, “Scientists vision new civilization for the 21st century, technology to be king, rocks to be the source of fuel and heat - - critical need is seen for Brain Power.”

Sad it is that one of every five of our hospital beds are occupied by mental patients, that for everyone hospitalized there are more “disturbed” people walking the streets, sad it is that the human mind is giving way in the face of this gigantic contest between man and God.

We are reminded again of Ignacio Silone, who said at a writers’ conference in Zurich after the great war that writers sold their talents to their governments and killed by their words about the ideals which they painted in such bold and glowing terms just as effectively as the ammunition which they extolled with such enthusiasm. It was not Winston Churchill who coined those glowing words, calling on men to give their “blood, sweat and tears.” It was Garibaldi, another man of the sword who said them first. The popular response to these words surely shows the instinctive need and desire in the hearts of all men for the Holy Cross, to suffer for and with their brothers.

The struggle between man and God is like that of Jacob and the angel and man must be wounded as Jacob was before the contest is over. So far, the Russians have the best of it, the official Russians who are officially atheist. Why should any talk of freedom enter in to confuse the issue for them. Freedom has its roots in religion. Education is not confused as it is in this country, where pupils are taught to reverence God and Country, where they are taught to take God into partnership in order to prosper.

And if anything is more than utter atheism, it is this attempt to equate God and country, and to make God serve our own purposes. We all do it, we are all guilty. And we need to remind ourselves that the reason for man’s existence is to love, honor and serve God; that the greatest work of the day is the Mass, the offering of the God-man to God for His praise, honor and glory, in reparation for our sins and in thanksgiving for all His benefits, and that the Mass is not to

help the work of the day, which it does, of course, but that all the work of the day is to build up to the climax of the Mass, that act of love - - that moment of union with God. When we use the Mass to further our work, which we regard as of such importance, and which we need, as human beings to regard of great importance, it is as though we were walking upside down, on our heads. We need to stop and right ourselves every now and then, frequently at first, until we get in the habit of walking upright.

On the other hand one finds so many Catholics spending their time not only at Mass (several a day in fact) but also in prayers, devotions, rosaries, holy hours, as well as all the societies in the church which promote one or another of all these Means and giving no time to try to change society and their own life in it so that it will more conform to what the life of a Christian should be in this world. Then on the other hand one is apt to plunge more desperately into the life of work, writing, speaking, organizing unions, credit unions, cooperatives, farming communes and retreats to dispose the Christian to go in for the foregoing. What a circle it all is.

In this last year when in the company of others I have spent so much time before city magistrates, for refusal to take shelter in the civil defense drill last June, and in my trial as a slum landlord (an attempt to close our house of hospitality) my interest has been turned to the need to study prisons and changes that are being made in them.

Contact with people who have had mental breakdowns, and visiting in mental hospitals, and the presence among us of so many psychosomatic complaints among people who live with us, has made me more than ever interested in the decentralization of mental hospitals.

In fact decentralization seems to be the solution to so many of our problems, from how to deal with the men on our skid rows, or how to deal with prisons and mental hospitals and the poor in India and Africa. The "do it yourself" movement; the service of others so emphasized by the Alcoholics Anonymous and Abbe Pierre; the retreat movement, all these are attempts to take care of the ills of the day, finding new ways of attacking the problem of how to perform the works of mercy most effectively, and without calling in the aid of the State.

It is the function of the journalist to try to cover all fields, to acquaint the readers of a periodical of all the things that are being done, and so to influence them that they too will be encourage if not inspired to take their part in the human race.

On the other hand there is a need to urge oneself and others to moderate our greed and zeal, so as not to try to embrace all fields, but to try to specialize, make oneself proficient in one needed work by education and schooling, and get the required degrees if necessary and if able, in order to do the job most needed and for which one is most fitted.

Those who can take such stringent courses as tax refusal can give their services rather than be put on payrolls and beg their way to supply their daily needs

if they can find agencies willing to work with them on these terms. Or they can embrace voluntary poverty and manual labor as a life of penance and mortification.

The harvest is great and the laborers are few. No fear of unemployment in this field.

Another thing about these hydrogen bomb tests. We must think of the guilt of the human race, of all men in their defiance of God. We are all Americans and we all partake of this guilt. In one way or another we contribute to the sin and we must atone for ourselves and for each other. There is the mystery of suffering and there is also something else we understand instinctively that if we love God and love our brothers in God, then we must atone to God, suffer for ourselves and for them. This goes for any suffering, if it is only the petty pin pricks of daily modern life, the life of the home, which can mount to such torture on occasion. We cannot choose just what kind of suffering we wish. That would be too easy. But if we use suffering so, for penance, it becomes the one supernatural thing we have to offer, Leon Bloy writes. Thinking this way, we must respect the sufferers mental or physical, and be grateful to them for being the lightening rods to divert the wrath of God.

Looked at in this light, understood in this way, we take comfort, and being comforted, we must comfort others, St. Paul said.

And in addition to atoning and praying for forgiveness, we can call upon St. Michael to defend us in battle, and we can pray to be like the youths in the fiery furnace, who praised God in the midst of that great updraft of heat which was turned for them into a gentle wind and warmth. Sacred Heart of Jesus, whose love for man we commemorate this month, have mercy.