

On Pilgrimage - October 1953

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Cares for her daughter's children after Tamar has her sixth child. Quotes from various letters she is answering. Tells of a conference on pacifism and notes that many don't agree with the Catholic Worker position. (DDLW #655).

Since August first I have been staying at Peter Maurin farm and first I gave myself the excuse for this great joy and comfort by saying that my daughter needed me. She had her sixth baby, a girl, August 9. This time instead of waiting a month beforehand, my help came for the month afterward, when it was needed most. I was there to drive her to the hospital where she had a happy six-day stay, visiting with half a dozen other women in the ward, none of whom could nurse their babies. She has been able to nurse all of hers. The two previous she had at home. I had a most enjoyable time taking care of the other five. Mary is at the giddy age of two, dancing and singing and shouting all the day long. "Rowdy Irish," David calls her. She is beautiful and good, and it is most edifying to see her fold her little hands in prayer at each meal. Nickie thinks the act of folding the hands, the gesture, is enough and dives right into the meal. He is the shoutingest member of the family. When Tamar got home I stayed a few days more, and then I took four of the children to Peter Maurin farm where they slept in the same room with me in double decker beds. My nights for a time were disturbed—I was always jumping up to see if they were covered, or falling out of bed. Now a month later, I have the two oldest who have started back to school. Tamar says it is very quiet at home with only four.

Writing

With the piling up of letters and articles to write, and the book which is moving along again, I have plenty to do here on Staten Island and I can combine baby sitting with writing, which is after all a talent God has given me to be used. Sometimes when I am going around the country on speaking trips, visiting our friends and readers, I feel like Dickens' Mrs. Jellyby. Certainly traveling is one way of getting out of writing too. Always I am trying to get out of it, and yet it is a thing I love to do. But if I can avoid it by housecleaning, by doing the family wash, by dishwashing, cooking a meal, I am very avid for those tasks. "After all, this is living," I say to myself, "not writing about it." And "St. Teresa of Avila always used to write by night rather than interrupt the work of her houses and foundations during the day."

But when I look at the pile of letters before me, I take myself to task and sit down for days at the typewriter. Here is a letter from Fr. Conrad Pepler, Dominican, editor of "The Life of

the Spirit,” and head of a retreat house in England, asking for an article on peace for the Christmas issue. I am very happy to be invited to write on peace for a Dominican magazine. These hounds of God are searching out truth, and sifting the true from the false, and they would not be inviting me if they thought I was writing contrary to the mind of the Church. And here is a letter from Father F. H. Drinkwater, a famous writer and sociologist, also English, who differs from us on the subject of war. He commends the article on the Rosenberg case which appeared in the July-August issue. The next letter in the pile (and I am taking them as they come), is from Abbot Joseph Gabriel Walzer who is founding a monastery in North Africa and who was formerly the Arch Abbot of Beuron. Germany. He is speaking at the Catholic Worker headquarters in New York, October 9, about his work.

The next two letters are from Paraguay, South America, from some of the society of brothers, in Primavera, asking for one thing, for an article for the Plough, their quarterly which has been revived after many years, and which is published at Bromdon, Bridgnorth: Shropshire, England. We hope our readers will subscribe. The price is \$2.50 a year, post free. One letter reads, “Hector Black told us you were very pleased in reading in our first number of the Plough, to see an article by Alfred Delp, S.J. and to see we are open to the Catholic testimony when it is given in clarity of spirit. We have actually received a great deal of inspiration from Catholic writers. Delp, who spoke a very powerful and clear word to his generation in Nazi Germany, has been read by us in very many of our meetings. Others who have had much to say to us—Karl Adam, Dietrich von Hildebrand, who wrote **Transformation in Christ**, and **Marriage and Purity**. This year we have used Romano Guardini’s **Der Herr** (The Lord) a great deal. Do you know this work? Is there an English translation of it? One of our American members who does quite a lot of translating from the German translated long passages from it which we read at meal times. Do you know Henri de Lubac’s (S.J.) **The Drama of Atheist Humanism** which treats of the writings of Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, Comte and the answer which Dostoevsky gives to their disbelief. I could mention many other Catholic writers who are important to us. At the same time as saying this, we do see, of course, the great discrepancy there is between Catholic practice and the testimony of a few enlightened witnesses.”

Philippines

How delighted I was also to receive a letter from Brother Denis who sent his regards to the two John Thorntons who had been associated with the CW. Brother Denis was a friend of Fr. Roy in Baltimore, and friend too, of the retreat movement which has had such an influence on our work, He sends his regards to Frs. Hugo, Meenan and Farina out Pittsburgh way. Also he answered a question I put to him a few years ago as to circulating the paper in the Philippines. “I spoke to Fr. Walter Hogan. S.J. whose boys are publishing a monthly called ‘**The Free Worker**’ and whose name was in the news for daring to sponsor the cause of labor here. His reaction to the CW was “that though he and the boys liked the paper in general, some of the articles offended the Filipino sensibilities, and he didn’t think he would be successful in getting rid of copies. He meant, by the way, articles dealing with pacifism principally.”

Fr. Marx

Which reminded me of a visit we had yesterday from Fr. Marx the 15th of 17 children, born in Loretto, Minn. and now going to the Catholic University and writing his thesis on Fr. Virgil Michel. He too commented on how our pacifism offended and lost us circulation.

"You are regarded," he said, "as has-beens, as a phenomenon of the depression years," and he said he was glad to see us so very much alive and growing still. He spent five hours with us talking about the early days of the work and of the influence Fr. Virgil Michel had on Peter Maurin and the Catholic Worker in general. What a great loss we all suffered when this great priest died at the age of 48. It will be most interesting to read Fr. Marx's thesis and we hope it is published so that it will reach many libraries. Fr. Michel and Peter used to talk of liturgy and sociology, liturgy and community, liturgy and work until the early hours of the morning. It was Peter who brought the work of Emmanuel Mounier to Fr. Virgil's attention, and encouraged the translation and publication of **The Personalist Manifesto** by Longmans Green in 1938. The foreword itself, beginning with "the man in the street" the "end of an era," reminds one of the round table discussions that always went on in Peter's lifetime and are going on still.

It always amazes me how some controversial issue so offends people that they cease reading the paper, and then, having ceased reading it they think it is a dead issue, that it is fading away and declining and soon will cease to be. I am happy to report, and to prove, come to think of it, by these very letters, that the Catholic Worker movement is very much alive, and "it makes to think," as Peter used to say.

Guatemala

Another letter come from Guatemala from a priest in the missions, who said he had been reading the paper with profit for the past two years. The more I see of mission work and all work connected with the purpose of saving souls, the more I am convinced of the need of the corporal works of mercy. Here in the Indian pueblos, some of which have been untouched by the church for generations, we found it difficult to start the Church again, but with free clinics the suspicion and coldness invariably breaks down."

Pacifist meeting

Our second Labor Day pacifist week end was a great success, although it was an exhausting week end of talk, and of course not all were in agreement, which is as it should be.

Ammon Hennacy, who kindly makes notes on what he is reading and sends them to me, made the following notes of the conference which I read with much amusement.

DOROTHY DAY—We need more love and patience and while the best that we do isn't so much, yet it is a leaven of greatest value.

DICK DONNELLY—Felt that pacifists should pay more attention to the economic factor; that we attempted to do a lot but were inconsistent.

MARTY CORBIN—Gave a good factual account of laws about the CO, and praised the non-registrant absolutist position.

AMMON HENNACY—Told of his prison and tax refusal experiences. .Only said the word “pip-squeak” twice. Second talk he defined anarchism..as. printed in “MAN” in 1940 and the definition in preface of his Autobiography. Stressed that majority rule was wrong; that all things worked together for good to those who loved God, but not to those who only “talked” about it. That Christian Anarchism succeeds in 4 places where Capitalism and Materialism fails: (1) War—Gandhi salt march, etc. (2) Crime—Osborne of Sing Sing. “Peace, brother” when robbers held up Fr. Divine’s folks. Restaurant hold up. (3) Liquor—Voluntary cooperation with God as the AA does and not law and pledges. Parable of dry road and wet road and detours calls for tolerance. (4) Indians – History of the tricks of the white man from 1798 to present. Details of the pacifist anarchist Hopi. .

We each have our own vocation, but don’t spend all your life alibiing about what it is. Arnold Winklereid story. Hard on myself but tolerant with others. Carry sword as long as you can advice to Polish priest who believed in defensive war. He saw terrible events so don’t ride him too hard. If you believe in violence, you must get there “fastest with the mostest.” Better kill the tyrant than to cringe, but better to conquer him with love as the way of Gandhi teaches. Story of Swiss town. Unlatched door-story of Quakers and Indians.

BOB LUDLOW – Spoke on Depth Psychology. No distinction between individual and collective ethics. Roots of war not only in the medieval economic system but in our own personality. This change needed. He favors Jung among the psychologists. The conflict between the ego and the collective unconscious. When we identify ourselves with the latter especially without any sense of humor, we become neurotic. A danger of pseudo-saints linking themselves with God. A real identification with the mystical body is o.k.

NOTE—A soldier from Harrisburg, Pa., who read his first CW came. Also a J.W. with his good looking Catholic girl friend who had just read her second copy of the CW. Felix the atheist anarchist took part.

MIKE GUNN—An old friend of Peter’s told of Peter.

I opened the conference, on Saturday morning, and spoke for an hour, and all Ammon could remember of my talk were twenty words. It proves to me, what I have often said, that on such subjects people scarcely listen to a woman. Her talk is called “inspirational” and so on, but war and peace are matters that concern men and they must battle it out. I have the notes, from which I spoke, and I not only talked on the examination into the problems of war and peace which were going on at other conferences, such as the Catholic Social week in France this year, but on the counsels and precepts, on means and ends, on poverty and war. I contrasted the words of St. Ignatius of Antioch, the Bishop Ford of Maryknoll who went to martyrdom rejoicing, and giving up all material wealth, schools, hospitals, churches, even life itself, desiring to suffer with Christ, with the fulminations in the Catholic press, which contributed to the sum total of hatred and strife in the world. Thank God we have the spirit of love and martyrdom growing in the Church today. I told also of a need for a community to meet the problems of pacifism, and read from **The Life of the Spirit** of a community of Catholic pacifists in England which has been in existence since 1940, an account of which

will be found elsewhere in this issue.

It did seem to me that my talk had substance and practicality. Ammon's summing up convinces me it is better to stay home and write—at least you have the record of your words before you, rather than wander the high ways and by ways of the country like a Methodist woman preacher!

Sunday joys

Staying home will give me a chance to taste the joys of home life and the country these lovely fall days. We have revived, here at Peter Maurin farm, a long defunct organization called the “Hot chocolate and Sunday afternoon walking club,” which was founded by Gerry Griffin and Joe Zarrella, on Mott street, at the time when my daughter was about twelve years old. Those were city walks which a group of them took, but we are going to roam the country side, down Claypit road, to find, clay pits for pottery; to the Arthur Kill, at the foot of the road, to explore fishing possibilities from the old skeletons of barges down there, and for sketching parties (Rita Ham and Stanley Becker are the artists.) Both these walks only mean a mile. Most of us prefer the beach, but that means over four miles back and forth and we end up by going by car and walking on the beach. This is to be an authentic walking club. Then, vespers at five, and singing in the evening if anyone wants to sing. We have a guitarist to accompany song.

And yet, some talks

I mention these joys and I recall that in spite of my preceding paragraphs, not so far back, I cannot stay home all the time. I do indeed have to go when I am called, and speak when I am invited, and this coming month, October, will find me at Gould Farm, Great Barrington, Mass., October 10, 11; for a meeting of psychiatrists, clergymen and social workers; at Earlham, a Quaker college at Richmond, Ind., October 15; at Fr. Ehman's parish, Watkins Glen, New York, October 21. Aside from this, my program keeps me home for the rest of the winter, thank God.