On Hospitality

Dorothy Day

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Introduction

In this series Dorothy discusses the notion of Christian hospitality, central to the Catholic Worker vision and work.

Chapter 2

From Union Square to Rome

Forward to *House of Hospitality*

Summary: An overview of the beginnings of the Catholic Worker. As a journalist covering the Communist led march on Washington in December 1932, Dorothy yearns and prays to find a way to work for the poor and oppressed. She meets Peter Maurin who "indoctrinates" her in Catholic social teaching and his program to change the social order: starting a newspaper, houses of hospitality, roundtable discussions and farming communes. Includes several of Peter's essays and details about starting the newspaper and their first houses of hospitality. (DDLW #435).

1

THE story of the *Catholic Worker* begins with Peter. If it were not for Peter there would be no *Catholic Worker.* If it were not for Peter there would be no Houses of Hospitality and Farming Communes. Peter has changed the life of thousands of people. I met Peter Maurin in December, 1932, right after the Hunger March staged by the Communists.

This is the way the movement Peter now heads began. For five years after my conversion to the Catholic Church I had been living a quiet and studious life. I had earned my living by working as bookseller, cook, research worker, synopsist, dialogue writer and newspaper correspondent. I had been to Hollywood, to Mexico, to Florida, and a good part of the time I had lived in New York.

In the fall of 1932 1 had been writing articles for *America* and the *Commonweal,* and the first week in December I went to Washington, D. C., to cover the Hunger March of the Unemployed Councils, and the Farmer's Convention. Both were Communist-led.

If the journalists and the police of Washington had been coached in their parts, they could not have staged a better drama, from the Communist standpoint, than they did in the events of that week.

Drama was what the Communist leaders of the march wanted, and drama, even melodrama, was what they got. They weren't presenting their petitions to Congress with any hope of immediately obtaining the cash bonuses and unemployment relief they demanded. (Nevertheless

five years later unemployment insurance became part of Social Security legislation). They were presenting pictorially the plight of the workers of America, not only to the countless small towns and large cities through which they passed, not only to the Senate and the House of Representatives, but through the press to the entire world. And in addition they were demonstrating to the proletariat.

They were saying, "Come, submit yourselves to our discipline,–place yourselves in our hands, you unionworkers, you unemployed, and we will show you how a scant 3,000 of you, unarmed, can terrorize authorities and make them submit to at least some of your demands."

It does not matter that the victory won was only that of marching to the Capitol. To those unarmed marchers who for two days and two cold nights in December lived and slept on an asphalt highway with no water, no fires, no sanitary facilities, with the scantiest of food, surrounded by hysteria in the shape of machine guns, tear and nauseous gas bombs, in the hands of a worn and fretted police force, egged on by a bunch of ghouls in the shape of newspaper men and photographers,–to these marchers, the victory was a real one. They had achieved their purpose.

They had dramatized their plight for the workers themselves and given them a taste of power. They might be booed by police, sneered at by the Vice-President, they might be hungry, unshaven, shivering and exhausted, but they felt a sense of power when they saw a whole capital, the center of their country, mobilized against them.

When they had finally gained permission to march, they set out jauntily, defiantly, conscious of victory, though they were escorted through the streets as prisoners, even as they had been prisoners since Sunday, on blockaded New York Avenue, between the government owned hillside and the miles of railway tracks on the other side.

They were victors in that they had forced an unfriendly press to play into their hands and give them headlines and pages of dramatic publicity. They were victors in that they had induced the press to excite the police to a brutal and stupid show of force.

I do not blame the harried police, the firemen, the reserves, even though they cursed and bullied and taunted the marchers as though they were trying to provoke a bloody conflict. I blame the press which for a few ghastly headlines, a few gruesome pictures, was ready to precipitate useless violence towards a group of unemployed human beings who were being used as "Communist tactics," as "shock troops" in the "class struggle."

It is true that the Hunger March was led by Communists. But it is also true that ninety per cent of the marchers were union men and women or unskilled, unorganized workers who were not Communists, but were accepting for the time being, the leadership of the militant Unemployed Councils, affiliated with the Communist party. "No other leaders presented themselves," they argued, "nothing was being done for us. We accepted this leadership and accepted the means offered by them to dramatize our plight."

2

1 went through Union Square in New York the week before, just as the Hunger Marchers were getting ready to pull out for Washington. It was sunny but very sharp and cold and the fresh-ploughed sod of the park had a frozen, barren look. About twenty-five trucks were lined

up at the north end of the square and a few thousand "comrades" were gathered around to "make a demonstration" and see off their friends, the delegates chosen from the various Unemployed Councils of New York. The march on Washington was organized by the National Committee of these Unemployed Councils, and for the past weeks delegates had been setting out from all over the United States, from California, from Washington, Oregon, and all the Middle Western states.

Details of the plan of march were given months before in the *Daily Worker,* the Communist newspaper. For the past months collections had been taken up at all Communist meetings to finance the march, and the trucks were hired for $100 apiece for nine days to take the delegates to Washington and back again. According to the published plan, the delegates were to get to Washington, demonstrating on the way in town and village, parade in Washington, present their petition, and turn about and return to their homes, in the same organized fashion. Discipline was to be maintained, violence was to be avoided, food and lodging were to be requested from the cities en route and from Washington, but all preparations such as the hiring of halls, rooms and food for the delegates were to be made beforehand.

Carl Winter, the secretary of the Unemployed Council of New York, was a mild, serious man of thirty-five or so, said by his companions to be a good organizer and a respected leader. He was a modest man, and refused to be photographed by the newsreel men, urging Anna Burlak, Karl Reeve, and Ben Gold to go before the cameras. Anna Burlak was a tall, blond, handsome girl of twenty-two, one of the leaders of textile workers of New England.

I talked with George Granich, one of the delegates on the march and the pay-off man for the truckmen. George was an old friend of mine. "The New England bunch got in last night," he said, "and they were offered accommodations at the Municipal Lodging House by the city. But to get these accommodations it was necessary to go through all sorts of red tape, and the giving up of one's clothes to be fumigated, so everyone went down to the Manhattan Lyceum and slept wrapped in their blankets on the floor. These delegates are all picked anyway, to withstand hardship on the march. They're a strong bunch and ready to sleep in the trucks if they have to."

An attempt had been made to bar members of the "oppressed races" from the march ("the hundred-percent American police would have had it in for them," Granich said), but the seamen's groups insisted on bringing along Filipino delegates. The marine workers who occupied the first trucks were a colorful group, made up as they were of all races. The sailors wore their tight

fitting dungarees, woven belts, wind-breakers and pulled down woolen caps.

The line of march as planned, lay through Jersey City, Elizabeth, Newark, New Brunswick, Trenton, Philadelphia, Chester, Wilmington, Baltimore and on to Washington.

I did not follow the progress of the Western group going into Washington, but the progress of the Northern group was typical. There was no trouble for the marchers in any of the cities on the way until they reached Wilmington. There they were holding a meeting in a church and Ben Gold, one of the leaders, was making a speech, when suddenly windows were broken simultaneously on either side of the hall and tear gas bombs were thrown in. The meeting was in an uproar and milled out into the street in anything but orderly fashion, as

was natural. There the police took the opportunity to club and beat the marchers. Ben Gold, after being badly beaten, was jailed, and the march went on without him.

On Sunday, with the Hunger Marchers approaching Washington, the city, according to the papers, was in a state bordering on hysteria. There were riot drills of the marines at Quantico; guards at the White House, Capitol, Treasury, power plants, arsenals of the National Guard, the American Legion, countless volunteers, supplemented by 370 firemen, all were armed with machine guns, tear gas, nauseating gas, revolvers, sawedoff shot guns, night sticks, lengths of rubber hose. The newspapers with scareheads and photographs of the radical "army" fanned flames of hostility, and of actual fear in the public.

When I went out with some newspaper men to meet the marchers and to visit their final encampment, I was struck by the fact that perhaps the most frightened of all were the newspaper men. They implored their editors to authorize the purchase of gas masks (thirty dollars apiece) and they kept a good distance away from the marchers, and with their eyes open for the best means of escape should anything happen.

In addition to the marchers, groups of liberals came to the city to give their moral support and to add their petitions to those of the 3,000 marchers. There were delegates from the League of Professional Groups which was formed before the national election to support the Communist candidates and which is now continuing its propaganda to support the Communist movement. Members of this delegation included Malcolm Cowley, one of the editors of the *New Republic*, Matthew Josephson, magazine writer and author of several biographies, James Rorty, poet, John Hermann, novelist and winner of a Scribner prize, Michael Gold, writer for the *Daily Worker*, Charles Rumford Walker, former associate editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, and others.

When the news came that the marchers were being held prisoners in the half-mile stretch of roadway, fifty feet wide, this group of liberals joined forces with the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners to take legal action to free them. A writ of habeas corpus was taken out and an injunction asked against the city commissioners.

Various women's organizations, pacifist groups, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, Quakers, and others protested against the ludicrous and uncalled-for show of force. There were no Catholic groups protesting.

Only one paper in Washington, the Scripps-Howard *Daily News,* gave a calm, unhysterical account of the situation. It suggested editorially that the marchers were within their rights in wishing to present their petition and that such imprisonment of the marchers and show of force were both unnecessary and unconstitutional.

The other papers screamed of the "mad fanaticism" of the marchers, "fanned to wild fury by the inflammatory speeches of the leaders." *The Star* spoke of razor blades secreted in the shoes of the marchers which could, if kicked with properly, sever arteries of the police. They hinted "they may be armed." And they went on in this way through edition after edition, Sunday and all day Monday.

Then on Tuesday morning it was announced that the marchers were to parade and to leave that night. And so, after this permission to parade had been refused steadily before and since their entry into Washington, they did parade, just as they had set out to do, just as the

campaign had been mapped out for them in the *Daily Worker* a month before. The plan was delayed, but not defeated.

The papers did their best to make a riot out of it and failed. They merely presented to public view the Communist leaders who could carry through successfully a planned and disciplined demonstration. And the Washingtonians who lined the streets by the thousands to watch the procession, laughed tolerantly at the songs and slogans, and said admiringly, "They sure have got gumption, standing up against the police that way."

3

I watched that ragged horde and thought to myself, "These are Christ's poor. He was one of them. He was a man like other men, and He chose His friends amongst the ordinary workers. These men feel they have been betrayed by Christianity. Men are not Christian today. If they were, this sight would not be possible. Far dearer in the sight of God perhaps are these hungry ragged ones, than all those smug, well-fed Christians who sit in their homes, cowering in fear of the Communist menace."

I felt that they were my people, that I was part of them. I had worked for them and with them in the past, and now I was a Catholic and so could not be a Communist. I could not join this united front of protest and I wanted to.

The feast of the Immaculate Conception was the next day and I went out to the National Shrine and assisted at solemn high Mass there. And the prayer that I offered up was that some way would be shown me, some way would be opened up for me to work for the poor and the oppressed.

When I got back to New York, Peter Maurin was at the house waiting for me.

He had come in a few days before and had met my brother and sister-in-law with whom I was living. John was working nights on one of the Hearst papers and Tessa was going to have a baby. John did not earn very much so they had moved in with me.

It was a tenement apartment, four rooms deep and there was a yard in back. There were peach trees and fig trees in the yard, planted by Italian tenants. Privet hedges lined the fences and hid their bleak ugliness. In the summer half the yard was fenced in to protect the beds of petunias that scattered their fragrance even there between the canyons of buildings. Both on the Fourteenth Street and Fifteenth Street side, the buildings were five and six stories high. Next door and down the block the gardens were the same, and the Italians used to sit and smoke their pipes under the stunted trees at night.

We were on the first floor and in the basement below was a barber shop with an organ in the rear where the Italian barber used to play sad tunes at night when his work was finished. Germans and Italians lived next door and upstairs.

I slept in the noisy front room, noisy because people came in all night and slammed the outside door and stamped up and down the bare steps. The milkman started the noise again at four in the morning. But one gets used to these things.

In the second room my daughter Teresa slept. Teresa was six. There was just room there for a bed and dresser. It was also a passage to the next room, which was in turn a passage to

the kitchen. John and Tessa slept in the room next to the kitchen. The kitchen was also our sitting room, library and dining room, but we were not as crowded as most of our neighbors. We had to heat the place with gas. The front room was a north room, and cold. The kitchen was heated by the cooking and by the gas oven, an expensive form of heat (the poor are always extravagant) and it was a south, sunny room, so we lived in it all winter, only using the bedrooms for sleeping purposes.

Tessa and John were twenty-one and twenty-two years old then. They were happy and carefree and didn't mind being crowded and having lots of company. And Tessa was Spanish.

It was because she was Spanish and hospitable that she welcomed Peter when he came. John is more reserved.

They often talk of that first night Peter Maurin walked in. He was wearing a khaki shirt and shabby stained pants and an overcoat, the pockets of which were crammed with books and papers. When he started looking for something, he pulled glasses out of his pocket (glasses which he bought along the Bowery for thirty cents and which magnified) and perched them half-way down his nose. For a year or so he wore a pair which had one ear-piece missing so they sagged on one side of his face.

On this night however, he did not stop to look for papers. He came in brusquely and wanted to know where I was. Hearing that I would be back in a day or so, he started indoctrinating Tessa.

Holding out one finger, from a position of vantage in the middle of the floor he began reciting his phrased essays, enunciating them so that one could almost see them clear and black against a page.

"People go to Washington,
asking the Federal Government
to solve their economic problems.
But the Federal Government
was never meant
to solve men's economic problems.
Thomas Jefferson says,
'The less government there is
the better it is.'
If the less government there is,
the better it is,
the best kind of government
is self-government.
If the best kind of government
is self-government,
then the best kind of organization
is self-organization.
When the organizers try
to organize the unorganized,
they often do it for the benefit

of the organizers.
The organizers don't organize themselves.
And when the organizers don't organize themselves,
nobody organizes himself.
And when nobody organizes himself,
nothing is organized."

Tessa was making supper, trying to find John's tie, and being hospitable and listening with one ear. This probably sounded anarchistic to her, caught in passing as it were, but her father is an anarchist so she felt quite at home with Peter. Tessa herself was a Communist.

Peter spoke and still speaks with a strong accent, but Tessa also was used to accents. Peter came from Languedoc near the border of Spain twenty-five years ago. Even his type was familiar to her, short and sturdy, shoulders broad and powerful, features hewed as though out of rock.

John confessed afterward that he thought of an anarchist friend, truly unbalanced, whom I tried to avoid and said that if he had been home alone he would not have told Peter that I would be back in a few days.

But nothing could have kept Peter from finding me, once he had made up his mind. He had read some articles I had written in the *Sign* and the *Commonweal* and had determined that I should start on his program of social reconstruction.

If I had not said those prayers down in Washington if I had not been reading the lives of the saints, canonized and as yet uncanonized, St. John Bosco and Rose Hawthorne for instance–I probably would have listened, but continued to write rather than act.

4

It has taken us years to pry Peter's story from him. He deals with ideas and considers personalities unimportant, and it has only been little by little and day by day that we have gained a knowledge of his background. He was born in a small village in the southern part of France, and his own mother died when he was nine years old. His father married again and there were twenty-three children in the family. Every now and then Peter tells us about the communal aspects of life in a little village; the bake-oven which all the villagers used; the flour mill. They had a big stone house and the sheep were housed on the first floor and the family on the second. When Peter was a young man he became a cocoa salesman travelling all over France. Finally, he reached Paris where he associated with the radicals of the day and continued his studies. He first came to Canada as a homesteader, but when his partner was killed in a hunting accident he gave it up and began wandering around the country doing whatever work came to hand. He has worked in steel mills, coal mines, lumber camps, on railroads. He has dug ditches and sewers, and worked as janitor in city tenements. He has taught French, and has always continued studying. Always he was an agitator, speaking on street corners and in public squares, indoctrinating the men with whom he came in contact in lodging houses, coffee shops and along the wayside.

"We must study history," he says, "in order to find out why things are as they are. In the light of history we should so work today that things will be different in the future." journalists, he believes, should not merely report history, but make history by influencing the time in which

they write. In other words they should be propagandists and agitators as he himself has always been. He started to write, he says, because he could not get enough people to listen to him, and his writing was influenced, technically at least, by the Works of Charles Peguy who also wrote in short phrased lines. St. Augustine had used this technique in writing his meditations, finding it a help to break up the sentences into phrases that catch the eye.

Peter always had sheaves of these writings in his pockets, and he began visiting the offices of Catholic papers and magazines trying to get them printed. At times he mimeographed copies of his work and distributed them himself. Always he emphasized voluntary poverty and the works of mercy as the techniques by which the masses could be reached, and he lived as he taught. He has the simplicity of a saint or a genius, believing that everyone is interested in what he has to teach, believing that everyone will play his part in the lay apostolate.

He was living at that time in Uncle Sam's hotel down on the Bowery where he paid fifty cents a night for his room. Today, as he travels all over the country, speaking at colleges and seminaries, he still lives in flop houses, sleeps in bus stations, and eats in dingy lunchrooms on the "Skid Rows" of the country. He possesses only the clothes that he wears and the books that he has in his pocket. He has no desk at which to write, no office–in fact, no home except the Catholic Worker Houses of Hospitality throughout the country. He is the most completely detached person that it has ever been my privilege to meet.

When we met he had been working in a boys' camp up near Mount Tremper, New York, for four years, cutting ice in winter, quarrying rock, and doing odd jobs about the camp. He was working without pay but when he came to New York, Father Scully, who had charge of the camp, gave him a dollar a day to live on. After weeks of stimulating discussion around Union Square he would go back to the camp to continue his studying and his writing. These years seem to me to have been years of preparation for the work that he is doing today. He had drawn up a program of action which was simple and comprehensive. He feels it is not enough merely to bring the workers propaganda by way of a newspaper, pamphlets, and leaflets. One must combine this with the direct action of the works of mercy: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, in order that one may instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, and comfort the afflicted. The corporal and the spiritual works, according to Peter, must go hand in hand, and getting out the *Catholic Worker* and distributing literature were to Peter performing spiritual works of mercy.

In order to carry on this work, he said, we needed hospices such as they had in the Middle Ages, and he always referred to these hospices as "Houses of Hospitality." In regard to this he wrote the following in an early issue of the paper:

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THE DUTY OF HOSPITALITY

People who are in need
  and are not afraid to beg
  give to people not in need
  the occasion to do good
  for goodness' sake.
Modern society calls the beggar
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bum and panhandler
and gives him the bum's rush.
But the Greeks used to say
that people in need are
the ambassadors of the gods.
Although you may be called bums
and panhandlers
You are in fact the Ambassadors of God.
As God's Ambassadors
you should be given food, clothing and shelter
by those who are able to give it.
Mahometan teachers tell us
that God commands hospitality.
And hospitality is still practiced
in Mahometan countries.
But the duty of hospitality
is neither taught nor practiced
in Christian countries.

THE MUNICIPAL LODGINGS
That is why you who are in need
are not invited to spend the night
in the homes of the rich.
There are guest rooms today
in the homes of the rich
but they are not for those
who need them.
And they are not for those
who need them
because those who need them
are no longer considered the Ambassadors
of God.
So people no longer
consider hospitality to the poor
as a personal duty.
And it does not disturb them a bit
to send them to the city where they are given the hospitality
of the "Muni"
at the expense of the taxpayer.
But the hospitality that the "Muni"
gives to the down and out
is no hospitality
because what comes from the taxpayer's pocketbook
does not come from his heart.

BACK TO HOSPITALITY
The Catholic unemployed
 should not be sent to the "Muni."
The Catholic unemployed
 should be given hospitality
 in Catholic Houses of Hospitality.
Catholic Houses of Hospitality
 are known in Europe
 under the name of Hospices.
There have been Hospices in Europe
 since the time of Constantine.
Hospices are free guest houses;
 hotels are paying guest houses.
And paying guest houses or hotels
 are as plentiful
 as free guest houses or Hospices
 are scarce.
So hospitality like everything else
 has been commercialized.
So hospitality
 like everything else
 must now be idealized.

HOUSES OF HOSPITALITY
We need Houses of Hospitality
 to give to the rich
 the opportunity to serve the poor.
We need Houses of Hospitality
 to bring the Bishops to the people
 and the people to the Bishops.
We need Houses of Hospitality
 to bring back to institutions
 the technique of institutions.
We need Houses of Hospitality
 to show what idealism looks like
 when it is practiced.
We need Houses of Hospitality
 to bring Social justice
 through Catholic Action
 exercised in Catholic Institutions.

HOSPICES
We read in the Catholic Encyclopedia
 that during the early ages of Christianity
 the hospice (or the House of Hospitality)

was a shelter for the sick, the poor,
the orphans, the old, the traveler
and the needy of every kind.
Originally the hospices (or Houses of Hospitality)
were under the supervision of the bishops who designated priests
to administer the spiritual and temporal affairs of these charitable instituti
The fourteenth statute of the so-called
Council of Carthage held about 436
enjoins upon the bishops
to have hospices (or Houses of Hospitality)
in connection with their churches.

PARISH HOUSES OF HOSPITALITY
Today we need Houses of Hospitality
as much as they needed them then
if not more so.
We have Parish Houses for the priests
Parish Houses for educational purposes
Parish Houses for recreational purposes
But no Parish Houses of Hospitality.
Bossuet says that the poor
are the first children of the Church
so the poor should come first.
People with homes should have
a room of hospitality
so as to give shelter to the needy
members of the parish.
The remaining needy members of the parish
should be given shelter in a Parish Home.
Furniture, clothing and food
should be sent to the needy
members of the Parish
from the Parish House of Hospitality.
We need Parish Homes
as well as Parish Domes.
In the new Cathedral of Liverpool
there will be a Home as well as
a Dome.

HOUSES OF "CATHOLIC ACTION"
Catholic Houses of Hospitality
should be more than free guest houses
for the Catholic unemployed.
They could be vocational training schools
including the training for the priesthood

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 as Father Corbett proposes.
They could be Catholic reading rooms
 as Father McSorley proposes.
They could be Catholic Instruction Schools
 as Father Cornelius Hayes proposes.
They could be Round-Table Discussion Groups
 as Peter Maurin proposes.
In a word, they could be
 Catholic Action Houses
 where Catholic Thought
 is combined with Catholic Action.
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5

But while Peter read aloud his inspired lines on hospitality we had as yet no office. I had worked on the first issue of the paper at the kitchen table after supper, at the library, sitting in the park in the afternoon with Teresa.

Peter's idea of hospices seemed a simple and logical one to me, hospices such as they had in the Middle Ages for the poor and the wayfarer and which we certainly very much needed today. But I liked even better his talks about personal responsibility. He quoted St. Jerome, that every house should have a "Christ's room" for our brother who was in need. That "the coat which hangs in one's closet belongs to the poor." Living in tenements as I had for years I had found many of the poorest practicing these teachings.

I was familiar enough with the hospitality of the Communist, with the voluntary poverty of the Communist. At a meeting that very week of the farmers' delegation, coming back from Washington and going back to their homes in the Middle West and New England, the chairman had called upon the audience to provide hospitality for the delegates.

"Who has an empty bed in their homes?" he wanted to know. "Who will put up one of the comrades for the next few days?" And hundreds of hands were raised.

It was like the Christian gesture put forth by the *Daily Worker* during the seamen's strike two years ago when the editors called upon the readers to provide Christmas dinners to the strikers, and so many responded that two thousand were fed. In the old days many of my friends had hitch-hiked around the country organizing for unions and for Communist affiliates, and they were always put up in homes of the workers and shared their poverty with them.

If one worked for one's fellows it was obvious that one had to embrace voluntary poverty, though the Communist would not call it by that name. Even now when we talk of it in the *Catholic Worker* as an indispensable means to an end, they claim that we are trying to lower the standard of living of the masses.

But of course it was getting out a labor paper which caught my imagination, popularizing the teachings of the Church in regard to social matters, bringing to the man in the street a Christian solution of unemployment, a way of rebuilding the social order.

Peter brought up the idea of the paper the first time I met him and he kept harping on it,

day after day. He told me I needed a Catholic background, and he came day after day with books and papers and digests of articles which he either read aloud or left with me to read.

I was doing some research then on peace, for a women's club, and was in the library until three every afternoon. And every day when I got home I found Peter waiting to "indoctrinate" me. He stayed until ten when I insisted he had to go home. He followed Tessa and me around the house, indoctrinating. If we were getting supper, washing dishes, ironing clothes, or washing them, he continued his conversations. If company came in he started over again from the beginning.

Teresa had measles that winter, and Peter followed the doctor around, commenting on the news of the day, hopefully looking for a stray apostle. He approached the plumber, the landlord when he came to collect the rent, the grocery clerk. When he had to stay away because so small a house had to be kept in peace and quiet during sickness, he spent his time at the Rand school, making a digest of Kropotkin's *Fields, Factories and Workshops* for me.

It was impossible to be with a person like Peter without sharing his simple faith that the Lord would provide what was necessary to do His work. Peter had counted on some priest to provide a mimeograph machine to get out the first issues of the paper, but nothing came of it. So I began planning a printed edition. It would cost only fifty-seven dollars to get Out 2,500 copies of an eight-page paper and I had some money coming in from articles. When I spoke of the work to Father Purcell, then editor of the *Sign,* he held up Father Ahearn of Newark for ten dollars and Sister Peter Claver for one dollar and handed me that. They were the first contributors to the work. Father McSorley, of the Paulists also helped by giving me work and advice.

Later that winter, Peter had to go up to the camp where he had been working for the past four years to put in some time cutting ice. He came down for a Catholic Industrial Conference which was held at the Astor in February but returned again for another few months. When the paper came out on May 1, 1933, he was still in the country.

The first issue was sold in Union Square on May Day. Two hundred thousand Communists and trade unionists paraded, gathered in the Square and dispersed all during that long hot day. A friendly priest sent a young convert, Joe Bennet, and two other young Catholics, to help sell copies. The two latter fled in short order. The sarcasm and questionings as to the place of a Catholic paper in Union Square was disconcerting. Joe, tall, gaunt and crippled, stayed throughout the day.

He is dead now, poor Joe, and he did not want to die. He was only twenty-four and he enjoyed every moment of living, enjoyed it seriously, with great earnestness. His faith was a tremendous thing to him and he wanted to do great things for God. But he had rheumatic fever and he suffered much, and his frail body could not stand the strain of his energetic desires. He worked with us for a time, later for Father Purcell in Alabama, and then two years ago, he came back to us to die.

That first issue took up the question of the cooperatives, of the Negro in labor, of the trade unions, of the unemployed. One of Peter's essays which caught all eyes, dealt with the dynamite of the Church.

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Albert J. Nock says,
 "The Catholic Church
 will have to do more
 than to play
 a waiting game: she will have to make use
 of some of the dynamite
 inherent in her message."
To blow the dynamite
 of a message,
 is the only way to make that message
 dynamic.
Catholic scholars
 have taken the dynamite
 of the church;
 they have wrapped it up
 in nice phraseology,
 have placed it
 in an hermetically
 sealed container,
 placed the lid
 over the container,
 and sat on the lid.
It is about time
 to take the lid off
 and to make
 the Catholic dynamite
 dynamic."
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6

About this time my brother got a job as city editor of the Dobbs Ferry *Register* and moved there, so in a month or so I rented the store downstairs which the barber had vacated. At first, however, the first floor apartment was the office. The rent was twenty-five a month, too high for a heatless place. But there was always hot water and the house was clean. There were no desks, no files, no typewriters even, because I had sold mine to pay the second printing bill.

An expressman, a Communist, contributed the first furnishings in the way of an old desk and a filing cabinet. Someone else brought in an old typewriter. We let our wants be known in the columns of the paper and soon plenty of furniture began coming in. At times we were better furnished then than we are now. Often too people who had been evicted , who had lost their furniture and now were in a position to start housekeeping again, came to us in need of furniture and we were stripped bare again.

With the second issue of the paper, Dorothy Weston, who was only twenty-one, joined me. She had studied at Manhattanville, Fordham and Columbia, had a brilliant mind and was intensely interested in the work. Soon others came, a young Canadian, a New Englander, an

unemployed real estate operator, a convert Jew, a Lithuanian boy of eighteen, a bookkeeper, a former policeman, an Armenian refugee, a German distributist, and we had an editorial force, a circulation department and a very active group of propagandists.

A pot of stew and a pot of coffee were kept going on the coal range in the kitchen and all who came in were fed. We worked from early morning until midnight.

Teresa and I slept in the middle room between the kitchen and the store. In the summer we could also move a typewriter into the back yard and write or receive callers out there.

Homes had to be found for the men–some had been sleeping in Central Park–so we rented an eight-dollar-a-month apartment near Tompkins Square, a rat-ridden place, heatless and filthy, abandoned even by slum dwellers.

The paper's circulation increased from 2,500 to 20,000 in six months, but since it is a monthly it was not the paper alone which kept us busy. Neighbors came in needing clothes and we had to go to friends and readers begging for them.

People were being evicted on all sides. We had to find other apartments, help get relief checks for them, borrow pushcarts and move them.

We cooked, cleaned, wrote, went out on demonstrations to distribute literature, got out mimeographed .leaflets, answered a tremendous correspondence, entertained callers. Bishop O'Hara, Bishop Busch, Monsignor Ryan, Father Virgil Michel, Father Parsons, Father Benedict Bradley, Carleton Hayes, Parker Moon, Jacques Maritain, and many other visitors,– priests, laymen, seminarians, students, workers and scholars came to visit us day after day, even as they do now. They came to see what we were doing and they taught us much. Subscriptions came in from India, China, Italy, France, England, Germany, Africa, Australia, from countries all over the world. A *Catholic Worker* was published in England and another in Australia. The Canadian *Social Forum, The Christian Front, The Sower* (American), *The Right Spirit,* the Chicago *Catholic Worker,* these are more children.

By the time we had gotten out six issues of the paper the need to start a hospice for women made itself felt. With the seventh issue of the paper we announced its beginning. We called upon Saint Joseph to help us and we went to the curates of our parish, Father Seccor and Father Nicholas. They interested young working women who pledged their help. Among themselves they collected quarters to pay the rent. Girls who lived in unheated, cold-water flats gave their quarters to the extent of fifteen dollars. Ten dollars came from a priest and ten dollars more came from a husband, who, from the bedside of his dying wife, sent this donation as one he knew she would be glad to make for the opening of a home for unemployed women. It was really not a house that we were opening up, but an apartment in the neighborhood, steam-heated, with a good big bath and six large rooms, five of which could be used as bedrooms. One room was even large enough to contain four beds. The rent was fifty dollars a month. The kitchen was large enough to be used as a small sitting room.

In the seventh issue of the paper we announced the opening and wrote:

"So far three beds are all that have been obtained although fifteen are needed. We also have four blankets, two of them donated by a woman the members of whose family are unemployed, save for one son who is working for ten dollars a week. She washed the blankets herself and

sent them down to the office with prayers for the success of the new venture. Another woman, unable to afford to buy things herself, canvassed among her friends until she found one who voluntarily bought ten sheets and pillow slips. Another one of our readers sent in two sheets, another sent curtains and a blanket, and she is the mother of a large family and could well use them herself.

"The winter is on us and we can wait no longer. Even without furniture we have opened the doors. We will borrow blankets for the time being and use those of the editors. They can roll themselves in coats and newspapers, which are said to be very warm, though we are sure they are also very noisy. However, we hug to ourselves the assurance that all these things, such as blankets, will be added unto us, so we are not dismayed. Come to think of it, there are two rugs on the *Catholic Worker* floor which, if energetically beaten out, will serve as covers.

"Christ's first bed was of straw."

7

A year later we moved to an eleven-room house on Charles Street, where the women occupied the third floor, the men the second, and the offices the first. The dining room and kitchen were in the basement, the only warm part of this cold house which had no furnace and had to be heated room by room. A year after that we were offered the use of an old rear tenement house on Mott Street and here we are today.

Throughout the country there are twenty-three hospices, each one now accommodating anywhere from a few people to one hundred and fifty. There are "cells" made up of interested readers who are personally practicing voluntary poverty and the works of mercy. There are bread lines run at many of the houses so that now about five thousand a day are fed. In New York City over a thousand come every morning to breakfast.

We have fed workers during strikes. We have been out on picket lines. We have spoken at meetings all over the country to workers, unemployed, unorganized and organized, to students, professors, seminarians, priests and lay people. Through these contacts we have reached thousands more who have become lay apostles.

And now there are four farming communes, which are a step towards clarifying Peter's fourth step in his four point program–labor papers, round-table discussions, houses of hospitality, and farming communes. As Peter says there is no unemployment on the land. As St. Thomas said, "A certain amount of goods is necessary for a man to lead a good life." On the land there is a possibility of ownership. There is the possibility for a man to raise his own food. There is room for the family on the land. In our endeavor to de-proletarianize the worker, as Pius XI advised in his encyclical *Forty Years After,* we have advocated not only de-centralized industry, cooperatives, the ownership by the workers of the means of production, but also, the land movement.

The following pages are jottings written down during journeys, notes kept for my own comfort, information, clarification, or publication. They are random notes published now while we are in the midst of the work, in the heart of the conflict.

At any time the work is likely to be interrupted by visitors. Often I have written only a few paragraphs, or a few pages, only to be called away to deal with some problem of human

misery.

Some will think, perhaps, that it is premature to present this sketchy material on the movement that the *Catholic Worker* has become to our friends and readers; but on the other hand, it may be a very useful volume to those thousands who wish to know more about the work we are doing in the lay apostolate. A great many of these notes were not written for publication, but for my own self in moments of trouble and in moments of peace and joy. So one cannot say that this is really the story of the *Catholic Worker* movement. That remains for some more disinterested person to cover. This Foreword is to give some background for these pages, most of which make up a notebook kept casually over a period of five years. I present it with apologies.

As St. Teresa of Avila said in giving an account of her first foundation:

"If our Lord should give me grace to say anything that is good, the approval of grave and learned persons will be sufficient; and should there be anything useful, it will be God's, not mine; for I have no learning, nor goodness. . . . I write also as if by stealth and with trouble because thereby I am kept from spinning; and I live in a poor house and have a great deal of business. If our Lord had given me better abilities and a more retentive memory I might then have profited by what I heard or read, and so, if I should say anything good our Lord wills it for some good; and whatever is useless or bad, that will be mine . . . in other things, my being a woman is sufficient to account for my stupidity."

Chapter 3

Room For Christ

The Catholic Worker, December 1945, 2.

Summary: Meditation on hospitality, that is, seeing Christ in those around us, ministering to others the way Christ ministered and was ministered to; with examples of this from the Scriptures. Encourages all to some form of the "privilege" of hospitality not because people remind us of Christ "but because they are Christ." (DDLW #416).

It is no use to say that we are born two thousand years too late to give room to Christ. Nor will those who live at the end of the world have been born too late. Christ is always with us, always asking for room in our hearts.

But now it is with the voice of our contemporaries that he speaks, with the eyes of store clerks, factory workers and children that he gazes; with the hands of office workers, slum dwellers and suburban housewives that he gives. It is with the feet of soldiers and tramps that he walks, and with the heart of anyone in need that he longs for shelter. And giving shelter or food to anyone who asks for it, or needs it, is giving it to Christ.

We can do now what those who knew Him in the days of His flesh did. I'm sure that the shepherds did not adore and then go away to leave Mary and her Child in the stable, but somehow found them room, even though what they had to offer might have been primitive enough. All that the friends of Christ did in His life-time for Him we can do. Peter's mother-in-law hastened to cook a meal for Him, and if anything in the Gospels can be inferred, it is surely that she gave the very best she had, with no thought of extravagance. Matthew made a feast for Him and invited the whole town, so that the house was in an uproar of enjoyment, and the straight-laced Pharisees–the good people–were scandalized. So did Zaccheus, only this time Christ invited Himself and sent Zaccheus home to get things ready. The people of Samaria, despised and isolated, were overjoyed to give Him hospitality, and for days He walked and ate and slept among them. And the loveliest of all relationships in Christ's life, after His relationship with his Mother, is His friendship with Martha, Mary and Lazarus and the continual hospitality He found with them–for there was always a bed for Him there, always a welcome, always a meal. It is a staggering thought that there were once two sisters and a brother whom Jesus looked on almost as His family and where He found a second home, where Martha got on with her work, bustling round in her house-proud way,

and Mary simply sat in silence with Him.

If we hadn't got Christ's own words for it, it would seem raving lunacy to believe that if I offer a bed and food and hospitality for Christmas–or any other time, for that matter–to some man, woman or child, I am replaying the part of Lazarus or Martha or Mary and that my guest is Christ. There is nothing to show it, perhaps. There are no haloes already glowing round their heads–at least none that human eyes can see. It is not likely that I shall be vouchsafed the vision of Elizabeth of Hungary, who put the leper in her bed and later, going to tend him, saw no longer the leper's stricken face, but the face of Christ. The part of a Peter Claver, who gave a stricken Negro his bed and slept on the floor at his side, is more likely to be ours. For Peter Claver never saw anything with his bodily eyes except the exhausted black faces of the Negroes; He had only faith in Christ's own words that these people were Christ. And when the Negroes he had induced to help him once ran from the room, panicstricken before the disgusting sight of some sickness, he was astonished. "You mustn't go," he said, and you can still hear his surprise that anyone could forget such a truth; "You mustn't leave him–it is Christ."

Some time ago I saw the death notice of a sergeant-pilot who had been killed on active service. After the usual information, a message was added which, I imagine, is likely to be initiated. It said that anyone who had ever known the dead boy would always be sure of a welcome at his parents' home. So, even now that the war is over, the father and mother will go on taking in strangers for the simple reason that they will be reminded of their dead son by the friends he made.

That is rather like the custom that existed among the first generations of Christians, when faith was a bright fire that warmed more than those who kept it burning. In every house then a room was kept ready for any stranger who might ask for shelter; it was even called "the strangers' room": and this not because these people, like the parents of the dead airman, thought they could trace something of someone they loved in the stranger who used it, not because the man or woman to whom they gave shelter reminded them of Christ, but because–plain and simple and stupendous fact–he was Christ.

It would be foolish to pretend that it is easy always to remember this. If everyone were holy and handsome, with "alter Christus" shining in neon lighting from them, it would be easy to see Christ in everyone. If Mary had appeared in Bethlehem clothed, as St. John says, with the sun, a crown of twelve stars on her head and the moon under her feet, then people would have fought to make room for her. But that was not God's way for her nor is it Christ's way for Himself now when He is disguised under every type of humanity that treads the earth.

To see how far one realizes this, it is a good thing to ask honestly what you would do, or have done, when a beggar asked at your house for food. Would you–or did you–give it on an old cracked plate, thinking that was good enough? Do you think that Martha and Mary thought that the old and chipped dish was good for their guest?

In Christ's human life there were always a few who made up for the neglect of the crowd.

The shepherds did it, their hurrying to the crib atoned for the people who would flee from Christ.

The wise men did it; their journey across the world made up for those who refused to stir one hand's breadth from the routine of their lives to go to Christ. Even the gifts that the wise men brought have in themselves an obscure recompense and atonement for what would follow later in this Child's life. For they brought gold, the king's emblem, to make up for the crown of thorns that He would wear; they offered incense, the symbol of praise, to make up for the mockery and the spitting; they gave Him myrrh, to heal and soothe, and He was wounded from head to foot and no one bathed his wounds. The women at the foot of the cross did it too, making up for the crowd who stood by and sneered.

We can do it too, exactly as they did. We are not born too late. We do it by seeing Christ and serving Christ in friends and strangers, in everyone we come in contact with. While almost no one is unable to give some hospitality or help to others, those for whom it is really impossible are not debarred from giving room to Christ, because, to take the simplest of examples, in those they live with or work with is Christ disguised. All our life is bound up with other people; for almost all of us happiness and unhappiness are conditioned by our relationship with other people. What a simplification of life it would be if we forced ourselves to see that everywhere we go is Christ, wearing out socks we have to darn, eating the food we have to cook, laughing with us, silent with us, sleeping with us.

All this can be proved, if proof is needed, by the doctrines of the Church. We can talk about Christ's Mystical Body, about the vine and the branches, about the Communion of Saints. But Christ Himself has proved it for us, and no one has to go further than that. For He said that a glass of water given to a beggar was given to Him. He made heaven hinge on the way we act towards Him in his disguise of commonplace, frail and ordinary human beings.

Did you give me food when I was hungry? Did you give me something to drink when I was thirsty? Did you take me in when I was homeless and a stranger? Did you give me clothes when my own were all rags? Did you come to see me when I was sick or in prison or in trouble?

And to those who say, aghast, that they never had a chance to do such a thing, that they lived two thousand years too late, he will say again what they had the chance of knowing all their lives, that if these things were done for the very least of his brethren they were done for Him.

For a total Christian the goad of duty is not needed–always prodding him to perform this or that good deed. It is not a duty to help Christ, it is a privilege. Is it likely that Martha and Mary sat back and considered that they had done all that was expected of them–is it likely that Peter's mother-in-law grudgingly served the chicken she had meant to keep till Sunday because she thought it was "her duty"? She did it gladly: she would have served ten chickens if she had them.

If that is the way they gave hospitality to Christ it is certain that is the way it should still be given. Not for the sake of humanity. Not because it might be Christ who stays with us, comes to see us, takes up our time. Not because these people remind us of Christ, as those soldiers and airmen remind the parents of their son, but because they are Christ, asking us to find room for Him exactly as He did at the first Christmas.

Chapter 4

Catholic Worker Ideas On Hospitality

The Catholic Worker, May 1940, 10.

Summary: Defends against the charge that they do more harm than good in providing hospitality to the undeserving. Asserts that doing the Works of Mercy is following Christ and a revolutionary technique. Points to the monastic tradition of indiscriminate hospitality. Other keywords: Communism, hospices, social order. (DDLW #358).

Many times we have borne the charge that Houses of Hospitality, this "new wrinkle," do more harm than good. It is said that they perpetuate chronic laziness and drunkenness. Communists ask us, "How can you say you're against capitalism when you keep it alive by feeding the poor the crumbs of the rich?" We are told to discriminate on the side of the "deserving poor."

The "new wrinkle" was old long before we appeared on the scene. Christ once told his disciples, "I was hungry and you gave me to eat," etc. Since that day, all over the world, pilgrims to holy places, weary travelers, the hungry and thirsty, saint and sinner have been succored in the name of Christ. Hospices, centuries ago, were under the supervision of the Bishops. They were set up in lonely and hostile regions. Lepers by the thousands were helped in the many hospices scattered all over France. The monks of St. Bernard are famous for their hospitality. The work of these monks was started back in 962.

The early monasteries founded by Benedict of Nursia designated monks as hospitallers and almoners. The former welcomed guests while the latter fed, clothed, and gave shelter to the needy.

"Chronics"

There is no record in the history of hospices and hospitality of discrimination. Those who disapprove feeding the "burdens of society" might look to the work of the nuns and priests laboring among the lepers. To bring it nearer, there is Father Dempsey of hallowed memory, who could see through a man's drunkenness and evaluate him, liken him to you and me, as another very precious entity, a creature of body and soul.

Christ exercised His good works among those who today would be lumped with "chronics." Hospitable in His heart, He took in the sinning woman and the thief beside Him on the Cross.

As for perpetuating the social order, we consider the spiritual and corporal Works of Mercy and the following of Christ to be the best revolutionary technique and a means of changing the social order rather than perpetuating it. Did not the thousands of monasteries, with their hospitality change the entire social pattern of their day? They did not wait for a paternal state to step in nor did they stand by to see destitution precipitate bloody revolt.

Louis B. Ward, in BACK TO BENEDICT, says, "The poor did not have to sit as they do today for endless hours on the benches of some welfare agency to be subjected to a third degree on their personal lives, treated as crooks and investigated to the point of criminal persecution." We have often deplored this treatment of our poor and advocated means grounded on the seven ways in which Christ was treated by His disciples. Not bound by vows and being weak in ourselves, we try, stumblingly, to do our little bit to express faith in the hospitable tradition.

Chapter 5

Houses of Hospitality

The Catholic Worker, December 1936, 4.

Summary: Enunciates the principles for starting a house of hospitality. Emphasizes starting small and emphasizing Christian principles. "They Houses of Hospitality will emphasize personal action, personal responsibility as opposed to political action and state responsibility." (DDLW #308).

During this last month news comes in that our fellow workers in Rochester, Pittsburgh, and Chicago want to start Houses of Hospitality. Already over in England, the staff of The English Catholic Worker have opened a House. We know the difficulties of the undertaking so it is in place to reiterate some of the principles by which we began our work.

We emphasize again the necessity of smallness. The idea, of course, would be that each Christian, conscious of his duty in the lay apostolate, should take in one of the homeless as an honored guest, remembering Christ's words,

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, ye have done it unto me."

The poor are more conscious of this obligation than those who are comfortably off. We know of any number of cases where families already overburdened and crowded, have taken in orphaned children, homeless aged, poor who were not members of their families but who were akin to them because they were fellow sufferers in this disordered world.

So first of all let us say that those of our readers who are interested in Houses of Hospitality might first of all try to take some one into their homes.

Several of the women workers of our group here in New York who have jobs have moved down to Mott street now and taken little slum apartments and are offering a room and bed and board to our overflow. They are exemplifying perfectly the idea of hospitality.

But if family complications make this impossible, then let our friends keep in mind the small beginnings. I might almost say that it is impossible to do this work unless they themselves are ready to live there with their fellow guests, who soon cease to become guests and become fellow workers. It is necessary, because those who have the ideal in mind, who have the will to make the beginnings, must be the ones who are on hand to guide the work. Otherwise it is just another charity organization, and the homeless might as well go to the missions or

municipal lodging houses or breadlines which throughout the depression have become well organized almost as a permanent part of our civilization. And that we certainly do not want to perpetuate.

Cyril Echele, out in St. Louis, is beginning in the right way. Read his letter in this issue of the paper. He is starting with a store and with whatever means come to hand. Clothes, some food, some furniture comes in. He is getting along with what he has, and the work will grow.

We began with a store, went on to an apartment rented in the neighborhood, from thence we moved to a twelve-room house, and now we have twenty-four rooms here in Mott street.

It is not enough to feed and shelter those who come. The work of indoctrination must go on. There must be time for conversations, and what better place than over the supper table? There must be meetings, discussion groups, the distribution of literature. There must be some one always on hand to do whatever comes up, whether that emergency is to go out on a picket line, attend a Communist meeting for the purpose of distributing literature, care for the sick or settle disputes. And there are always arguments and differences of opinion in work of this kind, and it is good that it should be so because it makes for clarification of thought, as Peter says, and cultivates the art of human contacts.

We call attention again to the fact that the Communists have set themselves to do four things, according to the reports of the last meeting of the Third International: to build up anti-war and anti-fascist groups in the colleges; to organize the industrial workers; to start a farm-labor party and to organize the unemployed.

Houses of Hospitality will bring workers and scholars together. They will provide a place for industrial workers to discuss Christian principles of organization as set forth in the encyclicals. They will emphasize personal action, personal responsibility as opposed to political action and state responsibility. They will care for the unemployed and teach principles of cooperation and mutual aid. They will be a half-way house towards farming communes and homesteads.

We have a big program but we warn our fellow workers to keep in mind small beginnings. The smaller the group, the more work is done.

And let us remember, “Unless the Lord build the House, they labor in vain that build it.”

Chapter 6

Loaves and Fishes

The Catholic Worker, May 1967, 5,6/

*Summary: A chapter from *Loaves and Fishes*. Describes her meeting Peter Maurin and getting out the first edition of *The Catholic Worker*. Recalls how Peter's program–roundtable discussions, houses of hospitality, and farm colonies–became the core Catholic Worker program. Extensive quotes from Peter Maurin, including an Easy Essay on utopianism and Christian communism. (DDLW #851).*

Ed. note: The following text is the bulk of chapter two of Dorothy Day's book *Loaves and Fishes*, published by Harper & Row in 1963, which is an account of the history of the Catholic Worker movement up to that time and may be read as a supplement to her earlier autobiographical work The Long Loneliness (Doubleday-Image paperback). When the later book appeared, Thomas Merton wrote: "Every American Christian should read Dorothy Day's Loaves and Fishes, because it explodes the comfortable myth that we have practically solved the 'problem of poverty' in our affluent society . . . I hope that those who read her book will be moved by it to serious thought and to some practical action: it is a credit to American democracy and to American Catholicism." And Norman Thomas described Loaves and Fishes as "an absorbingly well-written series of pictures of her work and of those she has gathered around her in connection with the Catholic Worker, its hospitality house and its community farm. I rejoice with new hope for mankind because of the kind of work that she and some of her associates are doing."

By DOROTHY DAY

Someone once said that it took me from December until May to bring out the paper. The truth is that I agreed at once. The delay was due chiefly to the fact that Peter, in his optimism about funds, was relying on a priest he knew who had a very plush rectory uptown on the West Side. His clerical friend would give us a mimeograph machine, paper, and space in the rectory basement. None of these were forthcoming– they had been only optimistic notions of Peter's.

But in the meantime Peter was educating me. I had a secular education, he said, and he would give me a Catholic outline of history. One way to study history was to read the lives of the saints down the centuries. Perhaps he chose this method because he had noticed my

library, which contained a life of St. Teresa of Avila and her writings, especially about her spiritual foundations, and a life of St. Catherine of Siena. "Ah, there was a saint who had an influence on her times!" he exclaimed. Then he plunged into a discussion of St. Catherine's letters to the Popes and other public figures of the fourteenth century, in which she took them to task for their failings.

The date I had met Peter is clear in my mind because it was just after the feast of the Immaculate Conception, which is on December 8. I had visited the national shrine at Catholic University in Washington to pray for the hunger marchers. I felt keenly that God was more on the side of the hungry, the ragged, the unemployed, than on the side of the comfortable churchgoers, who gave so little heed to the misery of the needy and the groaning of the poor. I had prayed that some way should open up for me to do something, to line myself up on their side, to work for them, so that I would no longer feel I had been false to them in embracing my newfound faith.

The appearance of Peter Maurin, I felt with deep conviction, was the result of my prayers. Just as the good God had used the farmer Habakuk to bring the mess of food intended for the reapers to Daniel in the lions' den, so had He sent Peter Maurin to bring me the good intellectual food I needed to strengthen me to work for Him.

I learned shortly how he had happened to come to see me. He had heard of me on a visit to the **Commonweal**, our famous New York weekly edited by laymen. It had been started by Michael Williams, a veteran journalist, who had worked in San Francisco on the same paper with my father years before. Peter had also been told of my conversion by a red-headed Irish Communist with whom he struck up a conversation on a bench in Union Square. The Irishman told Peter that we both had similar ideas–namely, that the Catholic Church had a social teaching which could be applied to the problems of our day. So Peter had set out to find me.

Now he had someone to whom he could propound his program. He must have proposed it many times before, at Social Action conferences, in visits to public figures and chancery offices around the country. But he seemed to have got nowhere. It might have been his shabbiness, it might have been his thick accent, that prevented him from getting a hearing.

Perhaps it was because of my own radical background that Peter brought me a digest of the writings of Kropotkin one day, calling my attention especially to **Fields, Factories and Workshops**. He had gone over to the Rand School of Social Science for this, and carefully copied out the pertinent passages. He also liked **Mutual Aid** and **The Conquest of Bread**.

I was familiar with Kropotkin only through his **Memoirs of a Revolutionist**, which had originally run serially in the **Atlantic Monthly**. (Oh, far-off day of American freedom, when Karl Marx could write for the morning **Tribune** in New York, and Kropotkin could not only be published in the **Atlantic**, but be received as a guest in the homes of New England Unitarians, and in Jane Addams' Hull House in Chicago!)

Theory of Revolution

Peter came day after day. He brought me books to read and the newest of his phased writings. There was to be no end to my learning.

One day I chanced upon Peter in his friend's uptown church. I had dropped in to say a few prayers. After some minutes I looked up. There was Peter, sitting in front of the Blessed Sacrament, evidently in deep meditation. He seemed totally unconscious of the presence of anyone else in the church. He sat there in silence. Every now and then he would nod his head, and gesticulate with his hand, as though he were making one of his points to the Presence before Whom he sat so quietly. I did not want to disturb him.

Also, in my subconscious, I was probably tired of his constant conversation. His line of thought, the books he had given me to read, were all new to me and all ponderous. There was so much theory. I had read about Kropotkin the man, his life and adventures. In a way they told me much. I was not sure I wanted to know more. Peter read Kropotkin's theoretical works. It was the idea, the abstract thought, that got him and that he hoped would get me. Sitting there thinking back over the past weeks, I had to face the fact that Peter was hard to listen to. I would tune in some concert, some symphony, and beg him to be still. Tessa (my brother John's wife) and I both loved music, but Peter seemed to have no ear for it. He would be obedient for a time. But soon he would look at my forbidding face, and, seeing no yielding there, he would go over to the gentler Tessa, pulling a chair close to hers and leaning almost on the arm, he would begin to talk. He was incorrigible. Yet we were growing to love him, to greet him warmly when he came, to press food on him, knowing that he ate only one meal a day.

His willingness to talk to any visitor who dropped in, however, was a boon to us; it released us for our various chores. I, for example, could run into the front room to my typewriter and get some work done. I recall one visitor in particular, who came quite often, a sculptor named Hugh–, a tall man, heavy and quiet, with big brown eyes. He used to take out a flute and play while Peter talked to him.

"You are quite right, Peter," he would say every now and then, nodding absently. Then he would go right on piping his simple tunes. He startled us one day, when a woman friend of ours came to call, by remarking after she had left that she used to come to his studio and sit in the nude on the mantelpiece. We concluded that she must have resembled some model who had once posed for him.

Usually by ten or eleven we urged our visitors to go. We were at home with them and felt free to send them on their way. On mild nights, Hugh and Peter would go on to Union Square to sit on a park bench. There they would continue their conversation–if it could be called that– with Hugh playing his flute, and Peter, gesticulating, haranguing him with his discussion of history, his analysis of ideas, old and new, and, in doing so, perhaps rehearsing his lessons for me the next day.

Placidly, Tessa awaited her baby, and I went on with my free- lancing. In the evenings, my brother and I (John was working days now) would talk over plans for the paper with Peter, who knew nothing about journalism. He would supply the ideas, and we would get out the

paper for the "man in the street."

Getting Into Print

My mind and heart were full of the part I had to play, self- centered creature that I was. I planned the makeup and the type, and what stories I would write to go with Peter's easy essays. I don't think we even consulted Peter as to whether he liked the title we had given to his writings in the paper, "Easy Essays." He was so happy over the coming incarnation of his ideas in print that he never expressed himself on the subject. But he well knew that, in spite of the title, his essays were anything but easy. Like those in the Gospel, his were hard sayings–hard to work out in everyday life.

Having become convinced of this after several weeks, I went, on the advice of Father Joseph McSorley, former provincial of the Paulist Society and my good spiritual adviser at the time, to the Paulist Press. For an edition of two thousand copies, I was told, the price would be fifty- seven dollars.

I decided to wait until I had the cash in hand before getting out the first issue. I didn't want to run up any debts. I did no installment buying, although I didn't mind being late with the rent or skimping on groceries to speed the accumulation of enough money to pay the first bill. Father McSorley helped a lot by finding work for me to do. Father Harold Purcell gave me ten dollars, and Sister Peter Claver brought me a dollar which someone had just given to her.

All that winter Peter had come back and forth from Mt. Tremper in upstate New York, but by April he was in town all the time. Our plans were shaping up. Yet Peter was plainly not too well pleased with the way the paper was going.

I had sent my copy to the printer–news accounts of the exploitation of Negroes in the South, and the plight of the sharecroppers; child labor in our own neighborhood; some recent evictions; a local strike over wages and hours; pleas for better home relief, and so on–and we were waiting for proofs.

When they came we cut them out and started making a dummy, pasting them up on the eight pages of a tabloid the size of the Nation, writing headlines, and experimenting with different kinds of type. Peter looked over what I had written as it came back from the printer. I could see that, far from being happy about it, he was becoming more and more disturbed. One day, while looking over some fresh proofs, he shook his head. His expression was one of great sadness. "It's everyone's paper," he said. I was pleased. I thought that was what we both wanted. "And everyone's paper is no one's paper," he added with a sigh.

He rose without another word and went out the door. Later we learned indirectly that he had gone back upstate. It was some time before we heard from him again.

We kept hoping that he would be on hand for that historic May Day in 1933 when we ventured out in Union Square to sell the first issue. He wasn't. A friendly priest sent three young men to accompany me. One of them was Joe Bennett, a tall, gangling blond boy from Denver, who was to work closely with us for some months. The day was bright and warm and beautiful. The square was packed with demonstrators and paraders, listening to speeches,

carrying on disputes among themselves, or glancing through the great masses of literature being given out or sold, which so soon were litter on the ground. The two younger men, intimidated and discouraged by the slighting comments of the champions of labor and the left, soon fled. Religion in Union Square! It was preposterous! If we had been representing Jehovah's Witnesses, we might have had a friendlier reception. But people associated with the Roman Catholic Church! Joe Bennett and I stuck it out, reveling in the bright spring sunshine. We did not sell many papers, but we did enjoy the discussions into which we were drawn. One Irishman looked at the masthead and rebuked us for the line which read "a penny a copy." We were in the pay of the English, he said. Next month we changed it to "a cent a copy" just to placate the Irish.

We knew Peter would not have let this go without making a point. He would have said, "When an Irishman met an Irishman a thousand years ago, they started a monastery. Now, when an Irishman meets an Irishman, you know what they start." Then he would have gone on with a long discourse on Gaelic culture, on how it was the Irish who kept civilization alive through the Dark Ages, and on and on, until his adversary would have forgotten all about his heat over the penny.

Another protest came from a Negro, who pointed out that the two workers on our masthead, standing on either side of our title, the Catholic Worker, were both white men. One had a pick and the other had a shovel. "Why not have one white and the other colored?" he wanted to know.

We thought it was a good suggestion. Before our next issue came out we found an artist who made a new masthead for us, a white man and a colored man, each with his implements of toil, clasping hands, with the figure of Christ in the background, uniting them. Joe Bennett and I sat on park benches that first day, got our first touch of sunburn and gradually relaxed. In spite of our small sales and the uncertain prospects for the future, it was with a happy feeling of accomplishment that I returned to East Fifteenth Street that evening.

Lost Leader

But I missed Peter Maurin. We had been so excited at the idea of launching a new paper, small though it was, and we had had so many details to attend to, that there was not much time to miss him before the paper came out. But now I did. His absence gave me an uneasy feeling, reminding me that our paper was not reflecting his thought, although it was he who had given us the idea.

Then, for a while, I was too busy again to think much about it. Copies had to be mailed out to editors of diocesan papers and to men and women prominent in the Catholic world. Mail began to come in praising our first effort. Some letters even contained donations to help us continue our work. I was lighthearted with success. We had started. Tessa's baby was born the week after the **Catholic Worker** was launched. A few days later my brother got a job, editing the small-town paper in Dobbs Ferry, up the Hudson River, and moved his family there.

At the same time a barbershop on the street floor below our apartment house became empty. I could see that it would be ideal for an office. It was a long shop, and narrow. In back of it was a bedroom, and beyond that a kitchen. A door opened on the backyard, and the paved space in front of the garden made an ideal spot for an outdoor sitting room where we could receive guests and even serve afternoon tea. So, with a few pieces of second-hand furniture–a desk, a table, a filing case, and a couple of chairs–we made still another start.

More and more people began to come. Two constant visitors at the office of the **Catholic Worker** were a thin, shabby, and rather furtive-looking pair whom Peter had picked up in Union Square earlier in the spring before he went away. To him they represented "the worker." They would listen to him untiringly and without interrupting. They were the beginning of an audience, something to build on–not very promising, but something. After one of Peter's discussions in the square, they usually followed him to my place, where, if there was not a bit of change forthcoming, there was at least bread and sweet tea. Peter would say each time, "They have no place to sleep." He was sure that I would produce the dollar needed for two beds on the Bowery. But often there was no dollar, so they stayed for lunch instead.

All the while Peter was in the country I was visited regularly by the pair of them. They always announced themselves before I opened the door: "Dolan and Egan here again." It got so that my personal friends, knowing how exasperated I was becoming at having my time taken up, used to call out upon arriving, "Dolan and Egan here again."

Thus it was with repressed impatience that I heard one day a knock on the door of my apartment above the barbershop. I stood there, braced for the familiar greeting. When it did not come, I opened the door anyway - there stood Peter Maurin.

"Peter! Where have you been?" My relief was so great that my welcome was ardent. "Where were you on May Day? Thousands of people in Union Square and not a sign of Peter!"

"Everyone's paper is no one's paper," he repeated, shaking his head. Peter seemed rested and not so dusty as usual. His gray eyes told me that he was glad to be back. While I prepared coffee and soup and put out the bread, he went on and on, and I let him, content to wait until he was eating his soup to tell him all that had been happening. When his mouth was full he would listen.

I got no explanation from him as to why he had gone away. The closest he came to it was to say wryly, with a shrug, "Man proposes and woman disposes." But he looked at me and smiled and his eyes warmed. I could see that he was happy to be back and ready to get on with his mission. He was full of patience, ready to look at me now not as a Catherine of Siena, already enlightened by the Holy Spirit, but as an ex-Socialist, ex- I.W.W., ex-Communist, in whom he might find some concordance, some basis on which to build. But unions and strikes and the fight for better wages and hours would remain my immediate concern. As St. Augustine said, "The bottle will still smell of the liquor it once held." I continued on this track until Peter had enlightened my mind and enlarged my heart to see further, more in accord with the liberty of Christ, of which St. Paul was always speaking.

Peter took up right where he had left off, pulling a book from his pocket to continue my schooling. It might have been an encyclical on St. Francis of Assisi; or something by Eric Gill, writer, sculptor, artist, craftsman; living at that time in a community in England; or

the short book **Nazareth or Social Chaos** by Father Vincent McNabb, O.P., who had encouraged that community. It was only gradually, through many conversations, that I came to understand enough of his thinking to realize why he considered the stories in the first issue of the **Catholic Worker** inadequate.

He often spoke of what he called "a philosophy of work." "Work, not wages–work is not a commodity to be bought and sold" was one of his slogans. "Personal responsibility, not state responsibility" was another. A favorite source of his was **The Personalist Manifesto** by Emmanuel Mounier, which he would go around extemporaneously translating from the French for the benefit of anyone who would listen. He finally persuaded Father Virgil Michel, a Benedictine priest of St. John's Abbey in Minnesota, to translate it. Peter got it published. "A personalist is a **go-giver**, not a **go- getter**," he used to say. "He tries to give what he has instead of trying to get what the other fellow has. He tries to be good by doing good to the other fellow. He has a social doctrine of the common good. He is alter-centered, not self-centered."

Philosophy of Labor

Much later, when I had a look at that first issue, I could see more clearly what bothered Peter. We had emphasized wages and hours while he was trying to talk about a philosophy of work. I had written of women in industry, children in industry, of sweatshops and strikes.

"Strikes don't strike me!" Peter kept saying, stubbornly. It must have appeared to him that we were just urging the patching-up of the industrial system instead of trying to rebuild society itself with a philosophy so old it seemed like new. Even the name of the paper did not satisfy him. He would have preferred **Catholic Radical**, since he believed that radicals should, as their name implied, get at the roots of things. The second issue of the paper, the June-July number, showed that we had been talking things over. My editorial said:

Peter Maurin (whose name we misspelled in the last issue) has his program which is embodied in his contribution this month. Because his program is specific and definite, he thinks it is better to withdraw his name from the editorial board and continue his contact with the paper as a contributor.

Then came Peter's editorial:

As an editor, it will be assumed that I sponsor or advocate any reform suggested in the pages of the Catholic Worker. I would rather definitely sign my own work, letting it be understood what I stand for.

My program stands for three things: Round-table discussions is one and I hope to have the first one at the Manhattan Lyceum the last Sunday in June. We can have a hall holding 150 people for eight hours for ten dollars. I have paid a deposit of three. I have no more money now but I will beg the rest. I hope everyone will come to this meeting. I want Communists, radicals, priests, and laity. I want everyone to set forth his own views. I want clarification of thought.

The next step in the program is houses of hospitality. In the Middle Ages it was an obligation of the bishop to provide houses of hospitality or hospices for the wayfarer. They are especially necessary now and necessary to my program, as halfway houses. I am hoping that someone will donate a house rent-free for six months so that a start may be made. A priest will be at the head of it and men gathered from our roundtable discussions will be recruited to work in the houses cooperatively and eventually be sent out to farm colonies or agronomic universities. Which comes to the third step in my program. People will have to go back to the land. The machine has displaced labor. The cities are overcrowded. The land will have to take care of them.

My whole scheme is a Utopian, Christian communism. I am not afraid of the word communism. I am not saying that my program is for everyone. It is for those who choose to embrace it. I am not opposed to private property with responsibility. But those who own private property should never forget it is a trust.

This succinct listing of his aims was not even the lead editorial. Perhaps it sounded too utopian for my tastes; perhaps I was irked because women were left out in his description of a house of hospitality, where he spoke of a group of men living under a priest. In addition to Peter's editorial, there were several of his easy essays. In one, recommending the formation of houses of hospitality and farming communes, he wrote in his troubadour mood:

We need round-table discussions to keep trained minds from becoming academic.

We need round-table discussions to keep untrained minds from becoming superficial.

We need round-table discussions to learn from scholars how things would be, if they were as they should be.

We need round-table discussions to learn from scholars how a path can be made from things as they are to things as they should be.

We need houses of hospitality to give to the rich the opportunity to serve the poor.

We need houses of hospitality to bring the Bishops to the people and the people to the Bishops.

We need houses of hospitality to bring back to institutions the technique of institutions.

We need houses of hospitality to bring social justice through Catholic Action.

The unemployed need free rent. They can have that in an agronomic university.

The unemployed need free fuel. They can get that in an agronomic university.

The unemployed need free food. They can raise that in an agronomic university.

The unemployed need to acquire skill. They can do that in an agronomic university.

There were other articles on more mundane matters. One stated that readers had contributed $156.50. That, with what money I got from free-lancing, would keep us going. There was also a report on distribution: papers were being mailed out all over the country in bundles of ten or twenty; Dolan and Eagan had been selling on the streets (they kept the money to pay

for their "eats and tobacco"); and I too had embarked on the great adventure of going out to face up to "the man on the street."

So we continued through the summer. Since this was the depression and there were no jobs, almost immediately we found ourselves a group, a staff, which grew steadily in numbers. Joe Bennett, our first salesman, was still with us. Soon we were joined by Stanley Vishnewski, a seventeen- year-old Lithuanian boy from the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn who used to walk to New York over the bridge every day and then twenty-five blocks uptown to Fifteenth Street. He sold the paper, too, and ran errands and worked without wages despite the urging of his father, a tailor, that he ought to be looking for a job. (Stanley has remained with us ever since.) . . .

That summer Peter performed with gusto his role as a troubadour of God. During dinner he talked–or rather he chanted–and his essays made a pleasant accompaniment to our meals.

One of them, "A Case for Utopia," which we printed later in our paper, is especially pertinent today:

The world would be better off if people tried to become better, and people would become better if they stopped trying to become better off.

For when everyone tries to become better off nobody is better off.

But when everyone tries to become better everybody is better off.

Everyone would be rich if nobody tried to become richer, and nobody would be poor if everybody tried to be the poorest.

And everybody would be what he ought to be if everybody tried to be what he wants the other fellow to be.
