On Peter Maurin

Dorothy Day

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Introduction

Dorothy maintained that without Peter Maurin there would be no Catholic Worker Movement. These articles outline his teachings and Dorothy's deep admiration for him and the model he represented. She said he was a Saint Francis for our time.

Chapter 2

Day After Day

The Catholic Worker, February 1943, 1,4.

*Summary: Discusses the two major subjects of her speaking engagements, Peter Maurin, whom she describes as founder and mind of the C.W., and personalism, which she describes as communitarian, and the philosophy of both P. Maurin and the C.W.. Describes some of the difficulties in living the CW vocation and running farming communes. Recommends reading the Desert Fathers and Aldous Huxley's *Grey Eminence* to understand personalism and communitarianism. (DDLW #148).*

Received a letter this month, which I can not only answer personally, but also by means of this column, since it takes up such fundamental issues.

We are printing Gerry's letter in this issue of the paper, but I want to take up one paragraph especially. He said: "Quite by chance I gave a very, very informal talk; on the Catholic Worker several nights ago. My talents are limited. I am positive they were bored to death or couldn't understand my middle western accent. I did my best but it makes one seem so much like a fool when people just don't grasp what you are driving at."

Joe and Gerry

How well we all know that feeling, those of us who are called upon to speak at meetings, communion breakfasts, conventions, etc. We are assailed by sudden feelings of futility, of false humility and only desperate praying drags us out of the sudden slough into which we have fallen. Gerry Griffin and Joe Zarrella were five and a half years with the CATHOLIC WORKER and neither of them made more than half a dozen speeches, and then only when they were caught in a trap and forced into it. Joe made a trip with Peter Maurin once and found himself on the platform and on the spot, but after he got home he never made another speech and all my pleadings, cajoling and even outright command s served to no purpose. He would not, could not speak. Nor would Gerry. Gerry was just dour. We knew he had been forced to express himself a few times in Chicago and Detroit, when he was visiting there. So far, only Peter and Arthur Sheehan and I have done the talking around the country. Right

now in my file of unanswered letters there are half a dozen invitations to speak, of which I can accept only a few and those on my way home from the south. And why are we speaking and what are we speaking about.

Peter Maurin

First of all, it was Peter who came into our lives and called us to work in the vineyard. He convinced us by his own talking that there was work to be done, that we each had vocations, callings. We were called upon, as St. Peter said, to give reason for the faith that was in us.

When people ask me how the Catholic Worker movement started and what it is, I tell them about Peter, and the way he lives, and the ideas he expresses. I talk about his personalist and communitarian philosophy. Personalism and comnunitarianism! There are two more "isms" for us to think about in this day of Communism, Fascism, Nazism, totalitarianism.

And since we started talking about these things ten years ago, there is scarcely a mail comes in that we don't have to go on talking and writing about them to answer the questions. That's because our readers are trying to live these ideas, not just talk about them. And the living of them leads to endless discussions, which as Peter says, leads to the clarification of thought, but it also leads to endless misunderstandings. I am at present engaged in trying to write a book, and it will be a long book, about Peter and his ideas and the work that came of them. So it is hard to try even to suggest what it is all about in a few short columns.

Personalism

Peter's little essays on personalism can be summed up in "What makes man human ?," and "To be what you want the other fellow to be." Ade Bethune has a magnificent article on Personalism in the Spring 1940, *Christian Social Art Quarterly.* Printed at St. Mary of the Woods, Indiana.

And the catechism sums it all up. What are we, what are we here for? We are here to know God, to love Him and to serve Him. We must study read and ponder. Peter is always giving us lists of books which enlighten us, develop our faculties so that we know more about God and man. We are here to know God, to love Him and to serve Him, and how can we love and serve Him unless we love our brother and serve him. So it follows, that each of us, instead of being self-centered, must try more and more to be God centered. To obey the first commandment by loving God above all things, with all our hearts, souls, minds and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves. Without thinking of what the other fellow is doing we must do what we are called upon to do.

Vocations

We are called, we have a vocation, we have a talent. It is up to us to develop that. Mine for instance, is journalism writing, and it is only because of the paper, the CATHOLIC WORKER, that houses of hospitality and farming communes, or even the suggestion of them came into being. That's how the communitarian end of the movement started. People read about our way of thinking and our way of life and want to join us. They come to visit and remain.

Things just happen. Jesus said if your neighbor is hungry, or if your enemy is hungry, feed him. So we took to feeding those who came. We didn't intend breadlines. They just happened. The Same with sheltering people. The same with starting farms. We write about these things and they sound wonderful in writing. The kingdom of Heaven sounds wonderful, too, but it must be taken by violence. One gives up his life in order to save it. And "love in practice is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams"

A Movement

People come to join us in "our wonderful work." It all sounds very wonderful, but life itself is a haphazard, untidy messy affair. Unless we can live simply, unquestioningly and solitarily, one might say, in the midst of a mob, then we cease to be a personalist. The more we live with people in a community the more we must look to ourselves and regard the beam in our own eye. The more we live with a babbling crowd, the more we must practice silence. "For every idle word we speak we will be judged."

Peter is one of those who peaks to the point and not idly. He speaks in season and out of season, of course. Sometimes as the night grows late it is necessary to call a halt. But since we are not having regular meetings, he must take his chances to indoctrinate as he gets them, which may be in the midst of mailing out the paper, answering letters, etc. Remember St. Paul and how he talked all through the night and how one of his listeners sitting on a window sill in the close room, hot with the lamp light, fell out of the window and had to be restored to life by the speaker, who then went back to his indoctrinating regardless!

Idle Talk

The idle talk, the judging of others, the lack of charity, this certainly is not the kind of talk to be indulging in. . . . Peter's vocation is most certainly to think and talk and write. He has done every kind of manual labor so he is indeed a worker as well as a scholar. But he is an indoctrinator, not a manager of a house of hospitality, nor yet of a farming commune. Joe and Gerry did the former job of running a house of hospitality as well as they could considering we were also a newspaper office, but we have not yet found good farm managers, with knowledge, ability and perseverance. Whether our farms will ever be more than groups of people living together, more than villages on the land, it is hard to tell. We simply have not

the people with skills to work, or to follow or to lead. We have many rugged individualists, each one doing the best he can. But we have lost our knowledge of crafts, we have not yet achieved the unjudging self-discipline, the asceticism, the voluntary poverty necessary for even the beginnings of a farming commune. We are still little more than refugee camps on the soil, and we are still no more than refugees from the industrial revolution the class war, a race war and international war that is engulfing us. This past month while I have been away from the work I have been reading the Fathers of the Desert. You can get a paper-covered dollar edition from Sheed and Ward 63 Fifth Avenue. I had read that and am now reading two complete volumes, edited by Ernest A. Wallis Budge, keeper of the Assyrian and Egyptian antiquities of the British Museum and published 1907.

Books to Read

It's a good time to be reading about the desert fathers. It is familiar ground that I am covering what with the campaign in Africa, and letters from Gerry from Syria. A lot of those desert fathers, according to Dr. Budge, fled from the cities to the wilderness to escape military service. Thousands of monasteries began then, for people began to live together as well as to seek solitary places. By reading about the desert fathers I have learned more about personalism and comnunitarianism.

Another book which is profoundly interesting is Aldous Huxley's *Grey Eminence*. Both these readings have helped clarify my own ideas in regard to our work and the part each one of us must play in it. We hope our readers can get hold of both and enjoy them as I have.

Chapter 3

Background for Peter Maurin

The Catholic Worker, February 1945, 3,7.

Summary: A chapter from her unpublished book "Peter Maurin." Comments on P. Maurin's thoughts on capitalism and socialism and the idea that Papal Encyclicals try to make an "acquisitive society functional." (DDLW #151).

This is another chapter from "About Peter Maurin," by Dorothy Day. Every now and then we will run a chapter (not consecutive ones). We would like to be able to tell you when the book is going to come out, but we are trying to make up our minds whether or not to publish it ourselves. We would like to bring out a cheap, paper covered edition which would be within the price reach of all. But wartime and paper priorities and printing bills make us hesitate. If we had a printing fund (and anyone who is interested in our publishing the "Peter" book can let us hear from them) we might go ahead.

THIS noon I met Peter down at St. Andrew's Church and we walked along the Bowery to the Eclipse Restaurant, where he usually has his breakfast. The Eclipse is a large, square, unattractive store, larger than the usual coffee shop, with the walls painted a swampy green and the lights not very bright. This is probably a good thing because wherever one looks all is dirt and neglect.

Floors are dirty and covered with sawdust. Cockroaches chase each other in all directions. I don't mean that they are thick, but wherever you look between the piles of bread on the counter, under the edges of the tables, on the floor at your feet, on the wall where you hang your coat and see always a scurrying insect. It is the same in our own Houses of Hospitality, most of them.

Not that this condition is known only to those on the Bowery. One of our friends, a priest at a Benedictine priory, in order to comfort us when we were having coffee in our kitchen at Saint Joseph's House, told us about the cockroaches in their kitchen where they have a good deal of help. "Only the other night," he said, "I had missed supper and was looking for a snack in the ice box and there were so many cockroaches swarming over the box I was afraid to open the door for fear of letting them in. So I went to bed without anything to eat."

And last week I spoke in the hall of a Catholic institution where huge water bugs scurried this way and that around the floor at my feet. The priest who sat next to me killed one but after we saw three or four others we didn't bother. These were the large, light-brown, variety, not like the big black water bugs you find in Florida which the natives there dignify with the name of palmbug.

I certainly don't think the poor ever get used to cockroaches, bed bugs, body lice, fleas, rats and such like vermin that go with poverty. They merely endure them, sometimes with patience, sometimes with a corroding bitterness that the comfortable and pious stigmatize as envy. Someone asked Peter once why God had created bedbugs, and he said: "For our patience, probably."

THE restaurant was filled with small tables, all of them crowded. Peter and I sat down with two Negroes. These left during the course of our conversation, and two sailors, heavily tattooed, took their places. They might have been Scandinavian, Finnish, Russian–It's hard to tell the nationality of these men.

On the walls were half a dozen cracked mirrors, some of them completely broken in half, and on the fragments, painted with chalk, food was advertised.

Pig ears, spaghetti, bread and tea, 15c.

Fried mush, one egg, coffee, 15c.

Peter ordered lamb stew which came at once, a huge bowl of it with three slices of bread and a very large mug of coffee for 20c.

It seemed to me that at every table around everyone was eating the same lamb stew, and when I ordered fried mush and an egg the waiter shook his head uncomprehendingly and said: "lamb stew," so I ordered it too. It was hot. There were a few pieces of potato and carrot, plenty of meat and plenty of grease.

Over on a counter there were desserts, and here they served not one baked apple, but three. Evidently they cater to robust appetites.

WE were looking at the daily paper as we went in, containing a story of a mine strike; also an account of the C.I.O. Convention.

We began talking of labor leaders, and Peter said: "Murray seems to be a religious man. John Lewis is a Welshman and the Welsh are very much akin to the Bretons. They are often mystics but mysticism may go in the wrong direction. From God-centered, they may become man-centered. Murray is a Catholic. They say he prays. I don't know about Lewis. I hear he has no religion. There may be the will to power. His mysticism may take that form but I don't know. Murray has made a very important analysis of unemployment. People fail to realize the importance of intelligent analysis of a situation before anything can be done about it."

Since Peter was hungry he talked more or less in fragments so we had no time on this occasion to talk in detail about the labor situation. I mentioned that we had an engagement for next Monday with Helene Isvolsky, the author of "Soviet Man Now" and "Dark Before Dusk," which I had read with much interest. Also she has had a few articles in *Commonweal* recently.

Her father, Peter said, was a Russian diplomat and formulated the foreign policies in the time of the Tsar. He was minister to France at the time Poincare gave Russia carte blanche in the Balkans. These were the days when the alliances were built up that brought about the great war.

"He was too Machiavellian a statesman. Helene Isvolsky has been in Paris since the World War, I understand. Jaures, head of the Socialists in France, accused Isvolsky of trying to bring war. Someone killed Jaures two days before the war began."

Peter went on eating his lamb stew with great appetite. He had been traveling all night, coming from Philadelphia, where the Catechetical Congress had been going on the last few days. I had asked him to go down there because many Bishops are very interested in Peter's ideas. Bishop Eustace, of Camden, Bishop O'Hara, of Kansas City, who is head of the conference; Bishop Boyle, of Pittsburgh; Bishop Ryan, of Bismarck, North Dakota. I don't know how many he saw, I don't imagine, in a huge congress of this kind, there was much chance to talk.

Peter did not look in the least tired, but, of course, he looked rather dirty, traveling as he had done, jumping from New York to Boston, then back to Philadelphia and then home again. His shirt was wilted, and his suit crushed and unpressed. It hadn't been cleaned for a long time because he had no other suit.

AS Peter finished up the last crumbs of his bread and the last drops of stew, he looked around him and called attention to the type of workers. "Not many loafers here," he said. "Contractors come down here to the Bowery and get these men for railroad jobs or contracting jobs. Sometimes there is intelligent conversation with intelligent criticism. I worked with one of these gangs going out of Chicago to Peoria once. They didn't give us our pay. Only paper, that we were supposed to cash when we got back to Chicago. We had to take a box car back and we were arrested for that and thrown in jail. We had to walk a good part of the day and we took corn from the fields and ate the raw corn." I thought of Christ and His disciples, as he said this.

"I was with a Finn from Helsingfors. As soon as he got to Chicago he drank up all his money. These workers don't get much and many of them drink."

"How did you make out at the Socialist meeting at Boston?"

"All right, said Peter."The other speaker tried to bring a philosophy of private property from the Pope's encyclicals. I gave him the philosophy, the essence of it. Of course, they would only give me 20 or 25 minutes, so I had to keep it short."

"Do you remember which essays you gave?"

"I only took a few. Of course, I had to select here and there to give the essence. I started with the idea of *Folk Schools*. Then *Logical and Practical, Real Man, Better and Better Off, Big Shots and Little Shots, Two of a Kind, Tug of War*. I told them I am the son of a peasant who could neither read nor write and so I am pre-capitalistic. Yes, I am pre-capitalistic and I don't like capitalism and I don't like Socialism, which is the child of capitalism. That is father and son. I don't like the father and I don't like the son."

"How many were there at the meeting?"

"Not many. They didn't advertise it."

"That's good. We don't like advertising."

"That's all right. I told them about the fallacy of saving and the wisdom of giving–*He Left So Much, The First Christians, Self Organization, On the Farming Commune, Firing the Boss*. Then *The Land of Refuge, Free Guest Houses, Rural Centers in Ireland, The Irish Scholars*, and I told them they don't have to keep up with the Irish politicians. They can keep up with the Irish scholars, and go in for Irish Communism.

"That's a good, positive program for Boston"

"I TOLD them of the Communism that was brought by the Jesuits to the Indians in Paraguay, and by the Franciscans to the Indians of Texas, Arizona, New Mexico and California. A fellow who was interested said, 'How is it that they got out of Paraguay?' and I was telling him that the Indians in Paraguay didn't like the white people. They were keeping away from the Jesuits because they were white. Because the whites robbed them and made slaves of them. And so the Jesuits formed there that communal life and gave them guns and told them to shoot whites when whites tried to force them into slavery. So friends of the white people were complaining to the Bishops in Europe against the Jesuits exciting the Indians; and the Pope, who was a Franciscan, suppressed the Jesuits because they had given arms. There was an old man from Austria there who knew all about it, who even knew the name of the Pope. About 70 years old.

"Then I gave them a philosophy of history and that interested them. They don't know those things. That gives them a light. Glass, the Socialist, put it this way. He said that we were Christian communists–but he was trying to figure out the encyclicals on the social order. These encyclicals, I told him. were trying to make an acquisitive society functional. We consider this society a product of capitalism and we are trying to go back to a functional society: they had one once, before it had decayed into acquisitiveness.

The original guilds had the idea. There is a pamphlet, *'The Sound Old Guilds*,' the Paulist Press publishes it. Glass had a better conception of guilds than most people.

"There were no guilds in rural districts. What they had was an ideology. The ideology of the Gospel.

The encyclicals try to convert an acquisitive society into a functional society. We personally renounce the acquisitive society altogether. It is a question of techniques.

"If the others are eager, they would start associations of Catholic employers. They don't. They just talk about it. They would have the cooperation of the A.C.T.U., which fosters changing an acquisitive society into a functional one. We go back, it is simpler. We go back to the simple life. Even Thoreau was talking about it, and Gandhi is an admirer of Thoreau.

The National Catholic Welfare Conference used to be connected with the Rural Life Conference. The Catholic Rural Life Conference talks about homesteads. We favor communes. What we foster did exist one time. We go back.

"IT was the same with the House of Hospitality. We had to prove to the Bishops it could be done. The Bishop of Sacramento says it almost does itself. It is not like people asking for

money and saying, 'rely on my judgment.' It's people who give of themselves to the leaders themselves.

"Some will tell me that is not in the encyclicals. They don't know the encyclicals. The one on St. Francis for instance. Ours is Franciscan and Benedictine stuff.

"They have abandoned Franciscanism and so we will show them the way by proving it can be done.

"The idea is now people don't work if they don't get wages. Even the workers become just as acquisitive as the Chambers of Commerce. We know some workers who can't take it. Some get drunk. They become intoxicated with the spirits. We think they can become intoxicated with the spirit and wouldn't care about spirits any more. Father Gillis says things are becoming worse. But when things become worse people cease to be indifferent. That is the hardest thing to contend with–indifference. People are preoccupied about this world. About people living in this world. If we were more preoccupied about the next world, maybe it would solve the problems of this world, too. People are beginning to pay attention to the priests and Bishops now. The papers feature those things now.

"Gerry was saying the Bishops' statements seemed to please everybody. Their position makes for it. We have to present these ideas in such a way they would–that is where intelligence wins–that the religious orders would again profess those things. But they have become like the professors that don't profess. They say that they are not practical. Now they admit the House of Hospitality was practical. And my cracks–logic with cracks–are not considered to be wisecracks and they give me a hearing. So I got Bishops reading my stuff. When the Abbott of Saint Meinrad's was here, he asked me"Where do you get all those ideas? I told him I didn't get them–they got me. Now they give me a hearing.

The secretaries wouldn't listen to me but I have succeeded in getting over their secretaries. Because they think I've got something on the ball. Through carrying out the farming commune program we prove we may be able to bring the Franciscans back to Franciscanism. And if you bring the Franciscans back to Franciscanism you will have the stuff for the Jesuits, too, as well as the Benedictines. When the Jesuits and Benedictines and Franciscans get our line of practicality then the Knights of Columbus will get it too. And when the Knights of Columbus get it, then the Free Masons will get it and the Free Masons will be both free and masons. Masons because they will construct. When press them, is not? Because the ideas get me I got to ex-people expect that from me." [sic]

Chapter 4

Peter the Materialist

The Catholic Worker, September 1945, 6.

Summary: Another chapter from her unpublished biography of Peter Maurin. Describes St. Francis as the great personalist and goes on to explicate a philosophy of work. Sees it as a gift, a vocation that one should find what he/she does best and develop it. Encourages scholars to become workers and workers to become scholars in order that more understanding exit between the two. Defends Peter from the criticism of being a materialist and portrays him as an apostle to the world, not of the world. (DDLW #152).

(Another chapter from a biography of Peter Maurin, lay apostle, founder of the Catholic Worker movement.)

Peter is always getting back to Saint Francis of Assisi, who was most truly the "great personalist." In his poverty, rich; in renouncing all, possessing all; generous, giving out of his heart, sowing generously and reaping generously, humble and asking when in need, possessing freedom and all joy.

Without doubt, Peter is a free and joyous person. And it is the freedom and joyousness that comes from a clear heart and soul. There are those who might say it comes because of his anarchistic nature, his refusal to enter into political controversy, his refusal to use worldly means to change the social order. He does not indeed refuse to use mystical means, physical means, secular means, the means that are at hand. But the means of expediency that men have turned to for so many ages, he disdains. He is no diplomat; he is no politician. He has so thoroughly discouraged in his followers the use of political means that he has been termed an anarchist by many, especially by our dear Jesuit friend, Father Dowling, who often has often come to us and talked to us of proportional representation.

To give up superfluous possession! Peter has no income so does not need to worry about income taxes. He does not worry about rationing. He uses those things he needs, in the way of clothing and food, "as though he used them not." He has no worries about style, fit, fashion. He eats what is put before him, and if he prefers anything he prefers vegetable stews to meat, a hot drink to a cold, oil to butter. He does not smoke; he does not drink wine only "because it causes his brother to stumble." Otherwise, he believes in feasts as well as fasts,

and there are, after all, many feast days, days of rejoicing, weddings, baptismal feasts, name days, and all the Saints' days.

Saint Francis desired that men should work with their hands. Peter enjoys manual labor. He used to tell the late Father Virgil Michel that if Benedictines had kept to their early ideal of manual labor, there would not be so many breakdowns from mental over-work. "We must use the whole man," says Peter, "so that we may be holy men." He may be quoting – it sounds like Eric Gill, but it also sounds like Peter.

There is nothing he likes better than building fires, and to get down and poke a grate fire until it is all but out, and poke kindling wood in under the coals, and shake it down, and finally dump it, and rebuild it altogether – that is fun! Then to laboriously go over the coal – (we have no sifters) getting out the pieces so none will be wasted, and to empty the ashes – and usually the wind blows them all over Peter, his grey hair, his iron grey suit and shoes.

I've seen him setting out like that, to give a lecture somewhere all unbrushed and uncombed, and run after him to refurbish him a bit for company. "It is for the sake of others"' I tell him.

But Peter is oblivious of appearances. There is not much in the way of manual labor he can do around Mott Street except to help keep the fires going and to mend chairs. We are always short of chairs, so each one is a treasure. Since people live out of doors, a good part of the winter as well as the summer, the women in the tenement on either side of us, back and front, come down on the sidewalk when their work in the house is done, and just sit. Usually they come into the store, which is the office, and take the chairs. If they like the chairs they bring them upstairs with them to their homes, leaving us the old broken-down ones.

"That is the way the voluntarily poor are treated," I tell Peter. "How long does it take Christianity to work, anyway? Because of our generosity in letting them borrow our chairs, because we believe that when someone takes our coat we should offer him our cloak too, then the argument is, 'they do not appreciate good things, they don't value what they have, so we might as well take them. We take care of them.' I've seen that argument working in people's minds hundreds of times. They justify themselves cleverly. The poor don't know the difference, they say. 'Them as has gits,' and from them who have not, what they have shall be taken away. That's us."

Peter does not answer, but takes the broken-down chairs, or those too heavy to be moved, which they have left us, and mends them uncomplainingly.

On the farm there is plenty of work for all; another reason why Peter was always extolling the land. People cannot live without working. Work is as necessary as bread. But what is needed is a philosophy of work. Work is a gift, a vocation. Before the fall, Adam was given the garden to cultivate. It was only after the fall that all nature travailed and groaned so that man has to work with the sweat of his brow and combat earthquakes, floods, droughts, boll weevils, Japanese beetles, fatigue and sloth. We have to recognize work as a penance, but we must also recognize work as a gift. Man has talents which God has given him, and he must develop these talents. He must find the work he can do best, and then learn to do it well, for his own sake and the sake of his fellows.

Peter's indoctrinations about scholars and workers has this practical result around the houses of hospitality. When the scholar starts scrubbing and cleaning house, the cooperation from

the worker is more willing, more spontaneous. Everyone wants to help. The labor and exercise tends to relieve the discouragement that often threatens to encompass the scholar. He understands better after a bout with a mop the discouragements of the poor man, his slothfulness, his hopelessness. He begins, too, to understand what Christ meant when he said He came to minister, not to be ministered unto. He begins to understand the humiliations of the very poor, and by seeking them voluntarily he finds peace and rest in them. "My yoke is easy and my burden light." "The meek shall inherit the earth." But these things are not understood until practiced. Saint Francis said, "You cannot know what you have not practiced."

A Jewish convert, who had been making a Retreat with us at Maryfarm, said some weeks after, "It is hard to live in the upside-down world of the gospels." Truly it is a world of paradoxes, giving up one's life in order to save it, dying to live. It is voluntary poverty, stripping oneself even of what the world calls dignity, honor, human respect.

For truly it must be admitted that one does not always have the respect of the poor, of the workers. There was Smitty who gave out clothes in the basement store room every day, and for three hours he took the abuse of the women and men who came for underwear and socks and sweaters and coats.

"These clothes are sent in here for us. You're holding out on us. You gave it to him yesterday and now you have nothing for me. You're selling the stuff yourself." Smitty meekly accepted all rebukes. He was in rags himself, down at the heel, wearing his clothes until we begged him to find something else in order to wash the things he had on. He was so poor, and looked so poor, that the miserable ones who came suspected him of their own vices. He must drink – he *must* steal – it is beyond reason that anyone voluntarily should stay down in that dingy rat-ridden hole, under the five-story tenement and give out clothes and bits of literature, and keep on taking abuse as meekly as he did.

And already he had been up since five o'clock in the morning, getting the coffee ready for the breadline, slicing the bread, which the men soak in their coffee. There were over a hundred men every morning. There used to be many times that number, but in war time, there were not so many unemployed. There are the old, the crippled, the unemployables in the neighborhood. They are served in one of the two stores which front our St. Joseph's House of Hospitality. The store is long and narrow and there is not enough room for tables and chairs. The men must come in on a line, be served their coffee and bread at a counter, drink it and eat their soaked-up bread, and then go out and let another batch of thirty or so come in. They can go back on the line again and take their turn on second helpings, and they can take all the bread they wish in their ragged pockets.

Smitty has helpers of course – Alex, the Russian, who was torpedoed in the last war, and afloat for hours. There is a little Swiss fellow, very critical of the men he is serving.

Peter says, "people learn the art of human contacts by living in a house of Hospitality."

Many a time Peter makes what he calls "points," but I do not understand for months. He builds up a program of action, his listeners concede the necessity of working out such a program – and then he expects them to guide their lives thereby, readjusting themselves to these new ideas which he has presented. If he fails to influence others as he has hoped,

he shrugs his shoulders and goes on propounding social doctrine. He is content to wait until circumstances arise which will be more favorable for the working out of his ideas. Certainly through the fifty thousand readers of THE CATHOLIC WORKER (that is its present circulation), he has found for himself many readers, many listeners.

He had invitations to speak at colleges, seminaries and groups throughout the country. Through the Houses of Hospitality which have been established, he has built up groups for round table discussions. Through the farming communes, he has directed attention to fundamental economic ideas.

To him there is a synthesis about all his ideas – they fit together; as blueprints for a new world they are unsurpassed, idyllic. But, when it comes to working them out, given the human material, the lack of equipment, the vagaries of human nature – there is the rub! Do they work? Does Christianity work? If it fails it is glorious in its failure, the failure of the Cross.

I do know this–that when people come into contact with Peter Maurin, they change, they awaken, they begin to see, things become as new, they look at life in the light of the Gospels. They admit the truth he possesses and lives by, and though they themselves fail to go the whole way their faces are turned at least toward the light. And Peter is patient. Looking at things as he does in the light of history, taking the long view, he is content to play his part, to live by his principles and to wait.

As Pascal said, "It is not ours to see the triumph of truth, but to fight on its behalf."

I have always thought of Peter as an apostle to *the world*. In the essays printed in THE CATHOLIC WORKER, many of them contain an outline of history, a criticism of history, an outline of simple solutions. They all have to do with the *world*, this life which we know and love, with the needs of our *bodies* for food, clothing and shelter. His philosophy, his sociology, his economics have a truly religious foundation. There is a synthesis in his instructions to us all, and it is not just to use the catchy phrases that he lists his quotations under the headings, *Cult, Culture and Cultivation*.

Father Furfey of the Catholic University, in his book, "The History of Social Thought," brings out in his first chapter how long the history of the human race is. Richarz, he says, has summarized the evidence which proves that 30,000 years is the absolute minimum, and then he goes on to talk about early human remains of the Pleistocene period, which began from 300,000 to a million years ago, with the weight of opinion inclining more and more to the larger figure. Thomas Mann, in the prelude to Joseph and His Brothers, says that experts estimate the age of the human species as 500,000 years, and calls it a scant reckoning. By the side of these figures, the 1,945 years of Christianity seem relatively an instant in the history of the world.

With this fresh point of view, Peter does not find it at all extraordinary to expect people to try to begin now to put into practice some of the social ideas, not only of the New Testament, but of the old. Unless we try to put these ideas into practice, we are guilty of secularism, so tersely condemned by Pope Pius XI. Unless we are trying to put the social ideas of the Gospel into practice, we are not showing our love for our neighbor. "And how can we love God Whom we have not seen, unless we love our brother whom we do see," as Saint John

wrote. Unless we are putting these social ideas into practice, recognizing the correlation of the soul and body, we are using religion as an insurance policy, as a prop, as a comfort in affliction, and not only is religion then truly an opiate of the people, but we are like men who "beholding our face in a glass, go away, not mindful of what manner of men we are."

Peter does not talk subjectively about religion. He brings to us quotations and books and ideas that, by stimulating the mind to know, will encourage the heart to love.

Three quotations from the first letter of Saint John epitomize Peter's religious attitude for me.

"No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abideth in us; and His charity is perfected in us. . . "

"If any man say: I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar. For he that loveth not his brother whom he seeth, how can he love God whom he seeth not?. . . "

"He that hath the substance of this world and shall see his brother in need and shall shut up his heart from him; how doth the charity of God abide in him?"

And there is that sentence of Saint James, "If a brother or sister be naked and want daily food, and one of you say to them, Go in peace, be ye warmed and filled; yet give them not those things that are necessary for the body, what shall it profit?"

And, of course, to sum it all up, there are those never-to-be-forgotten words of Our Lord, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

It is the above quotations that point the reason for Peter's preoccupation with the material details of this world, with the social order, with the need of rebuilding as he says, "within the shell of the old, with a philosophy which is so old that it looks like new."

And this preoccupation of his with business, with economics, with agriculture, with labor, with capital, with credit unions, maternity guilds, with cooperatives, his unceasing emphasis on the fact that these are the vital concerns of religion, have led people to think of him as a *materialist!* "Laying too much emphasis on the material!" they say, piously, and return to their prayers. "After all, we must use our spiritual weapons, we must devote ourselves to religious service, and all these things will be added unto us." And withdrawing themselves, "keeping themselves unspotted from the world," they again are guilty of secularism, of using religion as an opiate.

Chapter 5

Letter To Our Readers at the Beginning of Our Fifteenth Year

The Catholic Worker, May 1947, 1,3.

Summary: Outlines P. Maurin's program for social action as the instituting of Houses of Hospitality, Clarification of Thought and Farming Communes, and explains where the C.W. has gone with each program. Reveals Maurin's sources of thought and the need to find lay apostolates. Traces personal sacrifices to Jesus' command in the gospels and asserts that the state cannot take over this duty. (DDLW #155).

"It is better to light a candle than to sit complaining of the dark." Chinese proverb.

Dear Follow Workers in Christ:

This merry month of May, this month of Mary, this most important month which marks thc beginning of our fifteenth year I have offered, with great temerity, to write the whole paper, aside from Peter's essays. We have a new farm and retreat house at Newburgh-on-the-Hudson, sixty miles from New York and up there the men are ploughing and planting and building, Gerry Griffin and Jack Thornton, John Fillinger, Joe Cotter Hans Tunnesen, Rocco and Frank Coyle. In a way I would like to have this issue of THE CATHOLIC WORKER an anniversary issue, and give a resume of our life and work in neat and scholarly style. But being a woman, and a much interrupted woman, I can only write a letter, a discursive letter, which none the less will be packed full of news and events and from which you will gain a picture, form an opinion, even perhaps make a decision. A decision to read a book, make a retreat, visit us on Mott street; a decision perhaps to consider yourself an apostle and search out some school of the apostolate to inform yourself more about God our King, and Heaven our country.

Each and every paragraph of this letter will be interrupted, I know, by visitors, by babies perhaps, by meals, by matters of great importance in that they have to do with human beings. And in the face of these interruptions, I must remember what I read of Cervantes

recently–that he wrote his masterpiece, "Don Quixote," while he lived in a four-room house with six women, and above a tavern full of roistering drinkers. Not much peace and quiet there.

Peter Maurin's program of action, in the face of thc crisis of the day, a crisis that has continued these last fourteen years through a great depression and a great war, remains the same now as it did when first we met back in 1933.

1. To reach the man in the street with the social teachings of the church.
2. To reach the masses through the practice of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, a a personal sacrifice, which means voluntary poverty.
3. To build up a lay apostolate through round table discussions for the clarification of thought.
4. To found Houses of Hospitality for the practice of the works of mercy.
5. To found farming communes for the cure of unemployment. To solve the problem of the machine, for the restoration of property and the combating of the servile state: for the building up of the family, the original community, the first unit of society.

To form our minds, Peter brought us things to read, Chesterton and Belloc and Gill and Cobbett and Father Vincent McNabb, the encyclicals of the recent Popes, from Pope Leo XIII down to the present day. "Making the encyclicals click," he used to say with his bright and happy smile, at what he considered a happy phrase, something that would stick in the mind of the hearer. Peter is a Frenchman (for those of you who do not know him) and a peasant, and he has his own way of saying things.

He introduced to us Leon Bloy, the pilgrim of the absolute, and that great and terrible line of his, which converted the Maritains, *"There is only one unhappiness, and that is*–NOT TO BE ONE OF THE SAINTS." He showed us how Pope Pius XI called our attention in his encyclical on St. Francis de Sales, to the fact that we are all called to be saints, layman and religious, that this is our goal, union with God.

"If you have risen with Christ, seek the things which are above. Mind the things that are above, not the things that are of earth. For you have died and your life is hid with Christ in God." "Unless the seed fall into the ground and die, itself remaineth alone. But if it die it bringeth forth much fruit."

Peter quoted this encyclical on St. Francis de Sales, he quoted the beatitudes, he quoted the Sermon on the Mount. And these Ideas were afterward elaborated in the retreats given at Maryfarm Easton, and are now being given at Maryfarm, Newburgh; retreats which emphasize man's dignity as the son of God, the supernatural motive, as the little way to God; the correlation of the spiritual and the material, making one's work coincide with one's faith as a Christian. All summer we will have these retreats at Newburgh, and after the retreats there will be discussions and work on the land, to raise the food for the breadline at Mott street.

This letter will be for our prospective readers, as well as for the 58,000 subscribers we now have throughout the world. So I will try to take up Peter's program point by point and tell what we have been doing these last fourteen years.

Reach All Nations, Reach All Men

To reach the man in the street. "The workers of the world have been lost to the Church," Pope Piux XI is reported to have said to Canon Cardijn, international head of the Young Christian Workers. It is here that the apostolate of the WORD comes in, newspapers, leaflets, magazines; THE CATHOLIC WORKER, a monthly, usually of eight pages, but now cut down on account of the paper shortage has been distributed from the very first in public squares, sold on street corners, distributed in front of meeting halls. At times the circulation which started at 2,500 went up to 150,000, at a time when labor was beginning to organize and there was a greater call for the paper for mass distribution.

At those times when such simple issues as the right of workers to organize into unions of their own choosing was at stake, it was very necessary to get out into industrial conflicts, in front of factories and on picket lines, to emphasize what the Popes have said in regard to the worker.

But there were also criticisms to make as to the acceptance by the unions of the industrial set up as it was, private enterprise, competition, industrial capitalism.

Frankly, our position was that we had better work against the whole order, work for decentralization, in some cases even for abolition of the machine and the assembly line where it definitely went against the best interests of man and his needs and his nature. Since the unions were organized more for wages and hours, rather than for mutual aid and indoctrination, very often what we have to offer in the way of a program did not interest them. Our point of view was foreign if not hostile at times. Often it is a matter of criticism that we have not continued work with unions as we did in 1933 through 1938. Frankly, it was because we were not interested in increasing armaments, big business, perpetuating the status quo, and working in many cases perhaps towards state ownership.

We must continue to protest injustice, bad working conditions, poor wages which are general now in face of the high cost of living; but our vision is of another system, another social order, a state of society where, as Marx and Engels put it, *"Each man works according to his ability and receives according to his need,"* Or as St. Paul put it, "Let your abundance, supply their want." Men are beginning to think of the annual wage, in the unions, but not the family wage. Usually it is "equal pay for equal work." But that holy Pope Pius XI, said we should work to deproletarize the worker, to get him out of the wage-earning class and into the propertied class, so that he would own his home, as well as his tools.

Join the Apostolate

We must continue to get out into the highways and byways to distribute the paper even if it is not the food the man in the street wants. Religion is *morbid* to most people, and indeed it is a matter of dying to self, in order to live for God and one's neighbor. Religion has too long been the opium of the people, the opiate of the people. I forget how the jingle in the first issue of INTEGRITY ran, but the sense of it was this:

John Smith puts on his hat and

goes to Church on Sunday,

And John Smith goes to hell for

what he does on Monday.

Not Saturday night, mind you, when he may be taking surcease from care in some tavern, but for the work he engages in, whether it is the advertising business, or a fat job in the Rubber Company or Copper or Nickel Mines, or a Steamship company. We participate in the sin of others, we are all helping to make the kind of a world that makes for war.

Yes, let us get out into Union Square, along Forty Second street, in front of Madison Square Garden and distribute and sell THE CATHOLIC WORKER. We have been doing that for many years, but we need to do much more of it. As the older ones get tired (and Stanley has become a tired radical in this job of selling the paper), let the younger students and workers take over the job of being fools for Christ. One seminarian sold the paper all one summer for us. One rainy night when we were going into a CIO meeting there he was, standing in the downpour shouting READ THE CATHOLIC WORKER–THE ONLY THING THAT ISN'T ALL WET!

Big Dan used to call out (in opposition to Communist salesmen, who shouted, Read the Daily Worker), "READ THE CATHOLIC WORKER DAILY."

Leaflets, pamphlets, papers as well as more scholarly journals, are needed to reach the man in the street. Here is a letter which came last month: "We have been receiving a hundred CATHOLIC WORKERS a month and selling and distributing them in Columbus Circle. Do publish an appeal for more zeal on the part of Catholics in getting the Catholic message to the worker, to the poor, to the oppressed. There is a colored Catholic couple in Philadelphia and they would like a supply of fifty papers every month to distribute in their neighborhood."

Many an apostle has been found by selling Catholic literature on the street corner; he has been queried as to his positions and beliefs and has had to begin to study "to know the reason for the faith that is in him" in order to answer all the questions that are put to him. And many a time he just can't answer them and it's no use his trying.

Houses Needed For Hospitality

To reach the masses through the spiritual and the corporal works of mercy. Of course getting Catholic literature around is performing quite a few of those tasks. It is *enlightening the ignorant and counseling the doubtful, comforting the afflicted*, and you might even say that walking on a picket line is doing these things too, as well as *rebuking the sinner*. But when we talk of the works of mercy, we usually think of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and sheltering the homeless.

We have had to do them all even to *burying the dead*. One does not necessarily have to establish, run, or live in a House of Hospitality, as Peter named the hospices we have been

running around the country, in order to practice the works of mercy. The early Fathers of the Church said that every house should have a Christ's room. But it is generally only the poorest who are hospitable. A young college graduate hitchhiking across the country during the depression (he was trying to make up his mind about his vocation) said that the only place he found hospitality was among the Negroes and the Mexicans. Certainly priests' housekeepers did not extend any. He met so much misery and starvation even, that when he reached Los Angeles he finally started a House of Hospitality there, and in that house he met with so many impossible cases that he turned more and more to the spiritual weapons, and now he is a priest, with the most powerful weapons of all in his hands.

Every house should have a Christ's room. The coat which hangs in your closet belongs to the poor. If your brother comes to you hungry and you say, Go be thou filled, what kind of hospitality is that? It is no use turning people away to an agency, to the city or the state or the Catholic Charities. It is you yourself who must perform the works of mercy. Often you can only give the price of a meal, or a bed on the Bowery. Often you can only hope that it will be spent for that. Often you can literally take off a garment if it only be a scarf and warm some shivering brother. But *personally*, at a *personal sacrifice*, these were the ways Peter used to insist, to combat the growing tendency on the part of the State to take over. The great danger was the State taking over the job which our Lord Himself gave us to do, "Inasmuch as you did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me."

Of course husbands must be considered, and wives must be considered, and children. One must look after one's own family it is true. But Fr Coady said once, "We can all do ten times as much as we think we can do."

Right now we have two Houses of Hospitality in Detroit, the St. Martha House and the St. Francis House. In Cleveland there is the Martin de Porres House. In Pittsburgh, there is the St. Joseph House of Hospitality which was started by our group, (the Bishop gave the use of a huge orphanage) and is now run by Father Rice and Joseph Lenz. In Harrisburg there is the Martin de Porres House. In Philadelphia, the House of Christ the Worker. In Rochester St. Joseph's House of Hospitality for men and the Martha flat for women.

In the past there have been houses in Seattle, Sacramento, San Francisco, Los Angeles, St. Louis, Milwaukee, St. Paul Minneapolis, Chicago, South Bend, Toledo, Troy, Buffalo, Boston, Washington, Baltimore, New Orleans, etc., but when the depression ended with the war boom, and there were again jobs for all, many of the houses closed. Of course there is always a need for such centers. There are always the lame and the halt and the blind. There are always the poor we will always have with us, as our Lord said. There are always those coming out of hospitals, mental asylums, jails, etc. There is the wayfarer that needs to be sheltered for a night and those who come and stay a lifetime and finally need to be buried. The war took many of our young men into the service, into conscientious objector camps, into the medical corps, into jails, and they were the ones who ran the houses and performed the works of mercy. There were only four houses for women and of those two are still going; the Harrisburg house is a family center, to take care of the Negroes in the Seventh Street district in the shadow of the capital.

Unpremeditated

At one time a thousand a day were fed in New York, probably more. Now there are perhaps four hundred or five hundred. The house is always filled (we have 36 rooms and two stores) but the line is smaller. We started fourteen years ago by inviting whoever came along to dinner. Many of our workers were recruited in that way. By the time three years had passed we were given the use of 115 Mott street and the line began to stretch around the block. We never contemplated starting a BREAD LINE. All Peter had ever talked about were Houses of Hospitality and he had hoped that there could be craft shops, and discussion centers and libraries, and perhaps a chapel, and that these houses would be little cells of Christian living, radiating peace and brotherly love. But the evil of the day, the poverty in our rich country, the unemployment in the age of the machine was so great, and the disability, mental and physical, so appalling, that our houses grew and the lines grew with them.

But Peter never grows discouraged. "Discouragement is a temptation of the devil," he would say "We must make the kind of society where people find it easier to be good," he would add very simply.

Clarification Thru Discussion

Round Table discussions go on everywhere, when two or three gather together. Perhaps there is too much of it in an informal way, and not enough of it in a formal way. We have regular Friday night meetings, when speakers come and present a point of view lead in a discussion, or give a spiritual conference. There are discussions when visitors gather together, and whole groups, classes from seminaries, colleges and schools come together to ask questions and to enter into controversy. There are the retreats at Maryfarm, which in the past have been glimpses of heaven to a great many, an enlightenment, a conversion, a time of peace and study and rest.

Peter used to enter upon discussions on street corners, over restaurant tables, in public squares, as well as in the office, at all times of the day and night. He believed in catching people as they came, and often the discussions would go on all night. One is reminded of St. Paul who talked so long that the young man fell off the window seat out of the open window, and was picked up for dead; St. Paul had to revive him. And St. Catherine of Sienna, it is said, talked until she put people to sleep and then woke them up to listen some more. But Peter can talk and discuss no longer. He is over seventy, and his mind is tired and his memory bad. He has been a great leader, and his writings still inspire. And now significantly enough, many young people all over the country are trying to put into effect his ideas, both in publishing, in running centers of training, in establishing themselves on the land and here these discussions are being continued. If you cannot find enough people around Mott street to talk to about these ideas, and books that Peter has recommended, one can go to John Straub or Walter Marx in Washington or the Center for Christ the King at Herman, Pennsylvania, or to Loveland, Ohio where there are a number of families, as well as the great school of the apostolate for women, THE GRAIL. Or there is a center at

Brookfield, Conn., where there are four families on the land. Everywhere, the discussions started by Peter, are going on. The candle he has lit has been lighting many another candle and the light is becoming brighter.

Farm Centers Are Small Beginnings

There are these centers and other farms too around the country which are centers of the lay apostolate, though not the communal farm that Peter envisaged at a time when unemployment was the tragedy of the day, and man had neither work nor bread. There is a Catholic Worker farm at Lyons, Michigan where Louis and Justine Murphy live, and another Catholic Worker farm at Upton, Mass., where the O'Donnell and the Paulson family live. Frank manages the St. Leo shop there and Carl Paulson and Mary make stained glass and do wood carving etc. Both farms are called St. Benedict's Farm. There are nine children at the Massachusetts farm. There is Our Lady of the Wayside Farm at Avon, Ohio, where Bill and Dorothy Gauchat live with their three children and are taking care of a little crippled baby (who cannot live) whose parents cannot care for it. This farm helps provide food for the House of Hospitality Bill manages in Cleveland.

Now there is Maryfarm, Newburgh, which is connected with 1l5 Mott street, and which we hope will soon be self sustaining, and not only self sustaining, but helping to feed the breadline at Mott street. We will be having retreats there during the summer, and it will be delightful to go by way of boat up the Hudson, a slow trip, but a fitting approach to a week of prayer and study. You can get there quickly by New York Central to Beacon in an hour and a half, then take the ferry to Newburgh and a bus to Coldenham for ten minutes or so. You ask to be let off on Route 17K at the Catholic Worker Farm which is opposite the Sunnybrook Fruit Farms. We have had our first retreat already, Easter week, dedicated to rejoicing.

This is a brief summary of the Catholic Worker and its aims and purposes in the lay apostolate. Often people ask us what is the keynote of Peter's message, and one could say at once, without hesitation, POVERTY. It is what sets him apart, it is what distinguishes him from the great mass of the teachers of the day. In a time when we are living in an acquisitive society, Peter Maurin is THE POOR MAN.

Last month there was a sensational story in all the New York papers, and probably reprinted all over the country, about two brothers, Langley and Homer Collyer, who were misers and accumulators and who met with a horrible end. On receipt of a telephone call, police broke into a house on upper Fifth Avenue in the Harlem section, a four story house which in this housing shortage could have been converted into homes for four families. They found Homer, who had been blind and helpless, dead from starvation. His brother had disappeared. The house was so filled with junk that Langley had had to tunnel his way through to go in and out of the house to make their few purchases. In fear of intrusion, he had made booby traps with hundreds of pounds of old iron ready to fall on whoever threatened their privacy. One of these booby traps caught Langley who smothered to death within a few feet of his blind brother, who on account of the junk, could not reach either his brother or the window to call

for help.

He slowly starved to death, while listening to the rats feeding on the corpse of Langley a few feet away.

This story seems to me a vision of hell, a very literal and appalling sample of the hell that awaits the acquisitive, the greedy, the accumulators, the seekers after markets, wealth, power, prestige, exclusiveness, empire, dominion, of everything opposed to the common good. Here were two old men who epitomized to the nth degree suspicion and hatred of their fellows and a desire to gather together to themselves, everything they could lay their hands on. "They were worth $100,000" the newspapers reported. What a strange use of words! They spent little. Among the things they collected were six grand pianos dismantled cars, babies' cribs.

Peter, on the other hand has accumulated nothing in this life. He has nothing but the suit on his back, the shoes on his feet. He has lived on Bowerys and Skid Roads all his life, not believing that his dignity needed to be maintained by residence at a decent address, or by stopping at a good hotel. To reach one's fellows by the practice of the works of mercy, AT A PERSONAL SACRIFICE,– this meant embracing voluntary poverty. Voluntary poverty as a means to an end, to publish a paper, to put out leaflets, to live on the land, to serve one's fellows. He has lived these ideas.

And so when people ask us how we get the funds to run Houses of Hospitality, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, care for the sick and bury the dead we can only reply that our own wages are a penny a day and that by living in common we have enough to care for our brothers. The paper costs a cent a copy, or twenty-five cents a year. Many people send more. When our bills pile high, we send out an appeal, and usually this must be done twice a year, spring and fall, on St. Joseph's day in March and St. Francis Day in October. Always we get just enough to carry on. When there is some extraordinary project in view like the new farm at Newburgh, we made an especial appeal for that. Ask and you shall receive. That is, if the Lord wants you to have it. "I have no need of your goods," He has said, through the psalmist, and one of the ways we may know if it is God's will that we carry on this work, is by the response to our appeals. If He wants the work done, He will send the means to do it.

Light and Warmth Means Love

All this is set forth to show the validity, the vitality of Peter Maurin's ideas, of his vision. They said of the early Christians, – "SEE HOW THEY LOVE ONE ANOTHER" and we have seen in Peter's poverty how this love could be expressed, to live with the poor, to work with the poor, and to love the poor. And how great and wonderful thing is this love which makes all work joyful and all burdens light. "Love is the fulfilling of the law." And HELL Bernanos says, is not to love any more.

That love is not a matter of emotion, but a matter of the will, a matter of preference, one soon learns in work like this. To love your neighbor, to love your enemy, who only yesterday was your neighbor your ally, and now has become an enemy. Or so they say.

And what does this love mean in regard to Russia for instance?

What Is Our Stand on Russia?

We are fighting principalities and powers, not flesh and blood, and the Russians are our neighbors, our brothers in Christ, and not just a world power seeking empire. We are inclined to look upon the small nations as having much more to say, these days, and much clearer judgment than the mighty powers in the UNO. We are for disarmament and the outlawing of the atomic bomb, even if we die for it, even if we are deceived in the integrity of our brothers. We must lay down our lives as Christ did. "A New Commandment I give you, that you love your brother as I have loved you."

But what about the concentration camps, forced labor, domination of small countries? "The worst enemy of a man will be those of his own household." "Regard not the mote that is in thy brother's eye while disregarding the beam in thine own eye." What about our own problem of minorities, Negroes who are one tenth of our population, Chinese, Philippino, Japanese concentration camps, the recent deportation of Indonesians. Have we forgotten about these?

If your enemy hunger, give him to eat. There is always a solution in the practice of the works of mercy, *at a personal sacrifice*.

The old Testament speaking of our Lord, foretelling Him is full of the same thought. The epistle on Monday in Holy Week was from Isaias, "I have given my body to the strikers, and my cheeks to them that plucked them. I have not turned away my face from them that rebuked me and spit upon me. The Lord God is my helper."

To those who call us isolationist, we must remind them that the Good Samaritan did not leave the poor traveler by the road and run after the robbers. He ministered to the wounded, and fed and sheltered him, and did not seem in the least concerned for justice to be done to the thieves, or revenge being taken. Love, it is a beautiful word, but as Father Zossima said, LOVE IN PRACTICE IS A HARSH AND DREADFUL THING COMPARED TO LOVE IN DREAMS.

Chapter 6

The Story of Three Deaths - Peter Maurin, Lawrence Heaney, Willie Lurye

The Catholic Worker, June 1949, 1, 2.

Summary: A loving obituary for Peter Maurin giving the details of his death and burial. Speaks of his last five years of illness, the day he died, his wake and funeral. Emphasizes the ways "He was another St. Francis of modern times." (DDLW #495).

I want to write all the details before we forget them,–not the kind of obituary which *Time* magazine is printing this week, nor the kind that appeared in the *Times* and the *Tribune*, and the *Brooklyn Tablet*, or the *Catholic News*. The kind of story I want to write will be a letter to all Peter's friends around the country who want to hear the details of his death and burial.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints," and the details of such a death are precious.

Plato said: "Other people are not likely to be aware that those who pursue philosophy aright study nothing but dying and being dead. But if this be true, it would be absurd to be eager for nothing but this all their lives, and then be troubled when that came for which they had all along been eagerly practicing."

And St. Paul said, "We will not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that are asleep, that you be not sorrowful, even as others who have no hope."

So it will be understood that it is with a spirit of joy that we write this month, because Peter is no longer suffering, no longer groaning within himself and saying with St. Paul, "Who will deliver me from the body of this death?"

No, we are sure that he welcomed Sister Death with joy, and that underneath him he felt the Everlasting Arms.

I am writing this in New York, up in my room on the third floor, and all winter before last, that hard winter, he waited up here for the weather to clear so that he could go to the country.

He had to lie in bed much of the time, and the plaster is all picked off the wall by the side of my bed where he slept while I was down in West Virginia with my daughter. Marge and Joe took care of his needs and the children ran in and out of his bedroom. He must have been very weary of lying in bed, he who had travelled north and south, east and west in this vast country. Up on the farm he had become worse these last two years. Everybody was always so reassuring, exclaiming how well he looked, how bright he was, but we who had known him these past seventeen years felt only the tragedy of the death in life he was living. Truly he practiced for death a very long time.

We have written this before, and we repeat it again. Peter was the poor man of his day. He was another St. Francis of modern times. He was used to poverty as a peasant is used to rough living, poor food, hard bed, or no bed at all, dirt, fatigue, and hard and unrespected work. He was a man with a mission, a vision, an apostolate, but he had put off from him honors, prestige, recognition. He was truly humble of heart, and loving. Never a word of detraction passed his lips and as St. James said, the man who governs his tongue is a perfect man. He was impersonal in his love in that he loved all, saw all others around him as God saw them. In other words he saw Christ in them. And everyone loved him, I am sure, though there were some strange criticisms.

He never spoke idle words, though he was a great teacher who talked for hours on end, till late in the night and early morning. He roamed the streets and the countryside and talked to all who would listen. But when his great brain failed, he became silent. If he had been a babbler he would have been a babbler to the end. But when he could no longer think, as he himself expressed it, he remained silent.

For the last five years of his life he was this way, suffering, silent, dragging himself around, watched by us all for fear he would get lost, as he did once for three days; he was shouted at loudly by visitors as though he were deaf, talked to with condescension as one talks to a child to whom language must be simplified even to the point of absurdity. That was one of the hardest things we had to bear, we who loved him and worked with him for so long,–to see others treat him as though he were simple minded.

The fact was he had been stripped of all,–he had stripped himself throughout life. He had put off the old man, to put on the new. He had done all that he could to denude himself of the world, and I mean the world in the evil sense, not in the sense that "God looked at it and found it good." He loved people, he saw in them what God meant them to be. He saw the world as God meant it to be, and he loved it.

He had stripped himself, but there remained work for God to do. We are to be pruned as the vine is pruned so that it can bear fruit, and this we cannot do ourselves. God did it for him. He took from him his mind, the one thing he had left, the one thing perhaps he took delight in. He could no longer think. He could no longer discuss with others, give others in a brilliant overflow of talk, his keen analysis of what was going on in the world; he could no longer make what he called his synthesis of *cult, culture and cultivation.*

It is a temptation to go on and on, but what I want to do is to give our friends an account of his death.

He was sick for five years. It was as though he had a stroke in his sleep. He dragged one leg

after him, his face was slightly distorted, and he found it hard to speak. And he repeated, "I can no longer think." When he tried to, his face would have a strained, suffering expression. He had cardiac asthma, a hernia (as many hard workers have) and he was in pain when he coughed.

For the first couple of years of invalidism, he lived at Easton with us, and when we were about to move to Newburgh, New York, he went to stay for the winter months with Mrs. Teresa Weider, who was the first Catholic Worker of Rochester, New York, and who had always run a House of Hospitality of her own. When we finished the moving, I brought him to the farm at Newburgh. The house was too cold for him to live in in winter as we burned only wood in our furnace, so he lived in a rear house, a house of poured cement built originally as a chicken coop, and which was divided into three rooms, one of which Fr. Faley has, another Alan Dates, and the third was shared by Peter with Hans Tunneson. Hans was with him to keep the room warm and clean, and to watch over Peter at night, but also it was typical of Peter never to ask anything for himself, of course not privacy, that greatest of all luxuries. He had never had a bed of his own, really, until it came to his last illness. He just took what was available in the House of Hospitality.

He had always been a meager eater, getting along on two meals a day, never eating between meals. He used to say when he was offered anything, "I don't need it." But towards the close of his life, he was inclined to stuff down his food hastily like a child, and he had to be cautioned to eat slowly. Perhaps there was a hangover from the hunger of a childhood in a large family where there was never enough to eat. There were twenty-three children in all, over the years.

Other habits clung to him. When I'd go in to see if he were warm enough, I'd find him lying in bed with his pants folded neatly and under his head, and his coat wrapped around his feet, a habit I suppose which he got from living in flophouses where clothes are often stolen. And once I found him sleeping in the dead of winter with only a spread over him, in a dead cold room. Someone had taken his blankets.

One thing we can be happy about too, and that is that he felt he had finished his work before his mind failed, as St. Albertus Magnus' great mind failed. He used to say, "I have written all I have to say, I have done all I can, let the younger men take over." So he suffered but not with the feeling that there was much still that he could do.

We tried to make a record of Peter's voice on a wire recorder, and we had him read aloud all his essays on Houses of Hospitality. His voice strangely enough was louder and clearer as it came over the wire, than it had been for a long time. We spent quite a few days over this, Dave Mason and I, because Peter tired easily, and then, after we had triumphantly made a fifteen-minute spool, someone else tried to work the machine and erased it all.

We wanted to have Peter's book finished before he died, so that we could place it in his hands, and though the galleys were all done and the page proofs are being set up now, and Ed Willock of Integrity is making the illustrations–that too, was denied Peter, and he never could hold this finished work of his in his hands.

For the past two months I had been at the farm while Jane O'Donnell was away at Grailville, and then while returning from the funeral of Larry Heaney, I received a telephone call about

his death. Just before I had left, I had told him of Larry's sudden death, and he said yes, to my question as to whether he remembered Larry. He had loved him much, had sent him his quotations listed as cult, culture and cultivation over the years, and rejoiced in his total acceptance of his teaching, and when I said to him, "Now you will have someone waiting for you in heaven," his face lit up in a radiant smile. He had not smiled for months; there had only been a look of endurance, even of pain, on his face.

That was our goodbye. Over the telephone out in Avon, Ohio, at Our Lady of the Wayside Farm, we heard the news.

It was midnight and I had already fallen asleep. Dorothy Gauchat and Bill were not yet asleep. They had been saying the rosary for Ruth Ann and Catherine Reser, they said, because Catherine had lost another baby a few months ago, and Ruth Ann had lost her husband. When we hung up the receiver, Bill suggested we say Vespers of the Office of the Dead for Peter, so we knelt there in that farm living room and prayed those beautiful psalms that are like balm to the sore heart. No matter how much you expect a death, no matter how much you may regard it as a happy release, there is a gigantic sense of loss. With our love of life, we have not yet got to that point where we can say with the desert father, St. Anthony, "The spaces of this life, set over against eternity, are brief and poor."

Peter had been sitting up for supper that Sunday night, and had sat out in the sun all afternoon. There had been visitors from Friendship House that very day, and on Saturday Lydwinne von Kersbergen from Grailville had been at the farm, and had told Peter with love and reverence, all he had meant to the lay apostolate throughout the world. It was like a benediction from Europe, she might indeed have been representing Europe at that moment in saying farewell to him. His writings have been published there, he has been recognized there as perhaps he never has here in this, his own adopted country.

John Filliger had shaved him Saturday, he remembered, and Michael Kovalak had dressed and cared for him on Sunday, conducting him to the Chapel for Mass that morning, taking him to and from his room to rest. He had looked in again at Peter at nine Sunday night and found him sleeping rather restlessly on his side instead of on his back as he usually did. Eileen McCarthy had given him, as she did every night, a glass of wine, and I suppose Hans made his usual facetious gesture with the water pitcher, asking her to fill it for him. It makes me happy to think how everyone was caring for him. And honored to do so, Jane always said, when she spoke of Peter's needs. He was surrounded by loving care. Fr. Faley brought him communion the days he could not get up, and it was impressive, day after day at that sick bed, to hear those prayers, to witness that slow dying. A King, a Pope, could have no more devoted attention, than Fr. John Faley, who has been with us this past year, gave Peter.

At eleven that night, Hans said, Peter began coughing, and it went on for some minutes. Then he tried to rise, and fell over on his pillow, breathing heavily. Hans put on the light and called Father Faley and Jane. Michael, Eileen and others came too, and there were prayers for the dying about the bedside. He died immediately, there was no struggle, no pain. He was laid out at Newburgh the first night, in the conference room where he had sat so often, trying to understand the discussions and lectures. Flowers were all about him from shrubs in our garden and from our neighbors. He wore for shroud a suit which had been sent in for the poor. There was no rouge on his grey face which looked like granite, strong, contemplative,

set toward eternity. There was a requiem mass in our chapel sung by Michael and Alan and the rest.

The next morning he was brought to Mott street and laid out at the end of the store we use as an office. Tom Sullivan's desk was moved to make way for it, and all the tables taken down at which the paper is usually mailed out. The room had been scrubbed the night before by Rocky and Tony and they had painted the rooms only a month ago, so everything was fresh. (Rocky is a seaman, somewhat of a wandering monk, who had been with the Trappists for a while. Anthony Aratari is a writer, painter and craftsman who hopes some day to open a craft school in connection with the C. W. It is his painting of Peter which hangs on the wall of the office.)

All that day and night people came from all over the city, from the neighborhood, from different parts of the country and filled the little store and knelt before the coffin. Whenever we were sitting in the room, we saw them quietly, almost secretly pressing their rosary beads to Peter's hands. Some bent down and kissed him. My daughter, Tamar Hennessy, came from West Virginia. David, who had accompanied Peter on one of his last trips, stayed home with the three children, since Tamar had known Peter the longest; since her sixth year, in fact.

The neighbors, three of them, sent tremendous floral pieces, made up of carnations, gardenias and all around the coffin were the branches of flowering shrubs they had sent down from the farm. The sweet smells filled the room, and it was hot and fresh outside, clear weather, which was lucky, since the house overflowed all through that day and night. Priests came, from different orders, and led in the rosary. And all that night we sat with him.

The funeral was at nine at Transfiguration Church down on Mott street. Peter always loved the Salesians, and had always urged them to continue opening craft schools and agricultural schools throughout the country. He looked a bit like Don Bosco, their founder, himself. They were both peasants. The pall bearers were John Filliger and Joe Hughes, both of whom came to us during the seaman's strike in 1936, and have been with us ever since; Bob Ludlow, our chief editorial writer, who more than any other takes Peter's place here as a thinker and man of vision, and David Mason, who is the editor of Peter's writings; and Arthur Sheehan, former editor of the C.W., and Hazen Ordway, both dear and devoted friends. Arthur had been one of the heads of the Boston group and St. Benedict's farm at Upton, and Hazen had been librarian at the Marist Seminary in Washington, when he heard me speak of the work there in 1937 and left immediately to join us, being associated with us ever since.

Everyone, of course, wanted to be pall bearer, the church was full of them, and the pall bearers themselves wanted diffidently to give way to others. I had asked Tom Sullivan and Jack English, but there was only room for six around the coffin.

Fr. Francis Meenan, Holy Ghost Father from Norwalk, Conn., sang the Mass, with Fr. Divisio and Fr. Faley the deacons, and they and a group of other priests, headed by Msgr. Nelson, met the body at the door and ushered it into the Church. Everyone sang the requiem Mass together, the organist, the priests, the seminarians, the parishioners, and all the crowd at Mott street and at Maryfarm, Newburgh, and Ade Bethune, and Jane O'Donnell and Serena and Stanley Vishnewsky and the group from Easton, Victor and Jon and Chris–you could

almost hear their individual voices, and it was a loud and triumphant singing, with a note of joy, because we were sure Peter heard us in heaven, were sure that angels and saints joined in.

Peter was buried in St. John's Cemetery, Queens, in a grave given us by Fr. Pierre Conway, the Dominican. Peter was another St. John, a voice crying in the wilderness, and a voice too, saying, "My little children, love one another." As the body was carried out of the church those great and triumphant words rang out, the *In Paradisum.*

"May the angels lead thee into paradise; may the martyrs receive thee at thy coming, and lead thee into the holy city of Jerusalem. May the choir of angels receive thee, and mayest thou have eternal rest with Lazarus, who once was poor."

Who Once Was Poor

Which brings me back to some of the criticisms, the most strange criticisms made of Peter– that he neglected the things of the spirit, that he was always thinking in terms of the social order. "Only one thing is needful, Peter," I heard one of his critics say brightly to him one day. But Peter never saw affronts.

"We need to make the kind of society," he said simply, "where it is easier for people to be good." And because his love of God made him love his neighbor, lay down his life indeed for his brother, he wanted to cry out against the evils of the day–the State, war, usury, the degradation of man, the loss of a philosophy of work. He sang the delights of poverty (he was not talking of destitution) as a means to making a step to the land, of getting back to the dear natural things of earth and sky, of home and children. He cried out against the machine because as Pius XI had said, "raw materials went into the factory and came out ennobled and man went in and came out degraded"; and because it deprived a man of what was as important as bread, his work, his work with his hands, his ability to use all of himself, which made him a whole man and a holy man.

Yes, he talked of these material things. He knew we needed a good social order where men could grow up to their full stature and be men. And he also knew that it took men to make such a social order. He tried to form them, he tried to educate them, and God gave him poor weak materials to work with. He was as poor in the human material he had around him, as he was in material goods. We are the offscourings of all, as St. Paul said, and yet we know we have achieved great things in these brief years, and not ours is the glory. God has chosen the weak things to confound the strong, the fools of this earth to confound the wise.

Peter had been insulted and misunderstood in his life as well as loved. He had been taken for the plumber and left to sit in the basement when he had been invited for dinner and an evening of conversation. He had been thrown out of a K. of C. meeting; one pastor who invited him to speak demanded his money back which he had sent Peter for carfare to his upstate parish, because, he said, we had sent up to him a Bowery bum and not the speaker he expected. "This then is perfect joy," Peter could say, quoting the words of St. Francis to Friar Leo, when he was teaching him where perfect joy was to be found.

He was a man of sincerity and peace, and yet one letter came to us recently, accusing him of having a holier than-thou attitude. Yes, Peter pointed out that it was a precept that we should love God with our whole heart and soul and mind and strength, and not just a counsel, and he taught us all what it meant to be sons of God, and restored to us our sense of responsibility as lay apostles in a chaotic world. Yes, he was "holier than thou," holier than anyone we ever knew.

"Do not forget," Mary Frecon, head of the Harrisburgh house said before she left, "Do not forget to tell of the roots of the little tree that they cut through in digging his grave. I kept looking at those roots and thinking how wonderful it is that Peter is going to nourish that tree–that thing of beauty." The undertaker had tried to sell us artificial grass to cover up "the unsightly grave," as he called it, but we loved the sight of that earth that was to cover Peter. He had come from the earth, as we all had and to the earth he was returning. Around the grave we all said the rosary and after the Benedictus we left. Ade de Bethune will do a stone for him.

Chapter 7

Peter's Program

The Catholic Worker, May 1955, 2.

Summary: Outlines P. Maurin's program for social reordering. Calls for a Green Revolution, a return to the villages. Finds his whole message embodied in personalism, which begins with oneself. Blames the C.W.'s problems in its lack of ability to limit itself. (DDLW #176).

With the May issue of The Catholic Worker, we begin now our 22nd year. Peter Maurin, the founder of the Catholic Worker movement, died in 1949, May 15, on the feast of St. John Baptist de La Salle, in whose order of Christian Brothers he had taught for five years as a young man in Paris. He was preeminently a teacher, an agitator he liked to call himself, and he brought to us great books and great ideas, and great men, so that over the years, we have become a school for the service of God here and now. Many have come and gone in this work, finding their vocation in religion or in the world.

As usual we went out into Union Square this May Day to distribute some two thousand copies of the paper and to meet with old friends with whom we can talk of philosophical differences, and with whom we are united in a passion for peace and justice

Peter's Book

On this anniversary of Peter's death we announce another edition of Peter Maurin's Easy Essays, to be published by the Thistle Press which is also bringing out another one of the Fritz Eichenberg albums shortly (There may be a few copies of the first one left). This book will not only contain Peter's essays in new format but also some essays about Peter written by his friends, including one editorial from Blackfriars about Peter as prophet. When we listened to Abbe Pierre this month and his talk of the need for prophets, to bring to men in power the needs of the poor, to cry out unceasingly for justice, we thought of Peter.

Peter used to love to quote Eric Gill who said that Jesus Christ came to make the rich poor and the poor holy. As for the destitute, we can only reach them with love and the works of mercy, performed personally, at a sacrifice. You cannot preach to men with empty stomachs.

Our Temptation

Because Peter's program called for such practical things as houses of hospitality and farming communes or agronomic universities, we have often forgotten the first point in his program which was the need for clarification of thought, the need to clarify the "theory of revolution." He used to quote Lenin as saying, "there can be no revolution without a theory of revolution." But Peter's was the green revolution, a call for a return to the villages and the land "to make that kind of society where it is easier for men to be good."

Realizing that we had all too often leaped into the active work of trying to initiate these farming communes and agronomic universities, when our vocation was to write and speak and go out into the highways and byways, and that even the model society wasn't the first step in changing men's hearts towards each other, we started in 1940 a retreat house where all could come and make five days silent retreat to begin again the work of putting off the old man and putting on our Lord Jesus Christ. With Him we could do all things, and without Him we could do nothing. Our farms, Maryfarm and Peter Maurin farm, became once again houses of hospitality on the land as well as places where we could have retreats and days of recollection. People who need hospitality and who are suffering in body mind and soul, are not the ones to be starting agronomic universities, even though God has always used the mean and lowly, the weak and powerless to do his work.

We will get the work initiated, that we know. As it is now all over the country things are being done that never would have been done if there had been no Peter Maurin back in 1932 broadcasting his ideas through the new medium of the Catholic Worker. Before that he had worked as an individual, spreading mimeographed sheets, or even hand written ones to all who would read, and stopped in the public squares all those who would listen.

Personalism, Anarchism, Libertarianism

His whole message was that everything began with one's self. He termed his message a personalist one, and was much averse to the word socialist, since it had always been associated with the idea of political action, the action of the city or the state. He wanted us all to be what we wanted the other fellow to be. If every man became poor there would not be any destitute, he said. If everyone became better, everyone would be better off. He wanted us all "to quit passing the buck," and trying to pass on the work to George to do. He loved using American slang, in his French peasant accent, which made it very funny, but it has kept his most popular essays from being appreciated in his native country, France.

Freedom

Above all it was in the name of man's freedom that Peter opposed all "government ownership of the indigent," as one Bishop put it. Men who were truly brothers would share what they had and that was the beginning of simple community. "Two 'I's' make a we'," he used to say,

"and 'we' is a community and 'they' is a crowd," a lonely crowd, he would have added if he had read Reisman's book. Men were free, and they were always rejecting their freedom which brought with it so many responsibilities. He wanted no organization, so The Catholic Worker groups have always been free associations of people who are working together to get out a paper, to run houses of hospitality for themselves and for others who come in "off the road."

No Class War

In addition to being opposed to international and civil wars he was opposed to race wars and class wars. He had taken to himself that new constitution that new rule of the Sermon on the Mount, and truly loved his enemies and wanted to do good to all men, including those who injured him or tried to enslave him. He literally believed in overcoming evil with good, hatred with love. He loved the rich as well as the poor, and he wanted to make the rich envy the poor who were so close to Christ, and to try to become closer to them by giving of their means to start these schools, farming communes and agronomic universities. Houses of hospitality are always run by the generosity of the poor who work in them and by the donations of the more comfortably off who send what they can to keep them going. But one realizes more and more that farmers and agronomists and craftsmen do not seek hospitality, do not "come in off the road." They might give a year or so of their lives if there were the tools to work with, even the houses to live in. It is a pitiful thing to house priests in chicken coops even though they have the privacy of one room, in these converted shelters. It is hard to expect a craftsman to work when he is cooped up in a dormitory and there is no space for his tools.

We Are All Greedy

No, another one of our mistakes in the past is that we have wanted to be all things, to do all things and while we have learned by doing, we have also learned what we cannot do. We can agitate, we can initiate, we can arouse the conscience but we cannot start a housing project for the destitute as Abbe Pierre has in Paris; or a model village, or an agronomic university either. Part of Abbe Pierre's great wisdom is that he limited himself to that most important work of the day, sheltering the harborless, without question, with the love of his fellow poor. He himself had gone out to sleep in the doorways, on the hard pavements, in order to give his bed to a destitute woman and child, and in reward for this folly of love, he had been enabled to arouse the people of France, so that in a brief year, more was accomplished than he had ever been able to accomplish by his seven years in the house of deputies in Paris. How Peter would have loved his single mindedness, his purity of vision!

We have had many with us who could not find their vocation. There have been the wandering monks that St. Benedict talked of. They want religious life and life in the world. They want to have families and to preach, not teach. They wanted so much, not recognizing it was God Himself they wanted, that they could not develop the talents God gave them, and wander year after year wondering what God wants them to do. Peter would tell them, "first of all,

earn a living by the sweat of your own brow, not some one else's. Choose a work that can be considered honorable, and can be classed under the heading of a work of mercy, serving your brothers, not exploiting them. Man's work is as important to him as bread, and by it he gains his bread. And by it he gains love too, because he serves his brother, and love is an exchange of gifts. How often I have seen people begin to love each other, because they worked together. They began to"know" each other through the work they shared.

St. Benedict

How Peter loved St. Benedict whose motto was "Work and Pray." He is happy, no doubt, that I, his co-worker, was professed last month as a full oblate of St. Benedict, attached to St. Procopius Abbey, the mission of which is to work for unity between east and west, and which aims to set up a shrine to the eastern saints, at the monastery at Lisle, Illinois. He loved St. Benedict because he said that what the workers needed most was a philosophy of work. He loved St. Francis because he said St. Francis, through his voluntary poverty, was free as a bird. St. Francis was the personalist, St. Benedict the communitarian.

And Now, Sad News

This issue of the paper is being gotten out by Charles McCormack, Roger O'Neil, Ammon Hennacy, Pete Asaro, Peter Carey, Bob Stewart and Isadore Fazio. The sad news we have to tell is that Tom Sullivan is taking an indefinite leave of absence. The decision came very suddenly for the rest of us, and there has been great grief around the place. It was like Tom to wait until the death of Shorty before he made up his mind. He had wanted to go, he said, for a year, but such human needs as Shorty's kept him like iron chains. When Shorty died last month, he made his decision. The Lord does strange things with us. Like Habbukuk we are plucked by the hair of the head and deposited here and there in the apostolate. We had all thought that Tom, like Charlie O'Rourke, was with us for life. Vain assumption. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Tom was with the Chicago house and Chicago Catholic Worker until the war, and after the war he came to the New York house where, aside from the interval of a year–he went to Chicago for a wedding and didn't come back–when he went to Loyola and worked for TODAY magazine–he has been with us since, writing for, and making up**The Catholic Worker** each month, heading the house, having charge of the finances, and in general performing all the works of mercy.

Who knows–it may be like the last trip? This time he went for a vacation, and writes to tell us he is not coming back. Perhaps in a year, after a retreat, after a sabbatical year, he will be back. It is whatever God wants. There is some meaning to it all, Charlie McCormack said, with a very great sigh.

"Never mind," said Joe Motyka, who has been with us almost as long as Tom. "We got the paper out during the war, and we'll get it out again." Anyone familiar with Joe can hear his

hardboiled accents, as he said it, but they know too, the sadness in his heart and in John Pohl's heart and the rest of the Chrystie street gang, at the absence of a friend

Chapter 8

Peter Maurin, Personalist

The Catholic Worker, May 1965, pp. 1, 2, 5, 6

Summary: Tells a story of Peter Maurin's work at the Easton farm and goes on to summarize his principal teachings. Peter was a deeply religious man, a reader and constant student, who recommended books, especially the lives of the saints. He valued physical labor and wanted farming cooperatives, "clarification of thought", and houses of hospitality. His faith was invincible, he exhorted a philosophy of poverty and the study of man's freedom. (DDLW #914).

We are usually driving back and forth to the farm at Tivoli, but on the few occasions when I have taken the train from Grand Central station, I have enjoyed the view from the river side, and been oppressed by one aspect of the view from the land side. That is, the ugly habit of people to use as dumps the back yards of their houses as well as the swampy places and creek beds of the little streams flowing into the Hudson. In Yonkers, especially, there are some rows of houses that evidently front the street and where the front yards are probably well cared for. But garbage and trash have been thrown down the cliff side that leads to the railroad tracks and Hudson River, so that it hurts each time one sees it.

Suddenly, I thought one day of one of the jobs Peter Maurin had undertaken on the first farm we owned at Easton, Pennsylvania. It was a job which illustrated many of his ideas but also his love of beauty, his sense of the fitness of things. It also illustrated what he used to call his philosophy of work.

There were two farms, actually, at Easton, the upper and lower farm, and it was on the lower farm that most of us were housed and where we had our retreats every summer. There was one old house, two large barns, one of which we used for the animals, and the other of which we converted into chapel, meeting room, dormitories, and at the lower level, a long kitchen and dining room. The entire barn was built on a hillside so that on the road level the entrance was into the chapel and dormitories. It was below that, on a much lower level, that we had converted cowstalls into a long concrete floored room which made up the kitchen in one corner, and long dining room which could seat thirty or more guests. It was only later that we had electricity and running water in that kitchen. For several years we used lamplight and water from the spring house across the road.

At the very end of this large building, connected with it by one stone foundation wall, there was a foundation built up with field stone ceiling-high, which was overgrown with weeds when we first saw it that first summer, which was so hectic that we saw no further than that. We were too busy caring for the dozen children from Harlem and the numerous guests, most of whom were sick in one way or another.

But the winter disclosed the painful fact that this beautiful foundation, overlooking the fields below it and the Delaware River Valley far below that, was actually filled half way to the top with all the debris of years. The tenants of the farmhouse before us had used the foundation as a convenient dumping ground for garbage, tin cans, old machinery, discarded furniture, refrigerators, washing machines and other eyesores such as I complain of seeing from the windows of the train. (What to do with all this waste, all these old cars and machines, is one of the problems of the day.)

Peter Maurin surveyed this dump and, before we knew anything about his project, he was hard at work at it with wheelbarrow and pick and shovel. He had undertaken, with no assistance, to clean this Augean stable. Actually, we had no plans then, nor did we for several years, for utilizing the foundation and making an additional house on the property.

Fortunately, the ground sloped so steeply down back of the barns that Peter's engineering project was feasible. By dumping the refuse over the back and covering it with fill (another laborious job since he had to wheel loads of this heavy clay earth from the wooded hillside further down the road) he widened the foot path in back of the barn so that it became a narrow road around the back of the barn and, in fact, a little terrace where it was possible to sit and survey the long sloping valley below, a scene of incredible beauty, since we were high on what was called Mammy Morgan's Mountain, overlooking the conjunction of the Lehigh and Delaware Rivers.

I do not know how long this great task took Peter Maurin, the sturdy French peasant with the broad shoulders, the strong hands which were the hands of the scholar, more used to handling books than the shovel. He had taught in the Christian Brothers' schools in France in his youth and though peasant-born, had received a good education.

Philosophy of Work

I write this account of a piece of work, which I remembered only because the sight of the dumps from the train window which had flashed by in one short instant, had brought it suddenly to my mind so that I knew I should write about Peter in connection with it. It started a long train of thought which had to do with many of our problems today and Peter's solutions. I will try in this short space, and no matter how inadequately, to summarize them, although each of the points he used to make could be expanded into a day-long discussion.

First of all, it must be emphasized that Peter Maurin was a deeply religious man. He never missed daily Mass, and many a time I saw him sitting quietly in the church before or after Mass. When he lived on Fifteenth Street he walked to St. Francis of Assisi noon-day Mass. When we moved to Mott Street, where he lived for fifteen years, he walked to St. Andrew's

near City Hall to go to the noon-day Mass there. He never rushed, but walked in most leisurely fashion, his hands clasped behind his back, ruminating no doubt, paying little attention to shops (except for bookshops) or to passersby or even to traffic.

He read and studied a great deal, delighting to find new authors who could contribute to what he called the new synthesis of Cult, Culture and Cultivation. Cult came first, emphasizing the primacy of the spiritual. (Poor proof reading overlooked the error, "**privacy** of the spiritual," in last month's issue.) He never talked personally of his own spiritual life, but recommended to us such writings as Karl Adams's **Spirit of Catholicism**; Pius XI's 1927 Encyclical on St. Francis of Assisi and the Rule of St. Benedict.

He recommended the writings of the saints, as they had to do with their practical lives, what their faith led them to be and do. When Ade Bethune came to us as a high-school girl with drawings of the saints, Peter urged her to picture the saints as workers, and she drew pictures of Our Lady feeding the chickens, sweeping a room, caring for a host of children; not someone to be worshipped, but to be followed. Ade and others who followed her in this tradition (Carl Paulson in his stained glass) pictured St. Benedict planting a field, St. Peter pulling in his nets, St. Martin de Porres feeding a sick man.

Work, according to Peter was as necessary to man as bread, and he placed great importance on physical work. I can remember a discussion he had with the great scholar Dom Virgil Michel, who was the pioneer of the liturgical movement in this country.

"St. Benedict emphasized manual labor, as well as intellectual," Peter said. "Man needs to work with his hands. He needs to work by the sweat of his brow, for bodily health's sake. We would have far less nervous breakdowns if men worked with their hands more, instead of just their heads."

As a result of Peter's emphasis we were called romantic agrarians and, without paying attention to Peter's more profound vision, national leaders in the field of social justice and civil rights insisted on misunderstanding our whole message, which was one emphasizing the necessity of farming communes, rather than individual family farms, cooperative effort rather than the isolated and hopeless struggling with the problem of the land and earning a living from it. He cited the cooperative effort of Fr. Jimmy Tompkins and Father Coady of Nova Scotia, and the cooperative teaching of the Extension department of St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, where there is still active leadership in the cooperative movement. He was deeply interested in the **kibbutzim** of Israel.

Work, Not Wages

A philosophy of work meant an abolition of the wage system. An explanation of that phrase would mean another long article. It would mean, "Work, not wages," a slogan which Peter delighted in, as he did all slogans which made man think. (There is a new slogan now, "Wages, not work.")

It is to be remembered that the first plank in Peter Maurin's program for the world was "clarification of thought." I remember John Cogley's comment one time that all slogans, all

such phrases, became clichés in time, and Peter, the Frenchman, tried to keep up with the slang phrases of the day and to probe to the root of them as to what they meant, what they signified at the time. I remember one of his essays ending in a long list of such slang phrases, the last of which was, "So's your old man!" capped by the sardonic, "So what!"

Once, when I looked around our crowded house of hospitality and asked Peter if this is what he meant when he talked about houses of hospitality where the works of mercy could be performed at a personal sacrifice, by practicing voluntary poverty, which meant in turn stripping one's self of the "old man" and putting on the "new," which meant Christ, so that we could be other Christs to our brothers, in whom we were also to see Christ, Peter sighed and said, "It arouses the conscience."

Yes, it has aroused the conscience to the extent that some of our readers, (now we are printing 80,000 copies of the Catholic Worker each month), have supported us in this work to which we in turn have given our labor for the past thirty-two years, but it indeed is a precarious existence and it demands a great exercise of our faith to remain cheerful and confident in it.

Right now, Ed Forand, who pays the bills for farm and city House of Hospitality, and Walter Kerell, who gets the mail and opens it hopefully each morning, are talking of the summer ahead and the bills piling up, and reproaching me for being late in sending out what was supposed to be an appeal. "And you did not really make an appeal," they said.

I find they are right. This morning's mail brings me a letter which begins, "Your form letter of a month or so back did not come right our and ask for money; so I sent none. Today I got around to reading the April Catholic Worker with its **On Pilgrimage**... Here is $5 from my $60 a month social security." Our correspondent was an itinerant linotype operator and is a member of the United Church of Christ and the rest of his letter, his statement of his beliefs, is most interesting and we will print part of it later.

It is good we live still today, sixteen years after Peter's death, in such precarity that sudden large bills frighten us – such as a tremendous plumbing bill for the dingy old loft building which is part of St. Joseph's House of Hospitality on Chrystie Street; and an electric bill at Tivoli where we need new poles to convey electricity to our house of hospitality on the land, which is pretty much what our farm amounts to.

But Peter's faith was invincible. God would supply our needs, provided we were generous with our **work** and sacrifice. He had never failed any of the saints, and we were all called to be saints, as St. Paul said. Again he would call our attention to those who should be our leaders and teachers, the saints.

Also, such a crisis, he would point out hopefully, could lead us to a truer practice of poverty so that we would set a better example to the destitute. "Eat what you raise, and raise what you eat," was another slogan. Which meant, of course, that you would eat apples and tomatoes in this New York region, instead of oranges and grapefruit. You would have wine, but not tobacco! You would have honey, but not cane sugar. All to which means work, and the knowledge of how to work in the fields.

And as for electricity! The old mansion on the Tivoli farm has cisterns all around it (which we cleaned out last summer during the drought) and newly painted metal roofs, and if it rained (the drought is three years old now and farmers are talking of seeding the clouds, if

there were any clouds to seed, to produce rain) we would have water in the cisterns and a hand pump would give us water even if the electric pump of the artesian well failed us. And we could build an ice house and cut ice from the river to conserve our food and find other ways to preserve it also, though raising roots would be better – I can hear him now with all the solutions to a problem of survival.

In addition to a philosophy of work, and a philosophy of poverty which would intensify the need to work, and provide work for others who are without work in time of crisis, not to speak of the health attendant upon such efforts – there was also the study of man's freedom and this seemed to be the foundation of all Peter's thought in that time of dictatorships, when a Hitler, a Stalin, a Mussolini dominated men's minds and bodies. Man was created with freedom to choose to love God or not to love him, to serve or not to serve, according to divinely inspired Scriptures. Even this statement presupposes faith. He is made in the image and likeness of God and his most precious prerogative is his freedom. It is essentially a religious concept. It is in that he most resembles God.

Man, knowing his own personal responsibility, should not say, "**They** don't do this or **they** don't do that." Whether it was Church or State that was being criticized and judged. Instead, Peter Maurin went back, as Cardinal Newman did before him, and studied the teachings of the Fathers of the Church. "Except," said the Abbot Allois, **"a man shall say in his heart, I alone and God are in this world, he shall not find peace."**

These are extreme times when man feels helpless against the forces of the State in the problems of poverty and the problems of war, the weapons for which are being forged to a great extent by the fearful genius of our own country. **"With our neighbor,"** St. Anthony of the desert said, **"is life and death,"** and we feel a fearful sense of our helplessness as an individual.

Peter Maurin's teaching was that just as each one of us is responsible for the ills of the world, so too each one of us has freedom to choose to work in "the little way" for our brother. It may seem to take heroic sanctity to do so go against the world, but God's grace is sufficient, He will provide the means, will show the way if we ask Him. And the Way, of course, is Christ Himself. To follow Him.

Chapter 9

Peter Maurin 1877-1977

The Catholic Worker, May 1977, 1, 9.

Summary: Recounts her first meeting with Peter Maurin in 1932, his teaching style, his personal example, and his platform for the Catholic Worker: "Roundtable Discussions, Houses of Hospitality and Farming Communes–those were the three planks in Peter Maurin's platform." (DDLW #256).

When I first saw Peter Maurin my impression was of a short, broad-shouldered workingman with a high, broad head covered with graying hair. His face was weatherbeaten, he had warm grey eyes and a wide, pleasant mouth. The collar of his shirt was dirty, but he had tried to dress up by wearing a tie and a suit which looked as though he had slept in it. (As I found out afterward, indeed he had.)

What struck me first about him was that he was one of those people who talked you deaf, dumb and blind, who each time he saw you began his conversation just where he had left off at the previous meeting, and never stopped unless you begged for rest, and that was not for long. He was irrepressible and he was incapable of taking offense.

The night I met Peter I had come from an assignment for **The Commonweal,**covering the Communist-inspired "hunger march" of the unemployed to Washington. I had prayed at the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, that I might find something to do in the social order besides reporting conditions. I wanted to change them, not just report them, but I had lost faith in revolution, I wanted to love my enemy, whether capitalist or Communist.

I certainly did not realize at first that I had my answer in Peter Maurin. I was thirty-five years old and I had met plenty of radicals in my time and plenty of crackpots, too; people who had blueprints to change the social order were a dime a dozen around Union Square.

At that time Peter Maurin was fifty-seven, had never married, had been "away from the Church" in his youth, had worked with Sangnier and his social studies group in Paris, and had sold its paper, **Le Sillon.**He believed in going to the people in town and countryside, because first of all he was of the people himself.

He was born in a tiny hamlet in the southern part of France, 200 miles from Barcelona, one

of a family of 24 children. His own mother had died after she had borne her fifth child, and his stepmother had had 19 and was still alive, he said.

''I did not like the idea of revolution," he once told me. "I did not like the French revolution, nor the English revolution. I did not wish to work to perpetuate the proletariat. I never became a member of a union, even though here in America I did all kinds of hard labor. I was always interested in the land and man's life on the land. That is why I went homesteading in Canada, but after two years, after my partner was killed in a hunting accident, I went around Canada with work gangs and entered this country in 1911, where I have been ever since."

When I first knew Peter, I was busy at a research job which kept me at the library until three in the afternoon. When I got home to my little apartment on East Fifteenth Street, I'd find him there waiting for me, ready to indoctrinate, to give me a lesson in history from the Catholic point of view. He had been sent to me, he said, by George Shuster, later president of Hunter College, who at that time was editor of**The Commonweal.**George thought that we were alike in point of view, both interested in changing the social order and in reaching the masses with the social teaching of the Church.

I had been a Catholic only about four years, and Peter, having suggested that I get out a paper to reach the man in the street, started right in on my education; he was a born teacher, and any park bench, coffee shop counter, bus or lodging house was a place to teach. He believed in starting on a program at once, without waiting to acquire classroom or office or meeting hall. To reach the man in the street, you went to the street. Peter was literal.

I had met Peter in December, 1932, and the first issue of **The Catholic Worker**came out in time for the May Day celebration in Union Square, 1933. What Peter Maurin was interested in was the publication of his essays, and my journalistic sense led me to report conditions as they were, to paint a picture of poverty and destitution, homelessness and unemployment, in short, to so arouse the conscience that the reader would be willing and ready to listen to Peter when he talked about things as they should be.

Things as They Should Be

Peter was very much afraid of class war, and after his first essays were published he could not quite understand why I wrote so much about interracial injustice, hard conditions of labor, inadequate housing. He much preferred to write about how things should be–Houses of Hospitality for the needy, charity exercised in every home, voluntary poverty and the works of mercy, farming communes and agronomic universities that would teach people to earn a living by the sweat of their own brows instead of someone else's.

The Catholic Worker was financed like the publications of any radical "splinter group." If we had had a mimeograph machine, it would have been a mimeographed paper. But we had nothing but my typewriter, so we took our writing to a printer, found out it would cost $57 to get out 2,500 copies of a small, eight-page sheet the size of **The Nation,**and boldly had it set up. There were no office, no staff, no mailing list. I had a small pay-check coming in for the research job which was just finishing; two checks were due for articles I had

written, but these were needed to pay overdue rent and light bills. Father Joseph McSorley, the Paulist, paid me generously for a small job of bibliography which I did for him; the late Father Ahearn, pastor of a black church in Newark, gave me ten dollars; Sister Peter Claver gave me one dollar which someone had just given her. Those were our finances. We took that first issue of the paper into Union Square that May Day and sold it for one penny a copy to Communists and trade unionists.

Peter slept in the back of **The Catholic Worker**office, and he soon brought in an Armenian anarchist poet and a German agnostic to share his quarters with him and to provide sparring partners for round-table discussions. He never took part in any of the work of the paper, except to turn in each month half a dozen "easy essays," many of which he insisted that we repeat over and over again. He was the kind of teacher who believed in repetition, restatement, and the continual return to first principles. He loved, however, to see visitors, and, if none came into the office, he went out into the highways and byways and found them.

The only time Peter got excited was when he found others agreeing with him approving his ideas. Then his voice would rise, his eyes would shine and he would shout out exultingly. He always expected so much in the way of results that I often felt called upon to put a damper on him, to tone down his optimistic enthusiasms. But I soon noticed that he was never depressed or discouraged by disappointments or failures.

A failure such as that of the first round-table discussion was an example. Peter had hoped for great results from a series of Sunday afternoon discussions he had planned. Optimistically, for the first one he rented the ballroom of the Manhattan Lyceum, where trade union conventions as well as balls were often held. Only twenty people showed up; they gathered around the speaker's table and had an uproarious discussion on political action **versus**Catholic Action. After that, Peter rented a small meeting room. The waste of money, laboriously collected, did not bother him. There was plenty of money in the world, he believed. What was needed was men and women absorbed by the right ideas. Given the people, the money would follow. All one needed to do was to pray. When bills piled up and creditors came, we used to go to church and pray, all of us taking turns, and we called this "the picketing of St. Joseph." Once when I asked an unemployed chambermaid if she would take a half-hour of "picketing Saint Joseph" over at Precious Blood Church, she asked me if she was to carry a sign. Once the printer sent us his bill with the notation, "Pray and pay!"

I asked Peter several times if he were not disappointed at the lack of success in indoctrinating the man on the street. I pointed to various examples of those who came to stay with us and whose condition seemed to get worse instead of better.

Getting Down to the Roots

"People are just beginning to realize how deep-seated the evil is," he said soberly. "That is why we must be Catholic Radicals, we must get down to the roots. That is what radicalism is–the word means getting down to the roots."

Peter, even in his practicality, tried to deal with problems in the spirit of "the Prophets of Israel and the Fathers of the Church." He saw what the Industrial Revolution had done to

human beings and he did not think that unions and organizations, strikes for higher wages and shorter hours, were going to be the solution. "Strikes don't strike me," he used to say when we went out to a picket line to distribute literature during a strike. But he came with us to hand out the literature–leaflets which dealt with men and women's dignity and their need and right to associate themselves with their fellows in trade unions, in credit unions, cooperatives, maternity guilds, etc.

He was interested in far more fundamental approaches. He liked the name "radical" and he had wanted the paper to be called **The Catholic Radical.**To him, **Worker**smacked of class war. What he wanted was to instill in all, worker or scholar, a philosophy of poverty and a philosophy of work.

He was the layman always. I mean that he never preached; he taught. While decrying secularism, the separation of the material from the spiritual, his emphasis as a layman, was on our material needs, our need for work, food, clothing and shelter. Though Peter went weekly to confession and daily to Communion and spent an hour a day in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, his study was of the material order around him. Though he lived in the city, he urged a return to the village economy, the study of the crafts and of agriculture. He was dealing with this world, in which God has placed us to work for a new heaven and a new earth wherein justice dwelleth.

He constantly urged individuals to practice the corporal and spiritual works of mercy; he urged Bishops to establish Houses of Hospitality. Somehow the two planks of the program got mixed up. I can remember well enough how it happened. He had written a series of essays addressed to the Bishops, pointing out to them that canon law called for the establishment of hospices in every bishopric. When a reader who had been sleeping in the subway came into**The Catholic Worker**office one day and disclosed her need (the apartment and the office were already full), Peter's literal acceptance of "If thy brother needs food or drink, feed him, and if he needs shelter, shelter him" meant that we rented a large apartment a block away which became the first House of Hospitality for women. Now we have two houses, on First St. and Third St. Here the works of mercy are still being practiced by the group who get out **The Catholic Worker,**living without salaries, in voluntary poverty. "Feeding thy brother" started with feeding a few poor men. It became a daily breadline in 1936, and the line still forms every day outside the door.

Round-table Discussions, Houses of Hospitality and Farming Communes–those were the three planks in Peter Maurin's platform. There are still Houses of Hospitality, each autonomous but inspired by Peter, each trying to follow Peter's principles. And there are farms, all different but all starting with the idea of the personalist and communitarian revolution–to use Emmanuel Mounier's phrase. Peter was not disappointed in his life's work. He had given everything he had and he asked for nothing, least of all for success. He gave himself, and–at the end–God took from him the power to think.

He was anointed at Easton for a bad heart condition, and a few years later, on May 15, 1949, he died at Maryfarm in Newburgh, New York. Garbed in a donated suit of clothes, he was buried in a donated grave in St. John's Cemetery, Brooklyn.

Obituaries were found not only in **The Industrial Worker,**a Chicago I.W.W. paper which

was on the subversive list, but also in **Osservatore Romano**in Vatican City, which carried its notice on the front page.

God has taken him into Paradise, with Lazarus who once was poor. May He bring us, too, to a place of refreshment, light and peace.

(This article is slightly revised from the preface to the 1961 edition of THE GREEN REVOLUTION. Eds. note.)
