

Day After Day - December 1942

Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, December 1942, 1, 6.

Summary: Discusses the objection that the Catholic Worker has made pacifism a precept, not a counsel like poverty, chastity, and obedience. Says over emphasis on authority leads to totalitarianism. Violent means will not bring forth an end result of peace. (DDLW #220).

It's a bitter cold day outside though bright and sunny. The streets seem strangely empty on such days—everyone scurrying for shelter. In the office one is warm from the knees up, but the floor is cold. Hot bricks for the feet would be a comfort.

It is hard to warm the two houses, St. Joseph's House and Mary's House. We use either kerosene or the open fireplaces. The latter is more healthy but it is hard to work with. In these old houses the ground floor door is always left open, a gale of wind blows up through the hall. Even when the windows are nailed shut and the cracks stuffed (it always reminds me of happy days in a cold spring sitting on a beach, caulking a boat) it is still cold.

When Carol, mother of little Eric, grimly said that it took her all day to watch the fire, I was reminded again of the beach, those years before THE CATHOLIC WORKER, when driftwood gathering was the most important part of the days—when we used to look at each other and say ominously, “The wind is rising,” and all visitors were called upon to gather wood.

And I cannot speak of the beach without thinking of Teresa. She said this morning on her daily postcard, “We had a swell time at Upton, St. Benedict's Farm, Sunday. We chopped and sawed wood all afternoon, etc.” It was a picnic that the De Bethune Workshop went on, for the Thanksgiving holiday, and a picnic meant not only the Thanksgiving feast, but finding a job to do for others. Peter Maurin likes to emphasize the Christianity inherent in some of our slogans, such as “What can I do for you?” sometimes with joking truthfulness turned into, “What can I do you for?”

It certainly is a solution to the world's problems, this idea of looking around to see what you can do for those around you, a true expression of the second commandment, and the only way we have of showing our love for God whom we have not seen, but our love for those whom we do see. “Love is an exchange of gifts.” And “love is the measure by which we shall be judged.”

Please Excuse

These moralizings I fall into are for myself—I am just talking to myself, reminding myself of how simple life is, in a moment when things seem very complex. So don't mind me. We all reprove each other every so often for being didactic, preachy, pious, hypocritical, full of rash judgments. This, then, is part of the perfect joy of living together, of the common life. One of the healthy correctives, stimulants, incentives, clarifiers.

It is hard to write editorials these days. The most important issue being discussed by Fr. Hugo must take the place of the editorial. We used to write editorials on our neighbors, the weather, the little pear tree in Tompkins square, a walk on the waterfront, but in these grave days, such procedure would be flauntingly trivial. Not that we do not feel it necessary to continue to bring in such atmosphere, for the "composition of place," as the spiritual writers say. But we do it in this column, and on the farm page. We do not mind being personal—that is, most of us with the journalistic sense do not because we recognize that we are anonymous in our universality.

Gossip

Always there are changes these days in all our houses and groups around the country. People being scattered in all directions, what with the war.

Peter Clark, who has had charge of the coffee line in the morning for so long, is working in Baltimore, and Franklin Smith, one of the boys who was in charge of the Baltimore House of Hospitality (which is closed) is with us running the coffee line and taking care of the clothes. Now we have only about four hundred in the morning for the line, and about a hundred for lunch and two hundred for supper. It is hard to be exact, as it is a shifting population. At any rate it has gone way down in numbers.

Joe Zarrella has been accepted by the American Field Service, and Louis Murphy, head of the Detroit Catholic Worker activities (two houses and a farm) is hanging around in a beautiful AFS uniform waiting to be shipped, and meanwhile helping both the Field Service and us. Dave Mason, one of the heads of the Philadelphia Catholic Worker is here with us, waiting to be called to jail, since he refused induction, objecting to conscription and refusing to accept it even to the extent of a conscientious objectors' camp. Carl Paulson, who lives on St. Benedict's Farm, at Upton, is now at Danbury Federal penitentiary, his status as a c.o. not being considered proven.

Eddie Bergin, of Dunwoodie Seminary, calls this the gossip column (I pay him back by mentioning it) and I must justify these mentionings by saying that our friends and readers all over the country ask for such news for their encouragement. If we followed the true journalistic tradition, we would write separate stories,

headlined, detached in tone, impersonal, yet propagandist. We wish to influence people, of course, but we believe so firmly in vocation that we recognize how the word “propaganda” came to have its sinister connotations. We print the story of the women who would not register separately because forty-eight names are too long for this column, which always is overlong, and to let the government know beforehand our point of view. Most of us cannot go to Washington to testify before the senate military committee, or the hearings on the manpower bill.

As to the fewness of our numbers, forty-eight are far more than twelve, that holy, significant number. As Silone said, one voice crying out against injustice breaks the unanimity of the acceptance of that injustice.

“Extremism Again”

We have many friends among the seminarians around the country and a few weeks ago one of them wrote me from the middle west. “The general attitude on Pacifism? The attitude is mainly unfavorable. The ones who answer most strongly say in the main that Pacifism is the changing of a counsel to a precept—that it is the ideal for the Christian but may not be imposed as an obligation. The rest are pretty much swept along by the tide of friends and relatives who are fighting and by the solid fact to which they cling—the Japanese attack last December. All criticism of the Catholic Worker attitude on war is tempered by the stout qualification that the CW’s know how to bring Christian charity to the man in the street.”

We ought to keep on writing about counsels and precepts each time we hear such an objection.

Means and Ends

Fr. Hugo says that the precept is the end, the counsels the means to that end. He gave us a conference on the subject at one of our retreats with him. The counsels (of poverty, chastity and obedience) are looked upon as the best means to the end toward which we are all obliged to aim, perfection.

As to our obligations, to make perfection our end, Pope Pius XI said in his encyclical on St. Francis de Sales, “The Lord Himself declared it when he said, ‘Be ye therefore perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect.’ Let none think that this as addressed to a select few and that others are permitted to remain in an inferior degree of virtue. The law obliges, as is clear, absolutely everyone in the world without exception.” (Acta Stae, Sed., Vol. XV, P. 50.)

Fr. Hugo went on to say, quoting St. Thomas, that in the order of intention, we must aim at perfection. In the order of execution, if we tried faithfully

to correspond to the graces we receive, the Lord would take into account our weakness and infirmity and we need not worry about measuring spiritual progress.

He used the simile of a gunner aiming at a city. The gunner takes into consideration the lay of the land, the velocity of the wind and shoots high over his mark in order to reach it at all. If we do not aim high, we will reach nowhere.

As to the counsels—poverty, chastity and obedience—Fr. Joseph Woods of Portsmouth Priory has pointed out in various conferences of his, that at different times in our lives we are under obligation to practice the counsels, and the counsel of chastity we are to practice at all times. Strange though it seems, people confuse abstinence with chastity. Married people must be chaste according to their state in life.

The soldier must practice obedience to a much greater degree than the civilian, but the civilian is also expected to be obedient to lawful authority. The child is expected to be obedient to the parent. These are the precepts for them.

So little attention has been paid to the precept of obedience that totalitarianism is the result—an over emphasis on the idea of authority. Plenty is being written today about authority and freedom, not only because of the state of the world, but because of the state of the home, the school.

I thought as I read the seminarian letter, "We expect so much of men of God. We expect them not to judge men, yet not to uphold the lesser means such as resorting to force to make social change, or to defend oneself. And certainly not to uphold such means as blockades, bombardment of open cities, etc. Have the men of God taken to upholding the arm of the state, justifying the state? We expect men of God to cry out against the iniquities of war, to mitigate the horrors of war, as Pope Pius beseeched in the Spanish conflict. We do not expect them to be upholding the modern shambles of war. Nor do the army men. It is the state which again and again uses the Church.

From the letters we have received throughout the country from men in the service, what they wish to hear are the words of a St. John, high and clear above the combat, "My little children, love one another." Even the words of Christ Himself, pleading with them to remember His counsels.

And indeed they hear these words, but they do not hear them from the bishops, their shepherds. No, they hear in the depths of their hearts, the call to prayer. There is an account of such an incident in Time magazine of last week, of soldiers caught helpless in the midst of an inferno of battle saying the Lord's Prayer.

Our Father

Thy Kingdom come! And they know as they pray that His Kingdom will not be coming by such means as they are using.

Thy will be done. And it is certainly not His will, this war, nor does it come from doing His will.