

On Pilgrimage - May 1948

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Summary: 16th anniversary recapitulation of distinctive CW positions, especially pacifism and distributism. Explains the C.W.'s philosophy of labor as serving others. Argues that the problem of unemployment originates from the machine - and advocates Gandhi's economic program. Emphasizes a philosophy of work and a philosophy of poverty. (DDLW #158).

It is May Day again, and we will begin our sixteenth year. We have finished fifteen years in the lay apostolate. People look at our masthead and say, "Yes, but it says Vol. XV, No. 3. What does that mean?" It just means that we have skipped an issue now and again, and it means that we come out 11 times a year, not twelve, but according to some regulation of the post office department, you have to number a journal in that way.

Last year I tried, taking the whole issue of the paper to do it in, to write a general article on what we were trying to do, summing up what our program meant. But a thing like that is most unsatisfactory. One is always leaving out the most vital things. Peter Maurin's program of action was for round table discussions for the clarification of thought; houses of hospitality for the practice of the works of mercy, for the study of Catholic Action; farming communes or agronomic universities where the unemployed could learn to raise food, build shelters, make clothes, and where unemployed college graduates could do the same; where the worker could become a scholar and the scholar a worker.

And who are those with whom we have cooperated thru the years, and whom we admire and love in the lay apostolate, in spite of differences?

There is first of all the N.C.W.C. labor action groups with whom we first came in contact back in 1933 and who were pioneers in the field. Peter used to go to all their meetings, not only to hear, but to be heard.

There was the *Commonweal* group of scholars who were by their writings and thought studying the "theory of revolution." George Shuster, now president of Hunter College and then an editor of *Commonweal*, sent Peter Maurin to me and so started off the Catholic Worker movement.

There were the Friendship House groups first in Canada and then in the United States who worked so steadily in the interracial field, among the poor, performing

works of mercy and having centers of meetings and study, days of recollection and retreats.

There is the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists with their papers throughout the country and the papers they have influenced and the priests who have entered the field of trade unionism and gone on picket lines, into the factories, into the homes of workers and into strike headquarters. There is *Work* in Chicago, edited by Ed Marciniak, one of the founders of the Chicago House of Hospitality which is no more, and there are the ACTU publications, *The Wage Earner* in Detroit and *Labor Leader* in New York.

There is the Grail at Loveland, Ohio, and there is the Center for Christ the King, Herman, Pa., schools of the apostolate for women and for men, centers of study, not connected by any close ties, by leadership.

There are such publications as *Today* in Chicago, and *Integrity* in New York, animated by much the same spirit, and to whom we owe much, as they owe much to us. There is official Catholic Action, not recognized in many a diocese, but making a beginning here and there about the country and stimulating and arousing the laity. *Fides* publications at South Bend, which recently published Cardinal Suhard's *Growth or Decline?*, *Concord*, the student publication gotten out by the Young Christian Students, *The Catholic Lawyer*, published also from Notre Dame, all these are evidences of specialized Catholic Action, of the apostolate of like to like.

Retreats

There are the retreat movements, and we refer especially to our own because it is a basic retreat open for both colored and white, Catholic and non-Catholic, men and women, young and old, for the poorest of the poor from the Bowery, as well as for the young seminarian or student. There is one retreat house in New Kensington, Pa., called the Apostolate of Mary House, and there is our own at Maryfarm (Catholic Worker Farm) at Newburgh, N.Y.

There are the *Cana* conferences for the family, started in St. Louis by Fr. Dowling and spreading throughout the country.

And we are part of it all, part of this whole movement throughout the country, but of course we have our own particular talent, our own particular contribution to make to the sum total of the apostolate. And we think of it as so important that we are apt to fight and wrangle among ourselves on account of it, and we are all sensitive to the accusation that we are accenting, emphasizing one aspect of the truth at the expense of another. A heresy over-emphasizes one aspect of the truth.

Unity

But our unity, if it is not unity of thought, in regard to temporal matters, is a unity at the altar rail. We are all members of the Mystical Body of Christ, and so we are closer, to each other, by the tie of grace, than any blood brothers are. All these books about discrimination are thinking in terms of human brotherhood, of our responsibility one for another. We are our brothers keeper, and all men are our brothers whether they be Catholic or not. But of course the tie that binds Catholics is closer, the tie of grace. We partake of the same food, Christ. We put off the old man and put on Christ. The same blood flows through our veins, Christ's. We are the same flesh, Christ's. But all men are members or potential members, as St. Augustine says, and there is no time with God, so who are we to know the degree of separation between us and the Communist, the unbaptized, the God-hater, who may tomorrow, like St. Paul, love Christ.

The Apostolate

This past month or so we have all been reading such books as *The Worker Priests in Germany*, translated by Rosemary Sheed; *France Alive*, by Claire Bishop; *Growth or Decline*, by Emmanuel Cardinal Suhard; *Souls at Stake*, by Rev. Francis Ripley and F.S. Mitchel with a foreword by Archbishop Ritter.

Chesterton used to start off writing in answer to things he had been reading, or because he was stimulated by what he was reading, and I am sure that all of us on the Catholic Worker this month, are doing just that. One of the books I have been reading by a non-Catholic, Richard Gregg, about the work of Gandhi along economic lines, led me to think of just how The Catholic Worker movement is distinguished from all these other movements, just what it is we emphasize, just what position we take, which is not taken by them. Not that we wish to be different. God forbid. We wish that they all felt as we do, that we had that basic unity which would make us agree on *pacifism* and *distributism*.

Philosophy of Work

We feel that the two go together. We feel that the great causes of wars are maldistribution, not only of goods but of population. Peter used to talk about a philosophy of work and a philosophy of poverty. Both are needed in order to change things as they are, to do away with the causes of war. The bravery to face voluntary poverty is needed if we wish to marry, to live, to produce children, to work for life instead of for death, to reject war.

A philosophy of work is essential if we would be whole men, holy men, healthy men, joyous men. A certain amount of goods is necessary for a man to lead a good life, and we have to make that kind of society where it is easier for men to be good. These are all things Peter Maurin wrote about. (He is not writing any

more, we are just reprinting what has appeared in *The Catholic Worker* over and over again for many years. The fact that people think Peter is still writing, is an evidence of the freshness of all his ideas. They strike people as new. They see all things new, as St. Paul said.)

Philosophy of Poverty

A philosophy of work and a philosophy of poverty are necessary if we would share with all men what we have, if we would each try to be the least, if we would wash the feet of our brothers. It is necessary if we would so choose to love our brother, live for him, and die for him, rather than kill him in war. We would need to reject the work in steel mills, mines, factories which contributed to war. We would be willing to go on general strike, and we intend to keep talking about general strikes in order to familiarize each other, ourselves, our fellow workers with the phrase, so that they will begin to ponder and try to understand what a different way of working, different jobs, a different attitude to work, would mean in the lives of all. (There is plenty of other work besides factory work. Not all workers are factory workers. There are the service jobs, the jobs that have to do with food, clothing, and shelter. There are the village jobs. Not all would have to be farmers. We are not shouting for all to rush to the land. There is the village economy. A destruction of cities may force us to consider it in the future.)

Machine and war

The Catholic Worker movement is distinguished from other movements in its attitude to our industrial civilization, to the machine, and to war.

To make a study of the machine, it would be good for our readers to send to India and get this book of Richard Gregg's, called the *Economics of Khaddar* (hand-spun and hand-woven cloth). It is published by Jivanji Dahyabhai Desai, Navajivan Press, Kalupur Ahmedabad, India. "The symbol of the unity given to all Christians by Christ himself was food, bread and wine; so the symbol of unity of all India given by Gandhi was means to food - the spinning wheel."

Gandhi was concerned with the poor and with unemployment. So was Peter Maurin. He started his movement in 1933 when unemployment reached the peak of 11,000,000. It was war which put all these men back to work and it is recovering from war which is keeping them at work, though unemployment is again setting in. Peter did not believe in the use of force, any more than Gandhi did to settle disputes between men or nations. He was inspired by the Sermon on the Mount, as was Gandhi, and there was no talk in that of war. It was turning the other cheek, giving up your cloak, walking the second mile. It was feeding and clothing your enemy. It was dying for him on the Cross. It was the liberty of Christ that St. Paul talked of. Christ constrained no one. He lived

in an occupied country, all his years and he made no move to join a movement to throw off the yoke. He thought not in terms of the temporal kingdom of the Jews.

Use of Power

The problem of the machine is the problem of unemployment. Or rather, the problem of *power*. “The right use of power is the important thing, the machine is only an incident.” A spinning wheel is a machine, so is a typewriter, a churn, a loom, a plow. These machines use available mechanical energy of men, women, and children, young and old. The old man (anyone over forty-five in our industrial era) can use any of these machines. Mechanical energy is derived from food eaten by the person. Not from gasoline and water power, or electricity or coal. Men have to eat, employed or unemployed. The efficient thing to do is to use the available energy, human energy, to combat unemployment. Then we would not have to fight about oil, and such like raw materials.

There have been many tributes paid to Gandhi for his non-violent resistance, his pacifism in a world at war. But little to the “economic validity of his program.” That is what this book is about. And I would wholeheartedly recommend it to all missionaries who have been sending us their desperate appeals these last years. We must continue to help them of course, but the works of mercy are not enough. Men need work as well as bread to be co-creator with God, as He meant them to be, in taking raw materials and ennobling them.

Richard Gregg

Richard Gregg synopsisized his book as follows (paraphrasing mine):

“In addition to being a consideration of the economic validity of Mr. Gandhi’s program, and of one aspect of the Indian renaissance, it may be regarded as a discussion of a special instance of the economic validity of all handicraft work, versus power-machine industry; or as a discussion of a special method of unemployment prevention and relief; or as a new attack on the problem of poverty; or as an indigenous Indian form of cooperation; or as illustrating one phase of the relations between Orient and Occident; or between Western capitalism and some other forms of industrial organization; or as a fragmentary and tentative investigation of part of the problem of the limitation or balance of use of power and machinery in order to secure a fine and enduring civilization; or as a partial discussion of the beginning of a development of a sounder organization of human life.

“If India will develop her three great resources, (1) the inherited manual sensitiveness and skill of her people; (2) the wasted time of the millions of unemployed; (3) a larger portion of the radiant energy of the sun, and if she will distribute

wealth equably among all her people, by the wide use of the spinning wheel and the hand-loom, she can win her economic goal.”

Cardinal Suhard

“You have to take a position on our contemporary civilization, to judge, condemn or correct it,” Cardinal Suhard says. “You must draw up an objective evaluation of our urban civilization today with its gigantic concentrations and its continual growth, inhuman production, unjust distribution, exhausting form of entertainment. . . make a gigantic synthesis of the world to come. . . Do not be timid. . . Cooperate with all those believers and unbelievers who are wholeheartedly searching for the truth. You alone will be completely humanist. Be the leaven and the bread will rise. But it must be bread, not factitious matter.”

That is why we rebel against all talk of sanctifying ones surroundings. It is not bread in the first place. It is not worth working with. We must think of these things, even if we can take only first steps out of the morass. We may be caught in the toils of the machine, but we do not have to think of it for our children. We do not just think in terms of changing the ownership of the machine, though some machines will remain and undoubtedly will have to be controlled municipally, or regionally.

Peter Maurin’s vision of the city of God included pacifism and distributism. And that is what distinguishes us from much of the lay apostolate today. It is the talent Christ has given us and we cannot bury it. The April issue of *The Catholic Worker* has devoted its space to pacifism, and that was the issue distributed on May Day through the streets of New York. This May Day article is again a recapitulation.