Peter Maurin's Easy Essays

By EILEEN EGAN

Peter Maurin was happy to be called a radical, a person concerned with the roots of problems and issues. An early publication of his "Easy Essays" was described as "Easy Essays in Catholic Radicalism." His work as teacher, prophet, and co-founder of the Catholic Worker reminds us of the words of Henry Thoreau: "There are a thousand hating at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root, and it may be that they who bestow the largest amount of time and money are doing the most by their mode of life to produce the misery which they strive in vain to relieve."

Dorothy Day relates how she and Peter Maurin were brought together by the then editor of The Commonweal, George Shuster. It was at his urging that Peter first visited Dorothy since George felt that their ideas were similar. He noted in them not only criticism of the social order, but a conviction that each person has a responsibility to do something to change it for the better.

"The night I met Peter," Dorothy recalls, "I had come from an assignment for The Commonweal, covering the Communists-inspired "hunger march" of the unemployed in Washington. I had prayed at the Shrine 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."

A Learned Man

This was in December 1932. For the next few months, Peter took it upon himself to educate Dorothy in Catholic social thinking. In the history of social movements in Europe, in economics related not to the ethical void of Capitalism, but to the learned work of St. Thomas More and the Church. He was a learned man, having been educated, first as a lay student and then as a student-brother by the teaching order founded by John Baptiste de la Salle.

Peter Maurin shared all he had learned on an almost daily basis. He would arrive at the tenement flat on East Fifteenth Street in Manhattan at about three in the afternoon. As Dorothy did her housework and cared for her daughter, Peter would talk, explain, make his points and refer to his essays of views and resume of articles and books. It was often ten or eleven o'clock at night before he concluded. As Dorothy tells it, "... he was one of those people who talked you deaf, dumb and blinded, who each time he saw you began his conversation just where he had left off at the previous meeting, and never stopped until you agreed for rest, and that was not for long. He was irrepressible and he was incapable of taking offense. He believed in repeating, in driving home his point by constant repeti-

(Continued on page 5)

.Report from Nicaragua

By PEGGY SCHERR

The municipality of Jalapa is in the department of Nueva Segovia, and has some 25,000 inhabitants. The town of Jalapa itself has about 4,000 people, most of them poor, who live in rooms or small one-story houses, usually centered around courtyards, if not in what we would describe as shacks. Most people have electricity, a number have running water. All the roads in town are dirt, as is the small railroad which connects us to the rest of the country. There are a number of tiny stores, where some might get a soft drink, bread, eggs or soap, if there is any in town, and a few large businesses: a hardware store, a lumber yard, and businesses handling local crops. However, most people earn their living through agricultural work in this fertile valley. Tobacco, rice, corn, beans, some garlic, tomatoes, coffee and new potato plantations in the town are sources of income for the people of Jalapa. Some of the land in the area is in private hands; other parcels are state-owned farms, mainly the large Teco farms, and then there are the cooperatives. This mixture is typical of Nicaragua. Several of the cooperatives are also resettlement camps: La Estancia, Santa Cruz and El Callao, each perhaps 500 people, who have fled from more isolated spots in the northern mountains, which have been attacked by the contras. They have been given land, help with housing, water, seeds and equipment, and are forming cooperatives to plant crops and make a living.

There are six of us in the long-term Witness for Peace team working out of a Catholic house in town, in the center of town, spending more time with the groups when they arrive in Managua. We are attempting to spend a few of us at a time—more time in other threatened areas, such as Chinandega in the northwest corner of the country, and to escort short-term groups to them, as well as to Jalapa.

Our days vary: When we're with a group, we're off and running from early to late, taking the delegations to visit local people, in town or in the country, arranging meetings with local organizations, community leaders, meeting people on the street, and so on. We join with them in vigils, protests, and celebrations. Much effort is needed to provide the constant flow of people with a solid, rounded experience of Nicaragua, in a short time. In between, we continue to learn ourselves, visiting people in their homes, in town or country, walking along the roads. This work is naturally means hitchhiking, and one always has company waiting for a truck to stop and offer a lift. And so we get to know the people: Amelia, whose husband is a barber of twins, is..."
The motto of St. Benedict was Laborare et orare, Labor and Pray. Labor and prayer ought to be combined; Labor ought to be prayer.

Peter Maurin, Essay Essays

Joyfully, cyclically, the growing season slowly seeps into our land and our lives at Peter Maurin Farm. Fields lie Xxx under the onset of the early spring rains and the thawed snow. No longer rock hard and obscured by snow, the soil becomes a soggy, soupy sponge, soon to be drained by the winds and the sun until it is ready to receive seed.

The growing fields are ha with the rich brown growth of fall-planted winter rye. Our few fruit trees are pruned, ready for their growth. We are removing large rocks soon to be able to rese ed and re- sow grass in the pig area, a fine endeavor which recalls the work of Linda Bunce and Mike Vincent, who began this project of pig raising two years ago. Joe Wood, a skilled and loving craftsman who is visiting us, has been doing an excellent job of repairing and seeing to the seasonal start-up of our machinery. The rains are producing a greater number of eggs due to the rapidly increasing daylight hours. The winter cover mulch will push back the strawberries, exposing their low, visny green growth to the sun and warming air. Rhubarb is beginning to send its leafy stalks above the snow. Asparagus, though a spring plant, still wa late, warm conditions. Wintertid

Over Egyptian onions are pushing up through their mulch. Chives are up. Camomile is up. Oregono is beginning to stir, with a few rough, weather-worn leaves on its hard soil. Hail is falling to swelling on the raspberries. People are writing to us about coming for the season. As the flooded stream flows onto some of our fields, and water, washing across our growing fields, show us where we need to make grass waterways.

Flots have been started in the greenhouse: broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, onion, leek; some have germinated, some have been thinned already. Soon many more will be planted: lettuce, celery, tomatoes, melons, green peppers, flowers, and so on. There is a near-mad rush to finish up the planning and preparation for the work of the quickening season. We need to get our cold frame in operating shape; prune the apple trees and clean off the rust and oil our hand tools. As Peter Maurin knew, there is never a lack of work around a farm, and the needs change seasonally.

The stirrings of spring, the beginning of a new garden cycle is upon us. A new season is unfolding in its regular cycle but of the same seed, sowing of the earth, with the life-sustaining sun arcing upwards to greet us with its gifts. And with this cleansing of a new season comes questions that bob up and down in our consciousness much as does a bird feeding upon the sun. Just what are we about here at the farm? What do we do? What would we like to see our energies accomplish? Just what is this Green Revolution, anyway?

On this cool, damp, gray morning, I sit under a pole barn upon a bale of hay, fresh with the sweet green aroma, using another fragrant bale as a desk. I have just returned from a walk around the farm and am almost desperate to let it seep into me as surely as the spring rains are seeping into all the depths of the soil, so I could write of it truthfully.

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Peter Maurin Farm

By TOM CURTIN

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Prayer and Work Today

The motto of St. Benedict was Laborare et orare, Labor and Pray. Labor and prayer ought to be combined; Labor ought to be prayer.

Peter Maurin, Essay Essays

Ora et labora, prayer and work. The bringing together of the sacred and the secular has always been central to the Catholic Worker. Now, more than ever, it seems, it is then, it is important for us to re-think just what this tradition means, and the rampant spread of computer work certainly provides the stimulus today. How and in what ways can computer work be related to prayer? Can one bless a computer? Could we write a prayer program the way we light a votive candle?

In seeking answers to this type of question, it is usually a good idea to go back to the roots. The truth is that the phrase—in Peter's or in the more conventional form of ora et labara—was not really Benedict's motto, nor is it to be found in the Rule of St. Benedict. It was not coined until the nineteenth century, with the romantic revival of monasticism.

In the Regula of St. Benedict, the closest association of ora with anything is the predominant aspect of Revolution, the activity for which they were to become well-known. With regard to reading, St. Benedict tells us that the early monks wanted to be combined with the sacred that secular activity for which they were to become well-known; that is, scholarship and the preservation of culture.

When, in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, the predominant aspect of Western culture became work rather than scholarship, it was natural that the old ora et labora dictum should have been rephrased to become ora et laboras. The new motto has an authentic Benedictine heritage after all.

But how is the desired ordering to be attained—between either prayer or reading and work or prayer and work?

With regard to reading, St. Benedict gave a two-fold answer. First, only certain things should be read; that is, the content or substance of reading should be restricted. Secondly, we should read only in certain ways; the manner or methods of reading are wrong.

Peter Maurin is discussed by St. Benedict, he applied the same two principles. Farming is the most appropriate kind of labor and it should be undertaken with a certain dedication and detachment.

Peter Maurin used to say that the Catholic Worker wanted to create a new society within the shell of the old, and it is not coincidental that he advocated farming communities. One feature of the new society is that it will be structured so that those within it will find it easier to be good. This is exactly what St. Benedict warned as well, a community in which it would be easier to do that one good, which Jesus tells Martha, is more precious than any other (Luke 10:38-42).

The Benedictine monastery and the Catholic Worker community thus have as a common goal a social order in which it is easier to be Christ-like. The monastics do this for themselves and the world. The monastics do this for them and the world. They do this for society. For the early monastics, the world was called the active apostolate and the works of mercy.

Of course, it is never really "easy" to be Christ-like and, as a community, we can "make" people spiritual. All there can be is Maria Montessori called a "prepared environment." A Montessori school is "prepared" for the children to enter into students, but it can remove some distractions and encourage certain kinds of initiative. And, above all, the environment is "effectively prepared," and we should welcome all the help we can get.

Each of these instance—Benedictine monasteries, Peter Maurin's Green Revolution, Montessori schools— involves being selective about the activities and instruments adopted from the larger society. Each recognizes that actions, tools and even ideas are seldom neutral.

It is very easy to see this truth on the level of tools like nuclear weapons, accidents and violence, and ideas like hate. These are all "big" things and it seems obvious they are immoral. But what about "little" things like mass-produced bricks and mortar? What? We come back to the original question.

A Christian, it seems to me, should use as one standard for evaluating any tool or instrument of whether it can be integrated into a life of "constant prayer"—(1 Thessalonians 5:17). It is not enough to say that some technology, by reason of its efficiency, provides a free time for prayer. For this route would only accentuate the sacred- secular split. As is said in the Rite of Teneb, "For your prayers to be real, you must be at grips with hard work... Your prayer will become total."

(Continued on page 4)
Room for Christ
By BOB TAVANI

"Why is it useless if we help thousands, even hundreds of unhappy ones? Is it a bad thing, recording the dream of the poor to clothe the naked, feed the hungry?"

"What you are doing is not that. You are walking in the shoes of the rich and give to a few for pennies; you give it to him. Is that charity? Do him some spiritual good; teach him. What you gave him merely says, 'Leave me alone.' Let us in·

stead unite these poor ones with our·

selves. I am not rich myself but will at

once take two of them into my kitchen.

You see how you are out to do a good

work as fast as you can and how quickly as he did, but will have a chance to play baseball, study, think of some·

thing other than work and war. Rasa,

perhaps 22, has learned to read and write

in the past few years, moved from a life of

working under terrible conditions from

childhood, on the tobacco farm where her

family lives, to be a leader in her union. So

many people enrich our days.

In the time that I have been in Jalapa, I have received a number of letters from Nicaragua. They are written by various people about the Witness for Peace. Questions have focused on the complexity of the war, and whether it is possible to be a purist about nonviolence? Is nonviolence a viable societal option, or a large group response, or only personal? Is Nicaragua looking at some kind of "ultimate exam·

ple" of revolution? Is it a Christian

revolution? For me, there are more ques·

tions. At the very least, as U.S. citizens, seeing the adverse role our government has been playing in this war, I think it is important to try to

understand what is happening in this cruel way. There is a way that you, our extended family of readers, could help us who are so often overwhelmed.

There is an old Catholic Worker tradition I haven't heard anyone speak of for a long time. It is the tradition of Dorothy Day. Dorothy Day used to encourage those who wanted to live in the Worker way but whose responsibilities kept them from actually being at one of the Worker houses, to keep a Christroom. This room might be a guest room for the poor so that hospitality might be given not just by sending a check or an envelope but personally and with care. Perhaps houses were bigger in Dorothy's day and perhaps hearts too. Nonetheless, we who live in the 21st century must find ways to share whatever whole·

ness and wealth we have with those who have less. Deep knowing, honest acceptance can only be had if we are simple.

Bread is east, but bread is not enough.

Forming Bonds

How could a person who wants to share more than bread with Christ's little ones, with Christ Himself, begin to do this shar·

ing? One could start by getting to know

the people at a Catholic Worker house or a nearby meal line, getting to know them by being with them, quietly at first, and listening to their needs. One could invite those whose confidence comes spontan·

eously to a meal or a movie. One could let

these new friends call on the phone when they are lonely. One could gradually include them in the family in little ways that are appropriate and meaningful to their culture. Bonds are formed, beginning growth could be encouraged and changes sup·

ported.

Acceptance, even when there is no ap·

parent growth, is a very profound and healing reality. A person who would risk and are encouraged by efforts towards family farms, land trusts (rural and urban) and supported by hospitality. -The Catholic Worker advocates a society that

parent growth, is a very profound and in health-care and agriculture. Specifically, we look forward to a life closer to the land

in which the freedom and dignity of the person are fostered and the

the least.

The Catholic Worker movement is to realize in the individual and in socie·
ty the expressed and implied teachings of Christ. We see the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes as a call to solidarity. Therefore, we must look at the world to see whether we already have a social order that reflects the justice and charity of Christ.

When we examine the society in which we live, we find that it is not in accord with charity and justice. -The misdistribution of wealth is widespread: the fact that there are hungry and homeless people in the midst of plenty is unjust. Furthermore, we are struck by the spiritual destitution of our consumer society. Rich and poor suffer increasingly from isolation, madness, and growing individual violence, sides by sides with a governmental emphasis on the implements of war instead of human well-being. -The rapid rise of technology, without a fitting development of morality, emphasizes spiritual destitution of our consumer society. Rich and poor suffer increasingly from isolation, madness, and growing individual violence, sides by sides with a governmental emphasis on the implements of war instead of human well-being. -The rapid rise of technology, without a fitting development of morality, emphasizes the individual suffering as much from these transformations as does the whole social order. -Our scale, we can see, to previous generations, the poor throughout the world are systematically robbed of the goods necessary to life. Though we realize the United States is not the sole perpetrator of such immoral conduct, we are North Americans and must first acknowledge our own country's culpability. We deplore U.S. imperialism in its various expressions. Multinational corporations, economic "aid," military interven·
tion, etc., have led to the disintegration of communities and the destruction of in·
digenous cultures—blatant violations of justice and charity.

- The proliferation of nuclear power and weapons stands as a clear sign of the direction the world is going. How could a person who wants to share States is not the sole perpetrator of such immoral conduct. We are North Americans and must first acknowledge our own country's culpability. We deplore U.S. imperialism in its various expressions. Multinational corporations, economic "aid," military inter·
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tervention, etc., have led to the disintegration of communities and the destruction of indigen·
ous cultures—blatant violations of justice and charity.
Prayer and Work Today

(Continued from page 2) when it is one with your work.

When it comes to information technologies—writing, radio, TV, computers, etc—I think we ask ourselves what kind of information we use for the most personal and intimate forms of communication, I think we will find that we are equally selective. Our first choice is usually direct conversation, the second a hand-written letter, with typed letters being left for bringing up ideas. Telephone conversations and computer (electronic) mailings show that these tend to take on a more impersonal tone and often an almost violent character. For instance, we resort to harsh words much more readily over the phone than we do in person. We do have some minute differences in the way in which we think, in the belief that the means themselves are always neutral or can be put into the service of a multitude of ends.

One might object further that appealing to a standard like prayer is too ambiguous. Prayer may be classically defined as "A raising of the mind and heart to Christ Himself. ALLELUIA..." sung the peepers, LUMEN CHRISTI, sung the moon. DEO GRATIAS.

Recently, Marc, who has been at the Catholic Worker just a little over a year, brought up from Maryhouse a tape of a talk given by Dorothy Day at Casa Maria in Milwaukee in 1969. Marc and a few others who had never known Dorothy listened to the tape one evening, and enjoyed it very much. Later I, though I had heard the tape before when Dan Mask played it for one of our rap sessions, went through the tape, listened to it again. For me, who had known Dorothy so well, and had heard her speak at Catholic Worker meetings, the tape seemed to evoke Dorothy’s presence so that I felt almost as though she were in the room talking with me.

In 1969, when Dorothy spoke, the horrors of the Vietnam war were still continuing. Many young men were in jail as a result of their campaign against the war. We, the organizers of the Milwaukee Poor People's Campaign, were left in the difficult path of peace, nonviolence, and the possible relationship between the gift of the Gospel and the modern poetry. So on the way to wherever we were going, we would wind her way most surely toward a moving and convincing portrayal of Catholic Worker life and principles, with special emphasis on the importance of nonviolence in the attainment of Catholic Worker goals.

We spoke against the endorsement of revolution by the Catholic Worker movement in Europe. She wanted to prove a different way to the revolution.

If you’re blue and you don’t know where to go, why don’t you go where the Worker sits—puttin’ on the splits.

Different recipes a day, count on beans and leaves of bay, garlic fits—puttin’ on the splits. (sung to the tune of "Puttin’ on the Ritz")

Besides the song and dance routine, much hilarity was generated for one act, a take-off on "West Side Story," in which folk Catholic Workers played. George was our energetic choreographer, and tirelessly offered suggestions as we tried to dance and sing the parody. Dorothy had the ballads of the Catholic Worker verses to the tunes from this musical.

In the final performance, besides our "East Side Story," with Sue and Paul starring as our (in this case not star-crossed) lovers, Mike Quinn did a stand-up comedy routine, Mary and Jennifer sang a bit about intimate family relations called "I’m My Own Grandpa". Madeline sang her heart out, Sharron showed off her new talent on the tin whistle, Frank and Tim did piano

(Continued on page 7)
Peter Maurin's Easy Essays

(Continued from page 1)

Peter, a parish priest of the Church in France, founded the Catholic Worker Movement in the United States. He was a social activist, a writer, and a religious leader. His ideas and actions were rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ and the early Church fathers. Peter Maurin believed in the importance of the social gospel and the need for a radical reform of society. He advocated for the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized, and his work can be seen as a precursor to many modern social justice movements.

Peter's Easy Essays reveal the needs of the Catholic Worker Movement which has brought significant changes to the Catholic community. It might be thought that "Easy Essays" still have less resonance in the last quarter of the Twentieth Century. In point of fact, except for a few topical references, the "Easy Essays" seem to have been written for this time. The "dark age" that Peter Maurin saw some years ago, has become a darker age; unskilled labor has settled in the underdeveloped corners of the planet through multinational corporations. Industrialism has such technological power that it pollutes soil, inland waters, the broad oceans and even the air we breathe. Nuclear energy, offered as the answer to fuel shortages, becomes a greater danger to human life now and in the future, and nuclear weaponry gives us a planet pulsing with death. Instruments of mass destruction are turned out by the line and stored about the earth. Peter opposed the degradation of work in huge de-personalized factories; how much more would he oppose this de-personalization of work which provides a person a livelihood through participation in preparing instruments of mass death? Peter Maurin's "Easy Essays" need to be studied by those whose consciences are aroused by the evils they see around them and who want basic principles on which to move towards a better social order. They may find that "backing at the branches of the tree is enough. It is necessary to strike at the root." (Adapted from a review in the May, 1978 CW. For current information on Peter Maurin, see book listing, p. 6. Eds. note.)

Aims and Purposes

(Continued from page 3)

denn all war and the nuclear arms race; and we see oppression in any form as blasphemy against God, Who created all people in His image. When we fight tyranny and injustice, we must do so with humility and compassion, "using the very weapons of those who make war in the name of God, and bearing the cross as we bear the cross in our daily lives, and non-cooperation with evil. Renewal of the taxpaying, registration, and boycotts and withdrawals from the system are all methods that can be employed in this struggle for justice. Peter Maurin lived in an era filled with anxiety and confusion. In response, we, as a lay movement, seek our strength and direction in the beauty of regular prayer and liturgy in the Church, in the Word of God, the traditions of Scripture and the teachings of the Church to the modern condition. We believe in the work of the Church and in the role of the Pope as the leader of the Church. We believe that it is the Pope who determines it is not a fit criterion for judgment. We must be prepared and ready to face seeming failures. The most important method for combating this attitude is the belief in the work which transcends time, and for which we will be asked a personal accounting, not as to whether they succeeded (though we hope that they do) but as to whether we remained true to them.
John Howard Yoder, responding to his at such a story so completely, so personally as having been rather finally bested by Maurin's death in 1949. Few could tell cmcial to cling to the theological education. I think of Niebuhr beginning in 1933 up to the time of Peter Marian, a pen- very human tendency to strike poses and newski and I ·traipsed around Manhattan my own letters from prison. There is a the Dawn was theology which issues in such conven- years. "The ultimate fulfillment." Though the down Mott Street to Canal Street and unself-conscious. He is aware of the temp­ powerful and he sometimes succumbs. His 46 years of stories describe in detail his heart failed him and his manuscript was ·· hungry are still with us as are the many ing the entrance to the Anaheiin Conven­ parents is a likeable fellow. He is thoughtful WINGS OF THE DAWN. By Stanley Vishnewski. Available from The Catholic Worker (see note in the book below). 231 pp., 1984. Reviewed by The Catholic Worker. The first time I knew of the Wings of the Dawn was in 1976 when Stanley Vish­ newski and I traipsed around Manhattan from publisher to publisher with his manuscript in hand and the hope that some day the 231 pages would be printed. A year and a few days after that day together in New York, Stanley's move to Los Angeles Catholic Worker movement, and a tracery of the Catholic Worker movement, and a give the impression that it was only ir­ regularly said at the camp to which he was transferred. If this is still so, it is cer­ tainly a matter for concern. The Exposition did not return to Anaheim for a third year. It moved to West Germany, where it elicited a similar response. Mary Durkin's pastoral theology whose Marital Intimacy: A Catholic Perspective (1982) explored the sacramen­ tal-depths of the maritally vowed life, has of purity.) And it is open to the multiple human sexuality, a line from Eugene mature sexual personhood. On the one that Mary Durkin has hosted a generous feast. This is not to say that the reading is all that is good. It also brings forth truths that forced you to chuckle or II and Durkin firmly interweave sexuality and the Church. The book is from a small press in North Philadelphia, PA 19122. ($9.95 paper­ back) A history of the movement through 1965. —The Dorothy Day Book: A Selection from Her Writing and Reading. Edited by Margaret Quigley and Michael Garvey. Templegate Publishers, 302 E. Adams, P.O. Box 5153, Springfield, IL 62705 . —Theresa, By Dorothy Day. Templegate Publishers. A biography of Therese of Lisieux. —Dorothy Day and the Permanent Revolution. By Eileen Egan, (booklet) Benet Press, 6101 East Lake Rd, Erie, PA 16511. —Wings of the Dawn. By Stanley Vishnewski. (see review above) Yes, Stanley's book is finally in print! We have the following information, please write the Catholic Worker, 36 E. 1st St, New York, NY 10003. A superb edition of Peter Maurin's Easy Essays was published in 1977 by the Franciscan Herald Press, but unfortunately is now out of print. We are trying to encourage the publishers to do another printing, and requests from readers might help to bring this about. Inquiries about the Easy Essays should be addressed to: Franciscan Herald Press, 1434 W. 51st St., Chicago IL 60609.
MARYHOUSE

(Continued from page 4)

accomplishment and more. All in all, it was a brief but useful experience—full of much laughter and calls for “encores.”

Martha, whose special concerns include Central America, took off in late February for her first trip to visit a friend who works in the refugee camps in Honduras. Pam Noone rendezvoused with Martha in Texas in mid-March. The two of them then traveled to the Mexico for several weeks. Elaine also flew south in March to fulfill a long-dreamed hope of visiting Padre Skwarek in Paraguay. We look forward to welcoming all our weary travelers home by early May, full of stories to tell, no doubt.

Nancy, the head of Maryhouse, was taken to the hospital in February with what we feared was a mild stroke. She is better now and has been moved into a nursing home, a half-day’s trip from Maryhouse by public transportation. It was a hard decision not to bring Anna back to the city. We are thankful by many people that we could no longer adequately take care of her needs. We are grateful for the care she is getting at the nursing home. We hope she can make a transfer soon to a local nursing home so we can visit more often. We all miss her toothless grin and her affectionate greeting, “Hi! Babel!”

In an attempt to give folks at Maryhouse more of a sense of being a family, we have added Friday afternoons. We break out the popcorn, and often Bertha bakes a cake for the occasion. Sometimes we return to our Catholic “roots” by playing bingo for little prizes—jewelry, colognes, soaps—whatever little knick-knacks that we find around the bingling room. Bingo is a big hit with a few people, especially Annis Skwarek, our resident bingo pro.

Tim, Elaine and George seem to be the most faithful attenders at the prayer vigil at Riverside Research Institute. They are usually joined by a smattering of other folks from both houses, along with the S.J. from our local parish, and Fr. Martin Clarke, a Franciscan and friend of the Worker for many years. Nancy, a friend from Nine-town, made the trip even though she is only even on the coldest of days, we are able to have a good presence of hardy fools to pray, hand out leaflets, and talk to passersby.

Once a week since November, George, Tom and sometimes a few others from the Worker have taken time to join forces with people from several Christian peace groups to pray and protest at our Senator Moynihan’s office. This effort is to express concern about the escalation of violence and covert aid against Nicaragua, and United States involvement in Central America generally.

The letters we get from Peggy in Nicaragua and the news in the media each day keep the urgency of the issue ever in the minds and prayers of many at the Worker.

In recent months, Tim, George, Paul and I have been putting together a folk liturgy for the Lenten season. We are also planning, in excess of the Lenten season, as our budding choir rehearses for Good Friday and Easter Sunday Services. Jenny and Roxanne, from Nativity, have joined our fledgling group, adding flute and voices. Preparations for coming Holy Week and Holy Saturday services, at Maryhouse and St. Joseph House, are also underway.

If the coming of Easter is a sign of Spring, so is the recent rash of beard clipping among the menfolk of the Worker. Gary started it several weeks ago by cutting his marvelous full beard very short. Rebbie went further than that soon after, by shaving his beard off completely. Tom has his beard on its way out too and Tim has admitted that he is thinking of joining the fray. Paul, George, Alan and Ben, however, are holding on to their whiskers—perhaps they prefer the element of surprise (time will tell).

We find hope in watching the cycle of life begin again, as the blooming of spring breaks through the concrete expanse of our neighborhood. In the same way, the coming Easter, with its promise of redemption and forgiveness, gives us assurance of a better future. We pray constantly to be vigilant and to be a living presence in our world, a living presence that can bring to others the hope that our acts can be a sign of God’s presence and love. It is not easy to be a person of faith in a world where people live more simply and materialism is not a false god, it is so much easier to be a good. (We have the means to be a better typewriter, a copy machine closer than three hours away, hot water, etc.) It is heartening to see people come to the Worker and recognize the injustices between war and poverty and injustice, while discovering that a simpler life can encourage cooperation and freedom, and that the slower pace allows people to be important, rather than the efficiency of the tasks at hand.

In Nicaragua, the Catholic society can also teach us something of nonviolence. Hospitality—welcoming the stranger—is a way of life. We are an afterthought, a feeling and self-sacrifice, necessary elements for peace-making in our violent world, are all around us. How often I realize that people, taught for centuries that war can be justified in Christianity, have rarely been taught that there is another way.

I also reflect on the imperfections of the country. There are the dangerous implications of militarism, even if there is consciousness of the dangers. Youths and children are accustomed to guns, and see arms as a way of life. In lives often so dreary there is an attraction to uniforms and to going off to defend the country. In a tense atmosphere, polarization can come along with this. People with guns use them, accidents occur, personal disputes are “resolved” with violence. The very nationalismo needed, in one case, can turn up as war in another. I must note that the leveling of the armed forces is still on the drawing board, but even if it is only a few medical care, and because medicines are still in short supply, due to boycotts. We pray for those who suffer and pray for a better country. We pray constantly to be better instruments of peace.

PM. FARM

(Continued from page 2)

... from which we are all to reflect on the situation in which we are all, in fact, to support the Sandinistas—just as it is to support people who are fighting for a better country. We pray constantly to be better instruments of peace.

NICARAGUA

(Continued from page 3)

that it will, in fact, also cost lives, will probably be long in coming, will not be an easy task, and will continue to be viewed with skepticism. But we must pray and work toward that end. What is becoming progressively clearer to me is that Nicaragua’s nonviolence involves not a refusal to bear arms, but, as Dorothy Day, Gandhi, Martin Luther King and St. Francis of Assisi knew, the witness in all areas of our lives, especially in embracing voluntary poverty. One of the privileges of being in Nicaragua (while people are conscious that the wealth paid for poverty should be alleviated) is that, in a society where people live more simply and materialism is not a false god, it is so much easier to be a good. (We have the means to be a better typewriter, a copy machine closer than three hours away, hot water, etc.) It is heartening to see people come to the Worker and recognize the injustices between war and poverty and injustice, while discovering that a simpler life can encourage cooperation and freedom, and that the slower pace allows people to be important, rather than the efficiency of the tasks at hand.

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Review

(Continued from page 1)

oars. But of course, this is a task worthy of the human person.

God calls us out of solitude. In Feast of Love we see the Church itself being called out of solitude and to a new way of being in the world that has value in God’s eyes. I grow in the awareness that God calls us out of solitude. In

FRIDAY NIGHT MEETINGS

In keeping with Peter Maurin’s recognition of the need for ongoing clarification of thought, we invite you to join us for our weekly Friday night meetings. We are alterating at First St. and St. Joseph House—36 East First St., 254-1640. As much as we can see ahead, those we will hold at First St. will be marked with an asterisk (*). Both houses are between First and 36th Aves. stop on the F train. Meetings begin at 8:00 p.m., and tea is served afterwards.

May 11—A Round Table Discussion on Peter Maurin—Tom Sullivas & others
May 18—Joseph Cunneen: Jean Sullivan: Breton Priest/Novelist
June 1—Fritz Eltsenhorn: Art and Grace (a talk with slides)
June 8—Robert Peters: The Meanings—History and Revelation (Today)
June 22—Roberto Scullin: Evening of Song
June 29—Robert Scullin: Evening of Song

There will be no meeting during the summer, due to the warm weather and our need for a break. Meetings will resume again in September.
Speaking against confrontational methods, and rejected the name-calling. She remarked that Pope John XXIII and St. Thomas Aquinas were very stout men, but no one would call them aggressive. Indeed, it should be considered that true role models for those working for peace and civil rights were such persons as Cesar Chavez, Martin Luther King, Gandhi, and Vinoba Bhave. Many, I suspect, who heard her, would have added Dorothy Day’s name to the list.

Although some have a sense of nervousness in public speaking, Dorothy managed many talks during her long apostolate. Since the advent of the tape recorder, many of Dorothy’s talks are in the Catholic Worker archives at Marquette University. Phil Runkel, the conscientious archivist who looks after Catholic Worker materials, has undoubtedly made every effort to procure as many tapes as possible. Yet it is always possible that there are some fantastic taped talks of Dorothy’s which are not contained in the present archives collection. If you are a member of this column and possess or know of such taped talks, I hope they will try to get copies sent to the archives at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Even if they are somewhat imperfect tapes, I think they can still be useful. I am sure Phil Runkel will be grateful and take good care of them. Any graduate student, scholar, or historian interested in understanding Dorothy Day or the Catholic Worker could really benefit from studying these tapes.

Readings

Here at Peter Maurin Farm, where I listened to Dorothy Day’s Cass Maria talk fifteen years after it was given, we are suffering from a perennial Catholic Worker problem—the comings and goings of volunteer workers. Where no one takes vows, and no one marries, one can hardly expect stability. Perhaps the first commitment of a volunteer should be to the teaching and principles of the Catholic Worker movement. Yet I most effectively expressed in the writings of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. The best introduction to Dorothy Day is, as I have said before, contained in that marvelous anthology, By Little And Little, published by Knopf, and edited by Robert Ellsberg. This section is the best short account of the Catholic Worker I have read. His arrangement and selection of Dorothy’s writings is brilliant. He well deserves the Christopher Award he received for this book not long ago, and certainly the writings of Dorothy are worthy of that award. As for the writings of Peter Maurin, they fill only a small volume, but may be hard to find in print. Another book, Paperwork, which was done by the volunteer worker, is Stanley Vlahnswki’s Wings Of The Dawn. It has finally appeared, though not yet in plentiful copies. Requening Stan in Baltimore, the Catholic Worker volunteer, is Stanley Vlahnswki’s Wings Of The Dawn. It has finally appeared, though not yet in plentiful copies.

Making use of theียง, paradoxical realities of the Catholic Worker movement.

Mary, Carol and Jerilyn will certainly need help with the organic garden and with the general maintenance of this farmstead in Baltimore. Perhaps they will resume other duties in Baltimore. Perhaps there are among our readers some who would like to try volunteer work on a Catholic Worker farm. A friend once said that life in community is like a blade of sword grass in the hand. Many who have lived in community, however, remember the vivid feeling I had at that time. It was a special time.

Thirty years from now, will we look back on our present situation and call it as being a very special time? Is it important that it be remembered as such? By what yardsticks can we or should we measure the value of our present work? Perhaps a brilliant, unselfish Dorothy’s description in Leaves and Plashes of the meal lines at the house on Mott St. in the mid-thirties. Up to a thousand hungry people were fed twice-daily; bread and coffee in the morning, soup at noon. In the mid-thirties, the storefront kitchen, now a butcher shop, is hardly any bigger than our pre­sent soup kitchen at 36 East 1st St. Yet we are almost overwhelmed if we serve four hundred people on a busy soup line morning.

The danger of continually looking over our shoulders at the past is that so often we appropriate the past, rather than work, which is discouraging. As we strive for, as Peter Maurin said, a society where it is easier for people to be good, it seems that we are presently living in a society where believe there are also important rewards. Read Dorothy, Peter, Stanley. For them, the Catholic Worker was truly a way of life.

We shall certainly miss Tom and Kate and Tony. Partly as the result of the last illness and death of Kate’s father, but also because of other ills and goals, they are returning to Baltimore where they both have been active in action. Tony has been gone since they came to us. They have given us much, and have shown us examples of the work ethic in practice. Tom is un­expectedly expressed in the writings of Dorothy and Peter. Some people say, “There should be something by Dorothy and Peter on the current national issue.” Others say, “Please, no more reprints of old columns. You are doing the present quite well.”

This dilemma illustrates quite clearly the present situation of the Catholic Worker. We are sitting on top of a tremendous source of wisdom and spiritual wealth which we have inherited from Peter and Dorothy. Yet, we are living in a rapidly changing society which needs to be looked at from a fresh perspec­tive all the time. Since Peter wrote his Essay Essays, we have been subjected to a variety of wars, a new alignment of the superpowers, increasing secularization of society, and an arms race of unforeseeable magnitude. We have also experienced the fundamental changes of Vatican II, and an increasing participation in the issues of social justice, as evidenced by the civil rights movement in the fifties and sixties, and the current movement in more recent years. Even in the three short years since Dorothy’s death, dramatic changes have occurred; and as a result of the death of a member of the American bishops drafting a pastoral letter on peace and war, and, on the other, rapid technological changes, driven home to us personally by the inevitable acquisition of a home computer to print up our address labels. Given such change, how can we turn to the wisdom and riches that Peter and Dorothy have left us? When press deadlines are looming and an issue appears to be short of copy, it is an exacting task for the Catholic Worker editors to wade through pages and pages of papers and dig out an Easy Essay or an On Pilgrimage column that has some bearing on a present topic, hoping that the reader will find a reflection of this country’s current violent and peaceful trends.

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And we surely need guidance now! As it says in the Aims and Purposes of the Catholic Worker movement (see page 5 of this issue):

We see this as an era filled with anxiety and confusion. In response, we, as a lay community, attempt to strengthen and direction in the beauty of regular prayer and liturgy, in studying and applying the traditions of Scripture and the teachings of the Church to the modern condition.

Guidance comes from prayer and worship, from the Catholic Worker movement and the vision of our founders, and we struggle to apply it in our daily lives and views of the present world. There is so much in the news, on many different levels.

The works of mercy, those works so essential to the Catholic Worker program, through which we attempt to learn how to love our brothers and sisters as ourselves, must be performed continually. New ways to confront the violence and potential violence in our world must be put into action. Theology—Christian, social, and economic—must be developed and articulated. If, as Dostoyevsky said, the world is carried through by the thread of the surrounding, our words and our lives must be made beautiful. The talents of many are needed: artists, poets, playwrights, novelists, theologians, priests, pastors, economists and, of course, farmers, carpenters, soup makers, and so on. The work is ongoing, and there have been a steady stream of gifted people who have contributed to it over the years at the Catholic Worker. With God’s grace, the Bow will be unraveled and interrupted.

Signs of Hope

At present, there is exciting news from all over which gives cause for hope. Peggy Schiller’s book Witness for Peace in Nicaragua are learning to live nonviolently and to speak of nonviolence in a region where violence is virtually the basis of life. In Greenfield, Massachusetts, at the Institute for Community Economics, Chuck Matthei and his colleagues are working to establish community gardens and other sustainable, practical, and alternative economic programs in communities around the United States. We hear of the base Christian communities in Brazil and other Latin American countries, and hope that they might become models for a grassroots movement of spiritual and social renewal in our country.

Yet there are now over eighty Catholic Worker houses of hospitality all over the U.S., more than at any other time in the fifty years of the first issue.

Finally, as Peter said, the Catholic Worker is an organism, not an organization. We are an ever-changing community struggling to work for the Common Good in an ever-changing society. Dorothy addressed this idea beautifully when she said:

We must minister to people’s bodies in order to reach their souls. We hear of the faith through our ears, we speak it with our mouths, we build communities, work for a new social order, have come to be known as the community which breaks bread with brothers and sisters of whatever color, or creed. “This is My Body,” Christ said at the Last Supper, as He broke the Bread of Life each day, “the grace we receive remains a dead weight in the soul unless we cooperate with Him. As Dorothy once said, “We are a community which breaks bread with brothers and sisters of whatever color, or creed.”

And so, as the Catholic Worker moves along into its second half-century, I pray that we will be able to continue to “work with” Christ, and that we will be up to the tasks that He has laid out for us.