

the catholic peace fellowship

An educational service conducted by Catholic members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation

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CO-CHAIRMEN

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Dear Tom:

Let me bother you momentarily with a few requests for some recent articles.

Could you send as many copies as you can spare of the Father Perrin essay and the reflections on African Genesis, which I read a long time ago and had almost forgotten about.

I could also use a few copies of the ruler's examination of conscience.

I sent your package on this morning to Barbara Deming, to whom it will mean much.

My feelings about the priest worker movement are highly colored by my experiences with the priest workers themselves. While at the Catholic Worker I met several times a worker priest whose name I cannot presently recall, a small wirey man who spoke English awkwardly and who worked full time on the French Line. This he did, as I recall, with the unofficial but real support of his Dominican superiors. But it was not until this summer, while in Paris, that I was able to speak with a priest who had an excellent mastery of English, and I can honestly say that the encounter with this man was a personally unforgettable and deeply renewing experience.

I would never have guessed him to be a priest. He looked like any of the poorer Parisian workers—a faded flannel shirt, worn denim trousers, huge hands, broad shoulders, a strong back. He was really very huge and yet nonetheless extraordinarily gentle and absolutely unpretentious, much the way I would guess Perrin to have been, judging from the glimpses his book offers, and what persons who knew him have told me. Jean refers to our initial meeting with this particular worker priest in her review of the Perrin book, which I enclose.

One of the remarkable things about the priest worker movement, which of course has been said over and over again, is quite simply that these men were (and

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are) priests, that their hands offered the mass, that they received the confessions of men and forgave in Christ's name. This has much meaning--- it had much meaning before the suppression and it still has, not only for myself. What more meaningful demonstration of Christ's life in the Church than when his priests have left so many walls, the walls of a false and comfortable "poverty" available to the cleric, the security unto the grave of the rectory and the black clothe.

The workers priests I have met, while facing difficulties which exist in a special way for worker priests, have never felt the Holy Office suppressed full-time labor on their parts and disbanded the Mission de France because of "considerations of spirituality." Certainly those Dominican provincials who sacrificed their posts never felt that way. And the priest workers of Paris pray daily that once again they may work the same hours as any other working man.

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"This is the book I have come to love the man," Jean said. Yes, I too. Here was a life that mattered, here was a priest whose vocation was witness distant from the rectories of this world, where witness is even today barely known or dreamt of. That he was a priest was somehow important, just as I am certain it was important in the time of Christ that the majority of apostles were laborers and that, apparently they supported themselves not from contributions alone, but from their own labor.

I have never thought of the rectory as a "spiritual hothouse," or the priests which live in it more likely to achieve sanctity. It has been my experience that generally rectories are the opposite, spiritual wastelands. I have of course known numbers of priests who, like Father DuBay, have shattered the restraints of the priestly life. But I believe, for whatever my own experience may be worth, that they are few, they are like the few who spiritually survive the prison, the ^{un}imprisonables. There will always be a few such men. But the majority are not that strong, and they die. It isn't their fault, I think, but the inevitable result of a way of life which is sterile and unreal.

With much love,

Jim