

SIMPLICITY

Live Simply So That Others May Simply Live

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Spring 2000

A Bowl of Grits and the System

by Steve Baggarly

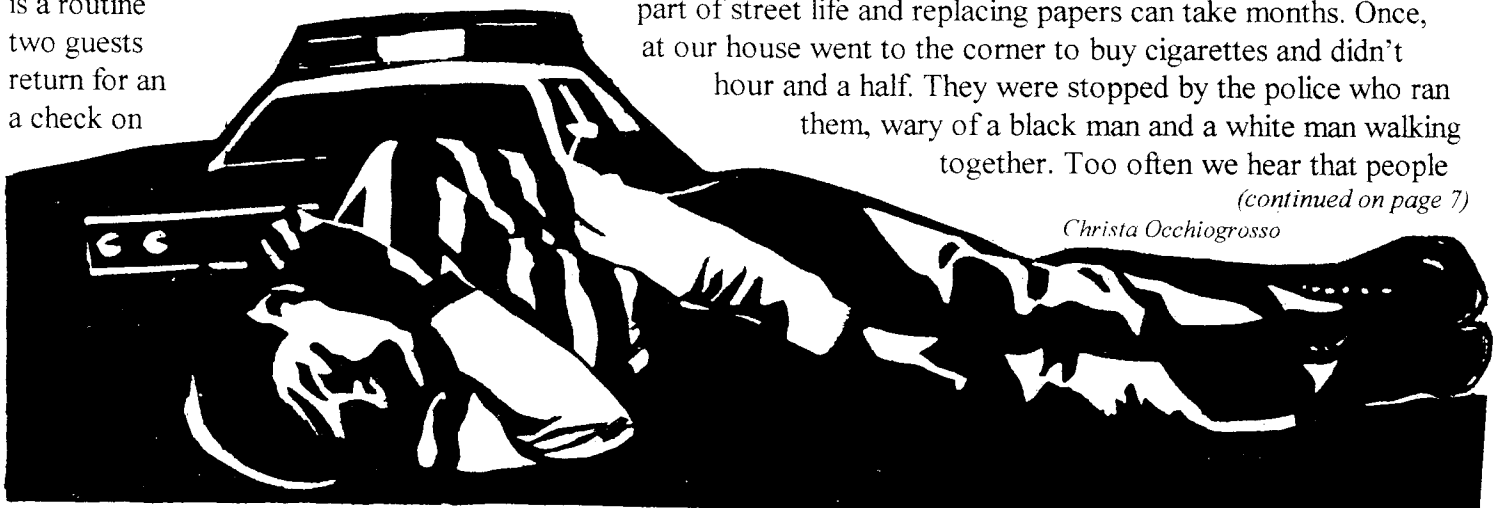
Recently on our soup line, a homeless man named Vern related that the previous night he had found some clothes in a dumpster and was stashing them in a good hiding place when a police car pulled up. The officer told Vern he looked suspicious and detained him for the next half hour with questions and ran his name through the computer looking for outstanding warrants. As Vern told his story I could see the security van which parks in the commuter lot across the street from where we serve our meal. Every morning the van keeps watch while people line up for breakfast and then as they spread out on both sides of the street to eat their grits and sandwiches. For the first three years we served on Salter street, between the parking lot and Elmwood Cemetery, Norfolk police staked out the line every morning. A police car slowly rolling by the line either looking for someone or just looking to intimidate was part of a normal morning.

The most mundane of actions, like putting clothes away or eating breakfast, when perpetrated by homeless people always border on criminality. Two days before Vern, another friend said he had to go to court that morning for urinating in public. "I had to go and there was no where to go," as he put it. This brought to mind the nearby business which reported our soup line to the Health Department a few years ago, because people were using the bushes behind its building for a toilet. The Health Department response was to order us to prepare our food in a Health Department approved kitchen rather than at the Catholic Worker house, and to get a few new pieces of serving equipment. Public bathrooms weren't considered as a remedy. Another friend, a mentally ill homeless woman, was in court the same day we were one time. She had been arrested for sleeping on the courthouse steps. Many people we know have been taken into custody for trespassing in abandoned buildings where they only hoped to escape the elements and be less vulnerable to attack. Living on the street means that every time nature calls or sleep comes heavy, one risks being run through the judicial system.

It is not uncommon for our black friends to be stopped just for walking through white neighborhoods, or to be taken downtown for not having identification, though being robbed of all one's possessions (clothing and papers) is a routine part of street life and replacing papers can take months. Once, two guests at our house went to the corner to buy cigarettes and didn't return for an hour and a half. They were stopped by the police who ran a check on them, wary of a black man and a white man walking together. Too often we hear that people

(continued on page 7)

Christa Occhiogrosso



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NORFOLK CATHOLIC WORKER

Dreaming Upside Down

by Tom Peterson, editor of *Seeds*

I dreamed the other night that all the maps turned upside down. Library atlases, road maps of Cincinnati, wall-sized maps in war rooms of great nations, even antique maps inscribed "Here be Dragons" were all flipped over. What had been north was now south, east was west. Like melting vanilla ice cream, Antarctica now capped schoolroom globes.

In my dream a cloud of anxieties closed around me. The United States was now at the bottom. Would we have to stand upside down, causing the blood to rush to our heads? Would we need suction-cup shoes to stay on the planet and would autumn leaves fall up? No, I remembered, the apple bopped Newton on the head—no need to worry about these things.

Other matters troubled me more. Now that we're at the bottom, would our resources and labor be exploited by the new top? Would African, Asian and Latin American nations structure world trade to their advantage?

Would my neighbors and I have two-dollar-a-day seasonal jobs on peach and strawberry plantations? Would the women and children work dawn to dusk to scratch survival from the earth of California and Virginia? Would the fruit we picked be shipped from New Orleans and New York to Thai and Ethiopian children who hurriedly eat it with their cereal so they won't miss the school bus? Would our children, then, go not to school but to fetch water from two miles away and to gather wood for cooking and heating? Would a small ruling class in this country send their daughters and sons to universities in Cairo and Buenos Aires?

Would our economy be dependent upon the goodwill and whims of, say, Brazil? Would Brazil send war planes and guns to Washington D.C. to assure our willingness to pick apples, pecans and tobacco for export while our children went hungry? Would Brazil or Vietnam fight their wars with our sons in our country? Would we consider revolution?

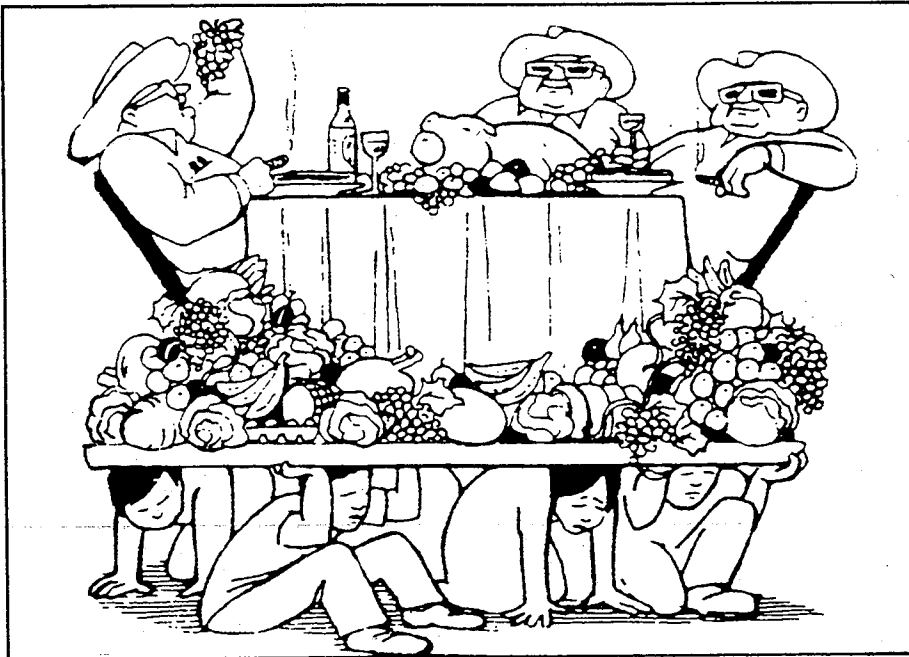
If we did revolt, would the Chilean government plot to put their favorite U.S. general in power and uphold him with military aid?

Would we work in sweatshops to manufacture radios for the Chinese? Would our oil be shipped in tankers to Southeast Asia to run cars, air conditioners and microwave ovens while most of our towns were without electricity?

Would religious leaders from "the top-of-the-world" call us stubborn pagans upon whom God's judgment had fallen, causing our misery? Would they proclaim from their opulent pulpits that if we simply turned to God, our needs would be met?

In my dream, I saw a child crying in Calcutta. Her parents wouldn't buy her any more video games until her birthday. I saw her mother drive to the supermarket and load her cart with junk food, vegetables, cheese, meat and women's magazines.

I saw a mother in Houston baking bread in an earthen oven. She had been crying because there were no more beans for her family. One of her children, a blond boy, about six years old, listlessly watched her. He slowly turned his empty, haunting gaze toward me.



At that I awoke with a gasp. I saw I was in my own bed, in my own house. Everything was okay. It was a bad dream. I drifted back to sleep, thinking, "It's all right, I'm still on top. Thank God!" **

You're already on page four — it's high time for answers to the important questions not answered by the first three pages of this rag. Questions like, "What is this Catholic Worker thing, anyway?" And "Where do they get their funding, now that the Soviet Union has collapsed?" And "What won't they print to fill space in their newspapers?" But instead, we offer

A CATHOLIC WORKER PRIMER

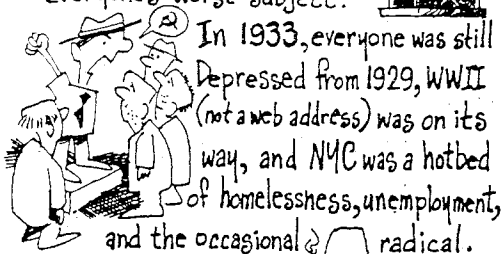
AN EMBARRASSINGLY SKEWED OVERVIEW OF CATHOLIC WORKER BASICS [by Chuck Traphus]

WE START WITH HISTORY

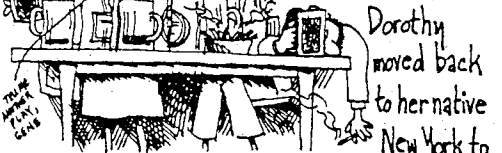
since that seems to be everyone's worst subject.



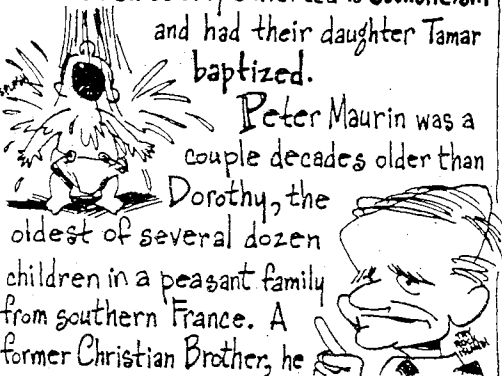
In 1933, everyone was still Depressed from 1929, WWII (not a web address) was on its way, and NYC was a hotbed of homelessness, unemployment, and the occasional radical.



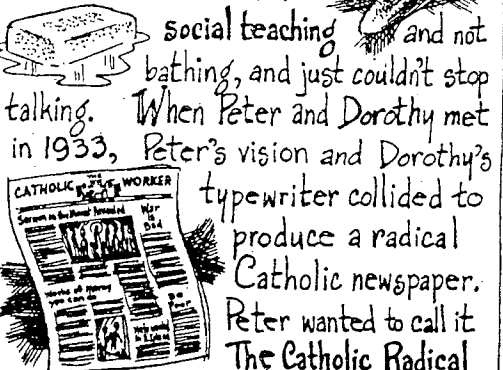
Enter Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin (sort of nuns with foreign). After two years of assorted classrooms at the University of Illinois, Dorothy moved back to New York to take up with the wild Greenwich Village crowd and the likes of Eugene O'Neill. She wrote for comic papers, was arrested as a suffragette, and again as a radical, had an affair, an abortion, a short-term marriage, a motorcycle gang, a sex-change, and numerous other outrageous things, some of which I am making up. Her "common-law marriage" with Forster What's-His-Name ended when Dorothy converted to Catholicism and had their daughter Tamar baptized.



Peter Maurin was a couple decades older than Dorothy, the oldest of several dozen children in a peasant family from southern France. A former Christian Brother, he

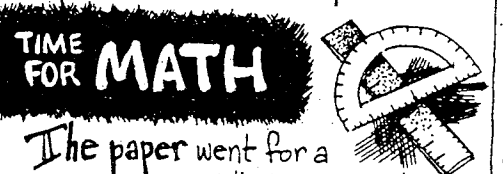


had been arrested for vagrancy and again for hoboing, was into manual labor and Catholic social teaching and not bathing, and just couldn't stop talking. When Peter and Dorothy met in 1933, Peter's vision and Dorothy's typewriter collided to produce a radical Catholic newspaper. Peter wanted to call it The Catholic Radical (really) but Dorothy changed it to The Catholic Worker, no doubt unaware that one day Catholic Workers would note a common characteristic of many in the movement: "They're not Catholic and they don't work."

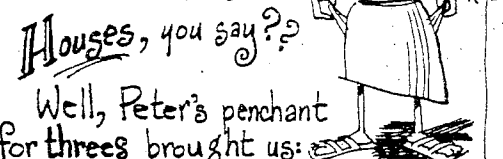


TIME FOR MATH

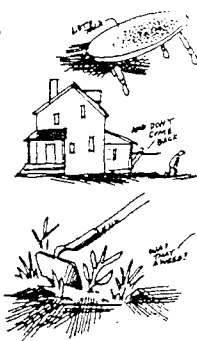
The paper went for a penny a copy — still does, despite some 67 years of inflation (and it remains the priciest of all CW papers at that). In 1933, the 2,500 copies cost \$57 to print. Figure it out. At 1¢ per, no ads, the Catholic Worker couldn't begin to pay for itself, and so began a proud tradition of insolvency that has energized and impoverished Catholic Worker Houses ever since.



Houses, you say? Well, Peter's penchant for threes brought us:



- ① Round Table Discussions
- ② Houses of Hospitality
- ③ Farming Communes



as well as:

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------|
| ① CULT, | ① PRAYER, |
| ② CULTURE, and | ② ACTION, and |
| ③ CULTIVATION | ③ SACRIFICE |
| ① LITURGY, | |
| ② LITERATURE, and | |
| ③ AGRICULTURE | |

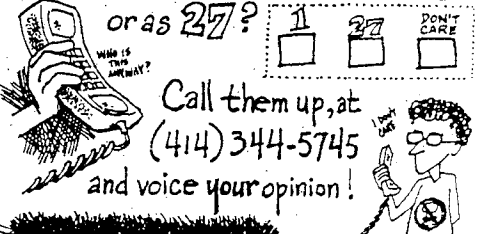


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|------------------|---------------------|
| ① ROME, | ① BIG SHOTS, |
| ② REUNION, and | ② LITTLE SHOTS, and |
| ③ RECONSTRUCTION | ③ HOT SHOTS |

Of all these, houses of hospitality for the homeless, the transient, the unemployed, the hardcore Bohemians, seem the most accessible, and thus we have lots of 'em — maybe a hundred or more. Trouble is, some CW communities run more than one hospitality house, like, say, Milwaukee CW, which probably has their own suburb by now. Count each house separately and we can inflate our numbers most impressively. What do you think — should the Milwaukee CW count as 1 or as 27?



Call them up, at (414) 344-5745 and voice your opinion!



A LITTLE GEOGRAPHY NOW

Since the first CW house of hospitality burst on the NY scene, the movement has spread like bread mold. New houses



spring up like cockroaches at night;
old ones vanish like coffee in
a Catholic Worker pantry.

And cockroaches are not exclusive to the US.—
that is, CW communities can be
found in Canada, Mexico,
England, Germany,
the Netherlands, New
Zealand, Australia,
and North Carolina.
(There are none, as far as
we know, in Vatican City.)

Of course, all these CWs are metric,
and therefore smaller.

SOCIAL STUDIES:

The Big Idea
behind the CW is
PERSONALISM: being person-
ally responsible for
everybody else's problems. The
word comes from another French guy,
Emmanuel Mounier, who would
be shocked to see what craziness
has been wrung out of that one
little word.

Beyond that, the CW is one of
the great indefinables of our time,
like God or electricity
or the Internet.

While many CWers run
houses of hospitality, many others
think they're CW snobs (in the
most polite sense of the word) and
embrace a broader vision of the
CW as a "Green Revolution,"
"a society where it is easier to be
good," "a path from where we are
to where we should be," even as their
"agronomie universities" are choking
from too many weeds and not
enough human contact. There
are those in the movement who think
pacifism is silly, or Catholicism

isn't much better than Satanism,
or gardening is best left to
migrant farm workers, or
cartoons have no place in a
respectable CW newspaper;
and generally a few sour
apples won't ruin the cider.
So when you hear
that the CW condemns usury or supports
unions or denounces computers or cats
wilted turnip greens, know that
the CW also possesses a
stubborn anarchist streak,
making generalizations
impossible. (That
doesn't stop some of us, however.)

If you say, for example,
that Personalism prevents
CWers from seeking tax-
exempt status and operating with
boards of directors and salaries and
insurance programs, you would be
right. But you would also be ignoring
the couple dozen CW
houses that have in-
corporated or are United
Way agencies or are in the
Fortune 500. After all, anybody
can call themselves a Catholic Worker;
there's no licensing or qualifying test
or membership card.

In this way, the CW
is like a big, some-
what dysfunctional
family. Some of whose members have
run off with the circus.

ART CLASS

Peter was big on a
craft-based economy,— and he
didn't mean refrigerator magnets
and plywood lawn ornaments.
We must stay connected with
the work of our hands, avoid
becoming industrial slaves,
and write in short,
Choppy,

Free-verse lines
Like this.

And read *Easy Essays*, by Peter Maurin.
Which is all about envisioning a computer-
free society, but since it was actually
written before computers he had to use a
lot of veiled, symbolic language. But it's
in there, trust me.

Some CWers dip
candles, some weave
rugs, some bake bread,
some carve spoons,
and some answer the phone so others
can do these things. Imagine
basing an economy on this.

IS IT TIME FOR RECESS YET?

Peter died in 1949, Dorothy in 1980;
we're on our own now. Other CW heavy-
weights include Ammon ("Arrest me")
Hennacy and Stanley
("It was a joke")
Vishnewski, both
of whom are dead
nowadays, and a
gaggle of live ones (you know
who you are).

There is a move afoot
to canonize Dorothy, of all people, and
when she gets wind of it she's going to split
her splenius, so to speak. It's not that her
reading of banned books or her association with
godless communists or her openness to women
priests disqualifies her from the Saintly Honor.
Rather, it's what Dorothy feared most:

DISMISSAL

Take away her radicalism,
her selective "obedience" to
church authority, her willingness
to get arrested, her French
peasant mentor and sidekick,
and put this nice old lady way
up on a pedestal in your
dusty chapel and what have
you got? Beats me, but please don't label
it the *Catholic Worker*.

Thank you. Class dismissed.

Mother's Day Proclamation

Arise, then, women of this day!
Arise all women who have hearts,
whether your baptism be that
of water or of fears!
Say firmly: "We will not have
great questions decided by
irrelevant agencies,
Our husbands shall not come to us
reeking with carnage,
for caresses and applause.
Our sons shall not be taken from us
to unlearn all that we have been
able to teach them of charity,
mercy, and patience.
We women of one country will be
too tender of those
of another country
to allow our sons to be trained
to injure theirs."
From the bosom
of the devastated earth
a voice goes up with our own.
It says, "Disarm, Disarm!"
The sword of murder is not
the balance of justice!
Blood does not wipe out dishonor
nor violence indicate possession.
As men have often forsaken the plow
and the anvil
at the summons of war,
let women now leave all that
may be left of home for a great
and earnest day of counsel.
Let them meet first, as women,
to bewail and commemorate
the dead.
Let them then solemnly take counsel
with each other as the means
whereby the great human family
can live in peace,
And each bearing after her own time
the sacred impress,
not of Caesar,
but of God.

Julia Ward Howe
Boston, 1870

Grits (continued from page 1)

are locked up and can't afford the \$50 or \$100 it would take to be out on bail awaiting trial. It usually takes at *least* two months to get a court date, and if charges are dropped at trial time or one is found not guilty, there is seldom even an apology for the months spent in jail for only suspicion and the want of a few dollars.

The surveillance, suspicion, and criminalization that Vern and other visitors to our soup line experience on an ongoing basis because they are black or poor, are the street-level manifestations of what theologian Walter Wink calls the "Domination System." In his book, *Engaging the Powers*, Wink contends that the world ethos is best characterized as one of domination. The unquestioned belief that some people have the right, even the duty, to dominate others, undergirds five millennia of social organization based on ranking. Domination is the paradigm for all social relationships, whether it is men over women, light-skinned people over dark-skinned, rich over poor, learned over uneducated, officialdom over the masses, etc. Wink calls this "all pervasive exploitation of the many by the few," the "Domination System" and offers it as a translation of what New Testament writers call "the world." So when Jesus says "I am not of this *world*," (John 8:23) it is not a declaration of his other-worldliness, but that he is *against* the systems of domination that are all around him.

In a nutshell, the Domination System is characterized by hierarchy, violence, and hoarding. And Satan is the presiding spirit of domination. In contrast, Jesus comes proclaiming God's kingdom, which is marked by egalitarianism, nonviolence, and sharing. No person or group of people is supposed to wield power over another. In God's domination-free system, all people are sisters and brothers and should be free from oppression, victimization, and hunger. This is the vision that Jesus calls his followers to incarnate.

So, when we venture out three mornings a week to share food with people who don't have enough to eat, we get an invaluable catechism in the workings of the Domination System. Living white, educated, and monied, amid systems and ideologies which present us as the "normal" people and offer to fill our sails, we're programmed to think that everything is OK; that there is equal protection under the law, and liberty and justice for all. While privilege blinds us to the brutal realities of domination, the people we see on our soup line are well acquainted with the demons inhabiting our system. Automatically suspect to the authorities and the good citizenry by virtue of their skin color, their character relentlessly maligned for being penniless in a land of plenty, they know the Domination System deep in their bones. We go out three mornings also because we want our world view to be shaped by *their* experiences, hoping to live in reality rather than illusion. On Salter street we learn how much we can live *without*, and realize the need to throw our lot in with the people we meet there, taking up the cross of nonviolent resistance to the powers of domination, as Jesus did. Unless we strive to understand life from the perspective of poor and marginalized people and then act on what we learn, we will never know the God of the exodus and the gospels. **