

The Spirit in the World—IV: The Catholic People's Weeks

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The organisation now known as the *Catholic People's Weeks* was founded in 1945 by a small group of priests and laity and has the main aim of helping ordinary Catholics to appreciate their faith more keenly and to live deeper and fuller lives in their homes, parishes and places of work. The original, and eventual, aim is to provide residential Catholic colleges for further education. The immediate need met by these study weeks has proved to be considerable and the organisation, which has Cardinal Godfrey as its Patron, has expanded rapidly in the last few years.

Our first introduction to this association was when we joined its group going for Easter to Worth Priory. Despite the high standard of chant in a Benedictine church, we were not to be mere spectators, for with great charity we were encouraged by the monks to participate fully in the liturgy. We were coached in the plainchant melodies of the Holy Week services and lectures were arranged on the Easter ceremonies and allied subjects so that we were prepared for playing a full part. We had plenty of time in between for wandering through the Sussex Weald and talking to the other people taking part, who came from many countries. The climax of the four days was of course the Easter Vigil. A great fire was kindled on the terrace outside and inside, after the *Lumen Christi*, the church was lit only by candlelight. We sang alternately with the choir of monks and were knit into one worshipping community, taking our part with our understanding deepened by the study we had made of the meaning and significance of the liturgy.

Such was the spiritual gain from this Easter at Worth that the next step was obviously to go to one of the 'Family Weeks' which this organisation holds every year in the summer. These Weeks take place at St Mary's Hall, the Middle School of Stonyhurst College, and are so popular that for the last three years a further Week has been held in Devon at the Marist Brothers' school, Winslade Park. People come to these weeks from a wide variety of occupations and backgrounds and can contribute a diversity of experience to the discussions. Families

with as many as eight children are not uncommon at Stonyhurst and often it is the only holiday they could afford.

While the parents are at the lectures the children are looked after in age groups, either by some of the parents who, having come for many years, now help to run things, or by young people who have come especially to help. Seminarians often cope with the older children and get on very well with them. There is plenty to do, an indoor swimming pool and plenty of games available, so that wet weather does not matter. Even the long-jump pit becomes a sandpit for the smallest children. Most years the children have their own chaplain, generally a Benedictine, who gives talks to the older ones. They have a dialogued mass in which each child who is going to communion places a host on a dish to symbolize his offering. Sometimes children make their first communion here, a family occasion of much joy, so much more satisfactory than making it as one of a school class with parents relegated to the back rows.

Each day starts with mass, either sung or dialogued, with everyone joining in. As the youngest children come to this with their parents *Clamor meus ad te veniat* gains more than one meaning. The mass ends with a Gelineau psalm and each year new ones are learned.

Meals are taken at long refectory tables, with people sitting where they will and shifting round to talk to old friends or make new ones. Some half of the families each year have been before and these provide a continuity of spirit. Meal times are those suitable for children and there are facilities for making feeds for the babies. One year the youngest was only three weeks old and the next junior five weeks. The parents and the youngest children share rooms—some of which are converted class rooms—and the older children are in rooms together according to age and sex, as are the single adults. People look after their own rooms but the cooking and washing up is done for them.

During the morning there is a lecture followed by coffee and then discussion in which everyone is encouraged to join. These discussions generally continue over lunch and in odd corners—washing the nappies or wandering round the grounds—for the rest of the day. When the weather is fine lectures and discussions take place in the open air. The afternoons are free and Stonyhurst is on the edge of wild moorland country while Winslade is not far from the sea. Some people play games, but one is free to do as much or as little as one wishes. After high tea the younger children are put to bed and parents are free for the evening lecture and discussion, followed by cocoa, when some pre-

fer to make for the village pub. The day ends with compline in English and a reading from some work such as Congar's *Lay People in the Church*. On the last evening there is a 'concert'. The children perform first followed by the adults who put on a skit of the week's proceedings. A remarkable wealth of talent appears spontaneously.

It is a real holiday for mind, body and spirit and one goes back to everyday life refreshed and encouraged. Several families have returned home to start Family Groups in their locality and many more return with new heart to cope with all the difficulties of living a fully Christian family life in modern society. The lectures provide food for the mind, but it is the community life shared in a spirit of charity and worship which makes the greatest impact.

Themes of these weeks vary and have included such things as 'The Lay Apostolate', 'Christians United and Separate', 'Marriage', 'Education and the Family' and 'The Scriptures'. Lecturers have included theologians, parents of families, Young Christian Workers' chaplains, teachers from schools or universities, marriage counsellors, child guidance workers, architects and journalists. The theme this year in the North was 'Work' and in the South 'The English Way of Life'.

The theme at Stonyhurst last year was 'The Scriptures'. Several lectures were given by a Benedictine and a Dominican. Some of the different levels of meaning were studied and the place of scripture in the liturgy of the Church was considered. Discussion brought up much difficulty in reading the Bible for the average layman, especially the Old Testament, unless he has some knowledge of the way in which divine inspiration worked through the Hebrew mind. We came to see, for instance, that because the Israelites had no real conception of secondary causality it led them to attribute the most brutal commands directly to God in a way which shocks the unprepared modern reader. Methods of making the Bible come alive in school or YCW group were demonstrated by a Young Christian Workers' chaplain and an expert on medieval mystery plays talked about religious drama based on the Bible. The final talk was on liturgical reform in parish life. The week's events included also a gramophone recital of Gelineau psalms and of the African Katanga Mass, as well as a discussion on what measures were practicable to improve relations with our separated brethren.

The uniqueness of the Catholic People's Weeks does not consist so much in their novelty of liturgical approach or of community study and worship as in the fact that the communal worship and study of the faith is carried out by ordinary people coming from all walks of life

who bring all their children, so that the whole thing takes place in a family setting. Perhaps this is particularly significant because the parish is a basic unit of the Church and parishes are very largely made up of families. Therefore, what can be done by the Catholic People's Weeks, for example in deepening lay appreciation of the faith and strengthening spiritual life, can form a pattern which is appropriate to the Church as a whole.

Reviews

NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE, edited by Walter Stein, with foreword by Archbishop Roberts; The Merlin Press, 12s. 6d.

This is a very thoughtful book on nuclear warfare. It attempts and achieves a maximum of objective analysis. It offers in the findings that it reaches some very reliable, if austere, conclusions about contemporary Christian duty in the matter of nuclear weapons. The five authors are all prominent Catholics in university life and they together develop a systematic treatment of the problems in question by a careful application to them of the Church's teaching, both ancient and recent. As such, their book has earned the commendation of the Bishop of Salford in a review in which, while judging that some of their conclusions were not fully established, he nevertheless pronounced the book to be deserving of our careful and unbiased reading.

What are the valuable contributions that it makes to the discussion of the great *casus conscientiae* of the present time? The book is addressed first to Catholics, but is intended to gain the attention of other Christians also as well as of anyone else concerned with Western ideals. Some of its arguments, therefore, do not presuppose the acceptance of the Christian revelation, though for the most part this is assumed. Archbishop Roberts in his foreword speaks of a supremely urgent need for an effective Christian witness about the morality of modern war. Walter Stein opens the discussion, setting forth the reasons both for the retention of the nuclear deterrent and those, from both expediency and morality, against. He then goes on to discuss the morals of deterrence, quoting statements of policy from Western leaders and assessing the moral issues they raise. Elizabeth Anscombe then considers the right and duty of rulers to resort to violence in certain circumstances, the question of when intentional killing is lawful, the pacifist attitude (which she judges has caused much blunting of moral judgment), the principle of 'double effect' (which receives notable treatment), and some sophistical arguments used on these topics.