

THE REGENERATIVE READER

VOLUME. 1 ISSUE 7 • SEPTEMBER 2023

IN THIS ISSUE



We've got a new look for our Regenerative Reader! This issue of The Regenerative Reader features updates from our reading groups, descriptions of upcoming classes, an Uneasy Essay from Dr. Laurie Johnson, updates from the John Paul II Catholic Worker farm, and an up-to-date reading list from our founders.

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Spencer and Emily give some of the brief highlights of the summer growing season as to what they are doing with their time on the farm including what they are harvesting right now.



More information about the PII Catholic Worker Farm at jpiicatholicworkerfarm.com

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On Tuesday, September 26, at 7 PM (CT), James will be first expounding on the work and the underlying principles of the Mondragón Corporation, founded in the eponymous village on the rural Basque Country (Spain) in 1956, by Father José María Arizmendiarieta, and second, drawing connections between this worker cooperative (primarily industrial) and its arm of technical education with the Catholic Worker Movement and the thought and Catholic social activism of Peter Maurin. In his discussion, James will examine the shared intellectual influences that sustain these worker communities, specifically from two major figures of the French personalist movement, Emmanuel Mounier and Jacques Maritain.

**Maurin's Three C's,
Mondragon
and Reconstructing the Social Order**

THE MAURIN ACADEMY PRESENTS

Maurin's Three C's, Mondragon and Reconstructing The Social Order



Peter Maurin's Easy Essays encourage Catholic Workers interested in constructing a new social order to read the personalist revolutionaries: Emmanuel Mounier and Jacques Maritain.

These personalist and communitarian philosophers also inspired Fr. Jose Maria Arizmendi, the founder of Mondragon, the world's largest industrial worker-owned cooperative. What can Mondragon illustrate about Peter Maurin's program that Catholic Workers can draw on to create a new society in the shell of the old.

Join James Murphy as he leads a presentation and discussion on Tuesday, September 26 at 7 p.m. US Central Time, live on Zoom.

Register on Eventbrite
or join us on Patreon

Catholic Workers may email us for access at
maurinacademy@gmail.com

for more details and other information
visit our website
pmaurin.org



Narcissists Anonymous

by Laurie Johnson



The primary ingredient in getting anything done is other people, but our way of life encourages us to steer clear of other people in any meaningful sense. Sure, it's fun to get together with friends or family for dinner and talk about what we believe, how we ought to live, what's wrong with the world. But as soon as someone tries to get serious, we tend to avoid even hearing them, let alone coming alongside them with more than moral support. This is because, in almost every case, what we hear from them is not what we want to hear. What we want to hear is ourselves, and they are not ourselves.

Some people are more honest about this than others. I've had people close to me tell me they have no interest in what I do for a living because they are not "into books." That's honest. But then that disconnect in what we like, or how we express our concerns and work them through, becomes an excuse to not render any level of interest or support.

I can't talk about this "side of my life" with them because they aren't "into that." Yet, they do want me to listen to what they're into—arguably things that I am not. I have come to realize that one of the reasons people like me is that I will listen to them, but that for many, that cannot be truly reciprocal, because what I'm into is a bridge too far.

How weird is it that people I don't know are into what I'm doing but most of my family and friends are not?

I think I'm not alone in this. I would bet that you, dear reader, have the same experience and may not have even thought about how weird that is. It's why we turn to online "communities."

When people in our lives don't want to come alongside us in our lives and endeavors, is this really about their inability to understand what we're doing? I don't think so. I think there's a tendency deeply ingrained in all of us to be isolated, atomistic individuals. There's a tendency not to give others any of our mental space because we're so into what we want to do that we don't even see, let alone want to give time to, someone else. And we often have already made up our minds that this person is associated with (fill in the blank) and therefore not worth hearing from.

Somehow, we like/love the people in our lives, but we feel no need to take them seriously. This is a mentality exacerbated by liberalism. It stems from the deep relativism within liberalism that says you have a right to your self-expression, but that's all it is. I have a right to that too, and neither of us needs to take the other seriously. But we do need to tolerate each other, which in practice means ignoring each other. It's why we in the Maurin Academy can find a following online.

There are like-minded people out there, and that's great. However, it's important to develop relationships of cooperation and friendship with people who are not just like us, and people in our area. In an age of social media, we have a cacophony of self-expression that is not taken seriously on its own merits even when it goes viral. It goes viral because it's already what other people were thinking.

This is why Spencer and I, on Dustbowl Diatribes, complain about the tendency to not respond with any real interest or action, even among people who say they care about community, the environment, faith, or healthy food. We both also routinely commit these same errors.

But we're trying not to. From the point of view of our common future, the reason why this primary narcissism is important to keep in mind is that cooperation at any significant level, strong cooperation, is not possible if we cannot see, hear from, and support people who are not us, people with different ways of seeing the world, people at different levels of development. People need to come into more alignment on moral and ethical matters, but they cannot do that without caring relationships that guard each other's dignity and a dialogue in which all are respected and taken seriously. If we cannot truly respect other people with all their views and ways of life, then we cannot have a real relationship with them. If we cannot have a real relationship with them, we cannot ask them to cooperate with us.

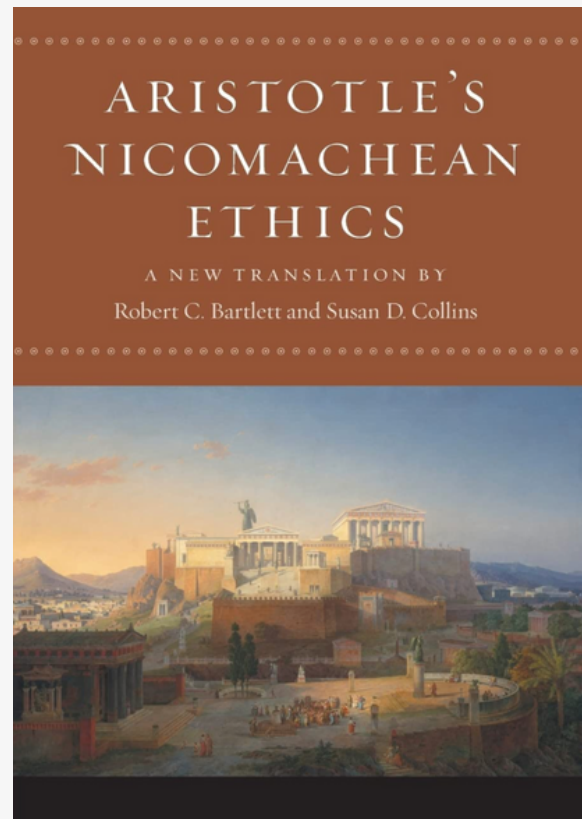
Really understanding friendship and being willing to embark on that adventure with the people in our lives is more than a personal goal to consider. It's necessary for our happiness, necessary for getting things done with each other, and necessary for our future in a world that may not be too hospitable to isolated, atomistic individuals. That is why, on the Political Philosophy YouTube pod, I'm going to spend a few weeks, after finishing up my thoughts on Eric Voegelin, on Aristotle and his teachings on friendship, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Oh no, not another book!



Detail of the fresco, *The School of Athens* (1509-1511), by Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino. Apostolic Palace, Vatican City.

The elder Plato (bearded, gray, wearing a crimson robe and bare footed) walks alongside the younger Aristotle (center, wearing a blue robe and sandals). Plato holds *Timaeus* and Aristotle holds his *Nicomachean Ethics*.

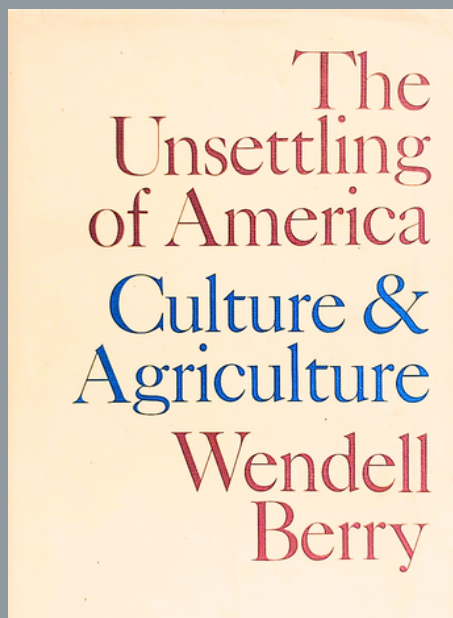


Maurin Academy Upcoming Classes

The Unsettling of America

Spencer Hess and Laurie Johnson

Thursdays October 19, 26, November 2 and 9



In this four-week series, Spencer Hess and Laurie Johnson will lead a discussion of Wendell Berry's most influential prose work, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*.

As the title implies, Berry argues that how we live, how we grow our food, and how we eat are interrelated matters. The upheavals in the American food economy towards industrial agriculture and the full commoditization of food have had their effect on the strength of families and extended families, small towns and communities, the environment, our way of life, our spiritual lives, and ultimately our happiness. Berry's insistence that we cannot dislocate people, physically, mentally, and spiritually, without destroying who they are, is a message that is both conservative and radical, as it calls for us to recognize the harm we've done in the name of efficiency and progress, and to live differently at every level to repair the damage done. Berry's work starts a conversation but calls on others to conclude it. Each session will start with a summary of the most important points of part of the book, followed by discussion.

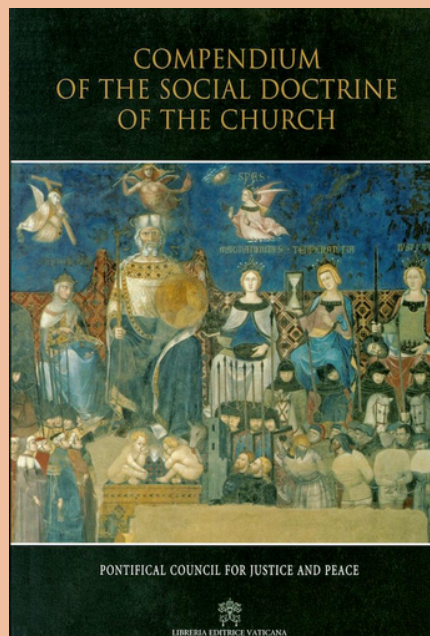
What does it mean to own something?

Our prevailing economic order assumes that ownership of property implies the right to almost any arbitrary use, or non-use, of that property. However, the Catholic tradition teaches that ownership of property necessitates the use of that property for the common good. Christian tradition has never recognized the right to private property as absolute and untouchable. Rather, the right to private property is secondary to, and at the service of, the right of all people to have access to the level of well-being that is necessary for their full development. The right to private property is subordinated to the right to common use, to the fact that goods are meant for everyone.

We will examine the history of the Universal Destination of Goods starting with the Mosaic Law, through the Christian New Testament, the Church Fathers, and finally modern Catholic Social Teaching.

Universal Destination of Goods Deacon Christopher May

Tuesday, November 28 at 7 p.m. US Central Time



John Paul II Catholic Worker Farm



- Around the farm these days we're harvesting okra and tomatoes (mostly Romas), apples, and watermelons
- We're dehydrating some of the apples, and making cider with them as well
- As always converting brush to biochar and cooking on all that released heat
- We got in a late summer mowing and brush-whacking before weeds go all to seed and the brush hardens off before winter
- We're (trying to) train 6-month old Guapo to control himself
- <<<Nik's always picking up more chicks

We received a visit from a young Catholic Worker who is trying to figure out her future farming endeavors.

With the help of Laurie Johnson, we have been working on the house numbered 1824, converting it from a tool shed into a habitable place for guest visits. Laurie is taking co-responsibility for 1824 by putting on a new roof and gutters while helping replace the windows and flooring. Maybe we'll name it the (Catherine) Doherty House?

For our fourth session of the Communio Reading Group we are looking forward to going to a conference on Fides et Ratio where Larry Chapp will speak about Integral Ecology at Benedictine University in Atchison, Kansas.



Dustbowl Diatribes: Season Three Overview

Spencer Hess and Laurie Johnson



For season three we're covering the various theories about Techno-Feudalism and looking into the current state of the Catholic Worker movement. In short, our hypotheses are that the coming period of capitalism can be accurately characterized as quasi-feudal and that the Catholic Worker movement is currently hamstrung by a radical split between those adhering to Peter Maurin's comprehensive vision for constructing a Christian social order and those adhering to Ammon Hennacy's Tolstoyan/Radical Liberal vision for protesting our way towards social justice. We're seeking to explore the people and ideas, question our priors, and learn what we can along the way.

Dustbowl Diatribes podcast can be found on our website, YouTube, iTunes, Google Podcasts, and Audible. Spotify thought we were a music business.

Laurie will soon be changing up her monthly talks, as she finishes up her foundations of political thought series with one more session, the first Thursday of October, on Friedrich Nietzsche. After that, she'll continue to meet with patrons live online on the first Thursday of each month, but she'll either be doing a Q & A session over what she's discussing on her channel or talking about a current issue or problem. Topics will be announced a few days in advance on Patreon and on our social media!

All of the past recordings of these talks are available to our patrons at the Salt-of-the-Earth and Worker-Scholar tier. Join Laurie on Zoom at 7 p.m. CT by registering on Eventbrite, or supporting the Maurin Academy on Patreon.

Political Philosophy Monthly Chats

Dr. Laurie M. Johnson



Maurin Academy Guest Essay

The Farmer and the Agitator: The Catholic Worker Needs Both

by Brian Terrell



The July/August 2023 issue of The Regenerative Reader, published by the Kansas City-based Maurin Academy for Regenerative Studies, features an essay titled “In the Fullness of Catholic Worker Time? An Uneasy Essay” by Spencer Hess. In it, he says: “I recently read an old article from Catholic Worker Brian Terrell entitled, ‘Peter Maurin’s Vision for the Catholic Worker, an Idea Whose Time has Come.’”

This article is the text of a talk that I gave at the National Catholic Worker Farm Gathering in Platteville, Wisconsin, in February 2017, and was published widely at the time, including in the pages of *The Catholic Worker*, as “CW Struggle For the Land.”

“He begins,” Spencer says, “by noting how the farming side of the Catholic Worker movement has always been a sideshow to the running of soup lines and the protesting of warfare. That, ‘since its beginning in 1933, this aspect of its [co-founder, Peter Maurin’s] original intentions was relegated to the margins of an already marginal movement.’”

In support of this proposition, I cited Daniel Berrigan, in his introduction to Dorothy’s memoir, *The Long Loneliness*, published in 1981, a year after her death, that reflected a common if less-than-generous perception of Peter and his vision at that time: “They started a newspaper and the rest is history. They started houses of hospitality; that too is history. Peter was forever talking about something he called ‘agronomic universities.’ They started one, on the land; and that is something less than history.”

Spencer finds my opening assessment “obviously true,” just as he emphatically agrees with my conclusion “that if the CW movement is ever to be ‘the dynamic revolutionary social force it was meant to be,’ then perhaps the time has come for the farms to come into their own.”

While agreeing with the beginning and the end of my talk, Spencer’s essay overlooks my central point, that “over the past 30 years there has been a great shift in understanding and respect for Peter’s vision and what it means,” and that there has been a resurgence in Peter’s dreams of farming communes in the movement.

This resurgence is evidenced not only in the unprecedented plethora of Catholic Worker farms around the country and abroad. It is also shown in the level of discussion given Peter and his ideas in the newspapers of the various houses. Peter’s influence is seen in the growth of urban gardens in the yards and vacant lots around our city houses. Catholic Worker cottage industries, such as carving spoons, repairing bicycles, making soap, all are examples of a growing movement.

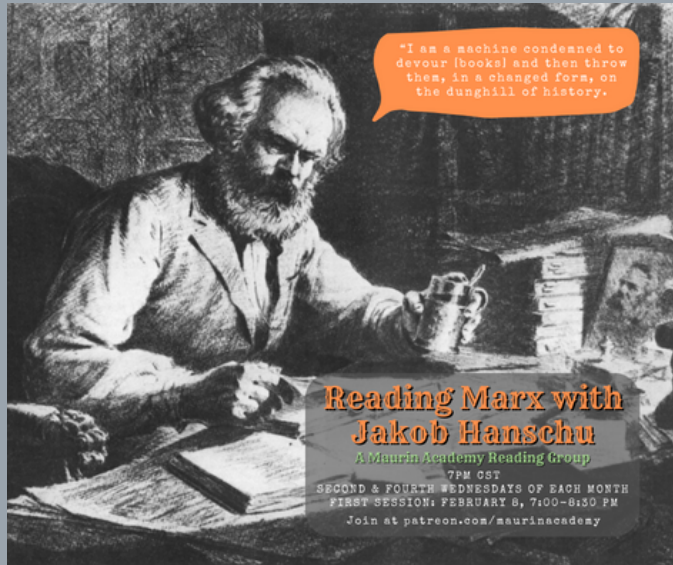
One recent example of a growing awareness of Peter’s vision in the movement is the June 2023 newsletter of Cherith Brook Catholic Worker, also in Kansas City. It opens with the question:

“What do protesting nukes, offering showers and weeding gardens have in common?”

.... Continued on page 11

Reading Marx with Jakob Hanschu

Jakob Hanschu; Co-Founder



The goal is to give participants a strong understanding of Marx's theory the money-form as it relates to everyday experiences. If you're new to Marx or new to the group this is a great time to join to learn more about the capitalist social formation before the end of the year:

September 13 – Chapter 3, Sec. 1, 2a, 2b

September 27 – Chapter 3, Sec. 2c, 3a, 3b, 3c

October 11 – Chapters 4

October 25 – Chapter 5

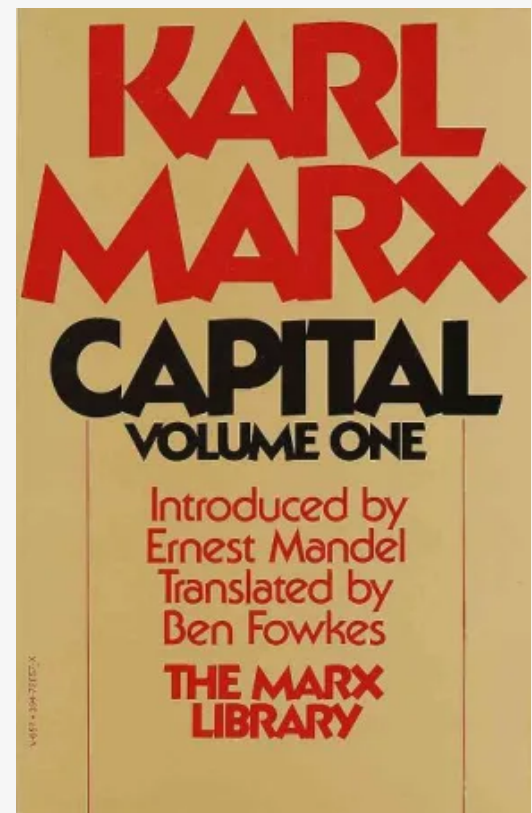
November 8 – Chapter 6

Join Jakob Hanschu on the second and fourth Wednesdays of every month, live on Zoom. You can join this group on our Patreon by going to Patreon:

<https://www.patreon.com/maurinacademy>

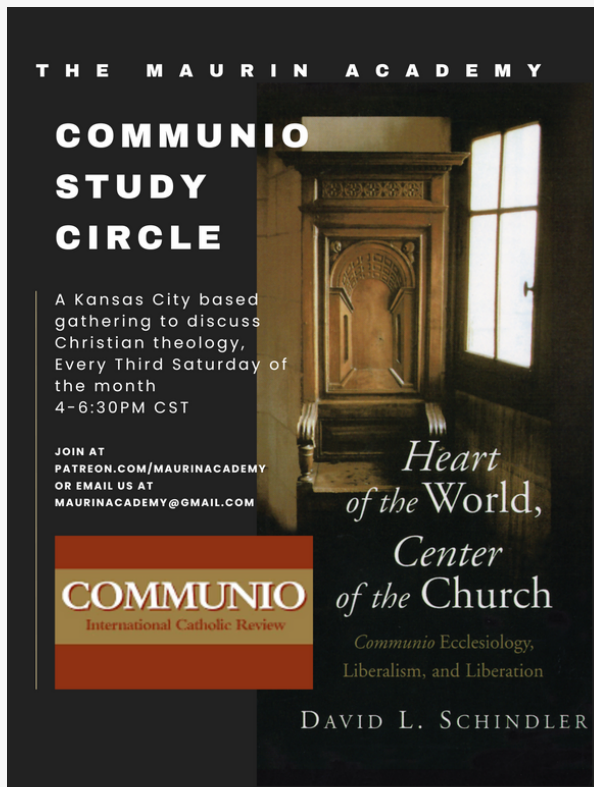
The Marx Reading Group has two important updates. First, having wrapped up the first two chapters with intensive commentary on nearly every line, we will be changing the format of the sessions. Each session will cover a pre-selected section of *Capital, Volume 1*. Jakob will spend the first 30 minutes reading and providing commentary on key portions of the selection. The rest of the session will be devoted to open-ended discussion of the portions of the text covered. Second, there are five sessions remaining in 2023. Our last session of the year will be on Wednesday, November 8th. The aim is to avoid conflicts with end-of-year travel and other commitments. Jakob plans to lead a similar reading group in 2024, but it is yet to be determined whether the group will resume with Marx or a different text.

Please take note of the schedule of the sections of *Capital* to be covered in the five remaining 2023 sessions.



Communio Study Circle

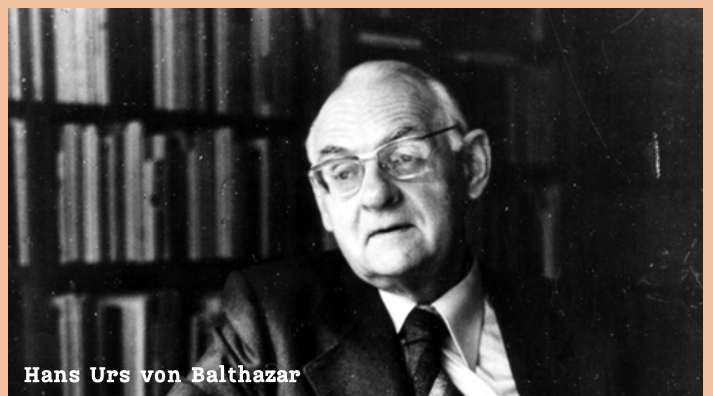
Nate Kuhl; Maurin Academy Patron and JPII
Catholic Worker Farm Volunteer



Our Kansas City-based Communio reading circle kicked off in June. We began by reading and discussing Hans Urs von Balthasar's seminal essay *Communio: A Program*, which articulates a vision of Catholic community and mission as an emergent, encompassing reality, unrestricted in scope and already existing in Christ outside of our initiative and effort. Unlike other social political projects that understand themselves as constituting the authentic movement of history from which the self-realization of humanity unfolds through force and struggle, *Communio* is an "already-but-not-yet" unity that springs from and is realized in God.

Through faith, we are able to see that the always-imminent possibility of apprehension-by-God eclipses every apparent opposition to the peace that Christ established between heaven and earth, and we are compelled to accompany Christ in advancing this communion to all.

Having grounded ourselves in Balthasar's program for ecclesiology and mission, we are now reading *Heart of the World, Center of the Church* by the late David L. Schindler. Schindler attempts to explore the implications of communion ecclesiology for Christian political theology and praxis in western, liberal society. A dialogue with and critique of Anglo-American liberalism is a primary theme. So far we've had several lively discussions on interpretations of the conciliar consensus on religious freedom, contemporary challenges around Catholic formation in the context of academic liberalism, and the theological implications of neoconservative economics. Balance between salvaging the achievements of liberalism and recognizing the social dislocation and latent atheism that seem to accompany it is a recurring discussion point!



Hans Urs von Balthasar

If the answer to that question might be obvious to Catholic Workers and their friends today, the question itself would have seemed irrational to most of us thirty years ago, because we all knew then that food came from dumpsters and that weeding a garden is a self-indulgent waste of time of irrelevant utopians with their heads in the clouds.

My advocacy for Maurin's vision comes as a surprise to Spencer because, as he says, "I had previously identified Brian as a Worker more of the Hennacy-ite persuasion."

"As something of a Maurin-ite," Spencer admits, "I can't help but feel it a tragedy that the influence of Ammon Hennacy has been effectually far more influential on actually-existing Catholic Workers than that of Peter's."

Spencer's bifurcation of the Catholic Worker movement into these two factions or sects, the Hennacy-ites on the one hand and the Maurin-ites on the other, is an unnecessary and unhelpful distinction at best, in part considering that among "actually-existing Catholic Workers," the farmers and the agitators are so often the same people. To stay with that characterization for the moment, though, it might be accurately said that Ammon Hennacy was a prominent Maurin-ite and with a bit of anachronist stretch, that Peter Maurin was an exemplary Hennacy-ite.

Focusing on Peter's insistence on a return to the land and to a craft-based economy, it is sometimes lost that he was a tireless agitator. His time on the farm was matched by his stomping city streets, leafletting, arguing, and speaking from soapboxes, rubbing shoulders with his fellow radicals of all persuasions. To know Peter Maurin is to know that he attended Mass daily, but also to know that he marched on Wall Street, on Union Square, in Harlem, that he picketed the German Consulate in protest of the rise of fascism.

Spencer is concerned, as am I, with the CW's place in history. In his own Easy Essay "A Rumpus on the Campus" in contrast to Spencer's "uneasy" one in The Restorative Review, Peter insisted:

And because history is taught
but not made
on the campus of our universities.
the Catholic Worker
is trying to make history
on Union Square,
where people have nothing to lose.

When I visited New York's Zuccotti Park at the height of Occupy Wall Street in the fall of 2011, I could only think of how excited Peter Maurin would have been to see it, how the occupiers' demands, their placards and chants, resonated with Peter's essays written decades before.

Peter, it is said, began losing his cognitive abilities around 1940, and he died in 1949. While the younger Ammon Hennacy was most prominent in the CW movement after 1950 until his death in 1970, he had known Maurin and co-founder Dorothy Day from shortly after it was founded in 1933. Ammon regarded Peter Maurin as "the second man of stature whom I had known; (anarchist Alexander) Berkman being the first." (The Book of Ammon, pg. 51, 52)

If Peter Maurin needs to be remembered as an agitator, it should also be remembered that Ammon Hennacy was a farmer and that his witness was not limited to protest. Ammon was also the movement's most vocal advocate for Peter's back-to-the-land vision at the time when it seemed most marginal, particularly in his regular "Life at Hard Labor" columns published in The Catholic Worker newspaper, often to the annoyance of the paper's more pious readers.

In the May, 1952, issue he wrote:

"It is a good thing that I like to do manual labor on the farm. A life of not paying taxes and of voluntary poverty such as I have set forth myself requires work as a basis. To talk about the dignity of labor, of life on the land, of a vegetarian in his own garden, of refusing to pay taxes, and then to mooch for a living gives a lie to all conversation. The best feeling that I have had during the past year was to look at the two rows of potatoes which I had laboriously hilled just right and planted before a storm broke over the mountains and the driving rain made me seek the refuge of my cabin."

In the aftermath of World War II, Peter Maurin was incapacitated, the pacifist CW movement was decimated by years of war, and the Great Depression that had given birth to the movement was giving way to a glut of counterfeit prosperity. Ammon Hennacy, along with Dorothy Day, were among a small minority not celebrating America's ascendancy to leader of the "free world."

Ammon was the first to fast in reparation for the destruction of Hiroshima, among the first to picket the Atomic Energy Commission's war preparations in Las Vegas, Cape Kennedy, Washington, D.C., and Omaha. This was not a departure from "Maurin-ism," it was bringing the Catholic Worker into the nuclear age.

In July 1957, while Ammon and three other Catholic Workers were in jail for 30 days for protesting nuclear war drills, Dorothy wrote in her [regular column](#):

"There is the usual complaint of some of the older readers that the paper is not what it used to be. Too much stuff about war and preparation for war, and the duty of building up resistance. But I repeat, in Peter Maurin's day, the problem was unemployment. It was the time of depression. We still need to build up the vision of a new social order wherein justice dwells, and try to work for it here and now. We still need to perform the works of mercy because in spite of full employment there is still sin, sickness and death, and the hunger and homelessness and destitution that go with so much sickness, and our industrial system. But the work of non-violent resistance to our militarist state must go on."



Dorothy Day protested nuclear testing with other Catholic Worker members in New York in 1958. Credit...Neal Boenzi/The New York Times

Dorothy should not have needed to repeat in 1957, and it should not need repeating now, that in the time of Peter's active life there were no nuclear bombs, there was no military-industrial complex. Peter, without citizenship and an undocumented laborer himself, did not live in fear of detention and deportation. There was no mass incarceration and the threat of industrialism for the climate was not known. The poverty caused by the Depression in the 1930s was not the same as the poverty accompanying the apparent prosperity of the 1950s, ill-gotten wealth that Dorothy never tired of reminding us was built on war. Peter, like Dorothy, like Ammon, like Saint Francis, like Jesus, like Jeremiah, responded to the political and social challenges of their times. We are called to do the same. Turning our faces from the evils of our present day because Peter Maurin didn't know about them is not to be a Maurin-ite.

I do resonate with Spencer's experience of the, "bleak cognitive dissonance engaging in such activity reveals between the 'nuts and bolts' of what you're actually materially accomplishing, and the type of institutions, community, and future you hope your labor is building up. It becomes increasingly hard to live in the gap between what is and what you want to be, especially when actually-existing reality is almost constantly raining (and sometimes hailing) on your parade towards paradise, you're always getting a little shorter of breath and one day closer to death."

Of course, we cannot do everything, but the suggestion that farming in the CW tradition is so all-consuming as to preclude activism is as absurd as it would be to suggest that CW farmers should not allow themselves to be distracted by liturgy and the sacraments or by parenting children. We cannot all of us be at the same time running a soup line, keeping a farm, sitting in court or in prison for acts of protest, and on a retreat. We can and must, though, all of us to the extent that we are able, be hospitable, care for the earth, and we all must stand in resistance to war and injustice.

Over the years, Catholic Worker farmers in the tradition of Maurin and Hennacy have participated in and provided leadership for protests and nonviolent direct actions against militarism, torture, the death penalty, racism, police violence, the weapons industry—all without compromising their commitments to building a life on the land.

In March of this year, young farmers were integral to planning the protests against the F-35 fighter-bombers at the Midwest Catholic Worker Faith and Resistance Retreat in Madison, Wisconsin, and over Holy Week several CW farmers took part in the annual Sacred Peace Walk from Las Vegas to the nuclear test site, some of us facing criminal charges as a result. In August, I was privileged to join dedicated Maurin-ites from several countries, resisting U.S. nuclear weapons at NATO bases in Germany and the Netherlands. In 1936, announcing the first CW farm, Dorothy wrote, “We believe that our words will have more weight, our writings will have more conviction, if we ourselves are engaged in making a better life on the land.” I am just as convinced that the example of our life on the land will have more weight, more conviction, if we ourselves are engaged in work for justice and peace.

Spencer raises a crucial question: “What if the efforts of ‘historic’ proportions required for a network of local farms to thrive would require (among many other things) compromising on some of the until now pre-supposed sacred tenets of Catholic Worker-hood?”

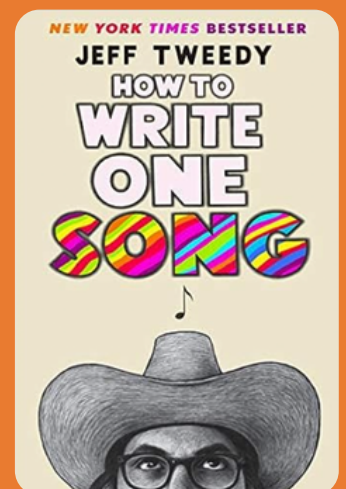
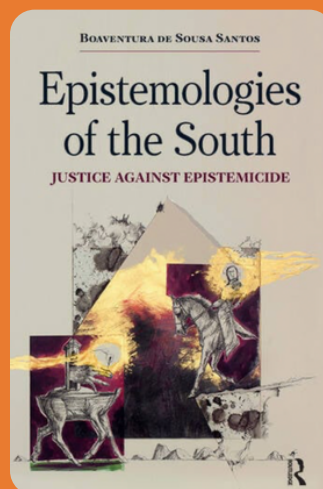
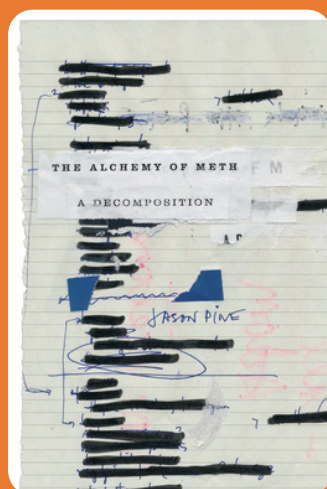
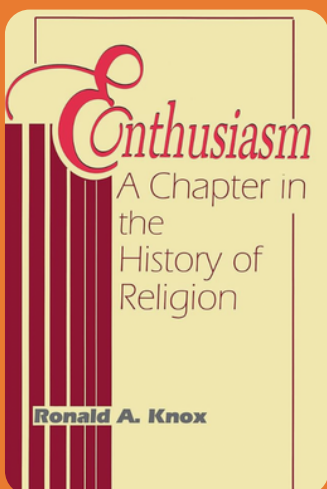
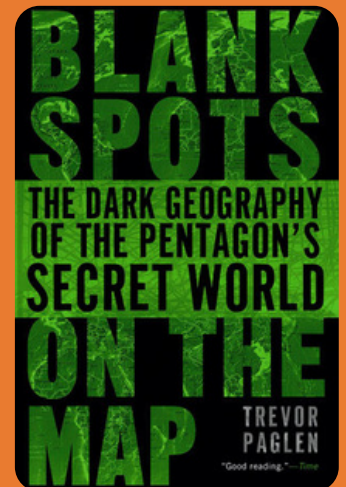
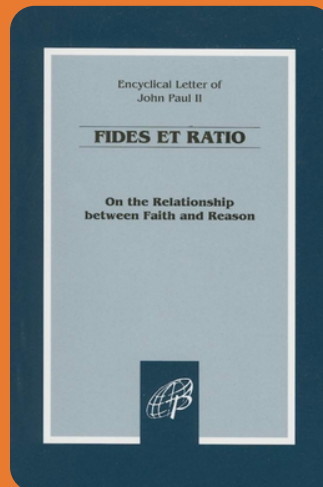
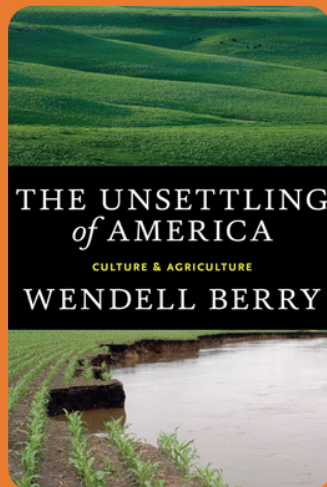
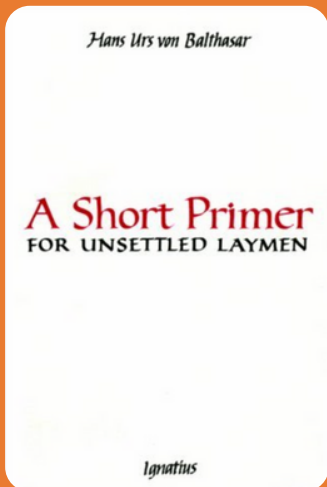
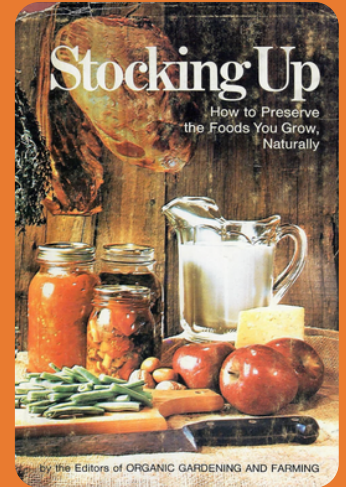
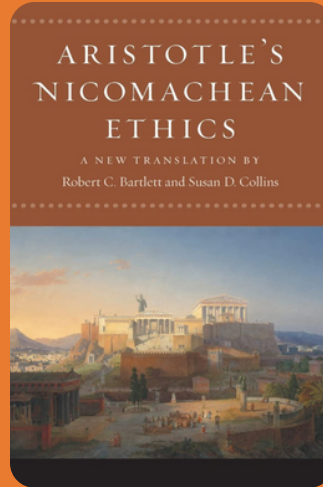
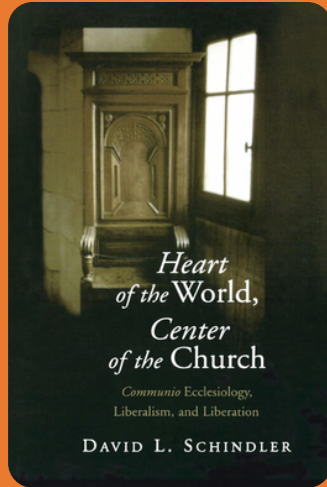
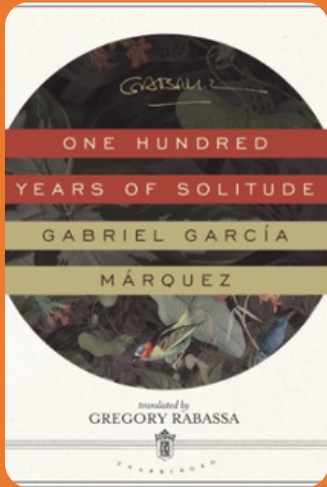
Catholic Workers believing that they can use Peter Maurin’s “green revolution” or Dorothy Day’s “revolution of the heart” as excuses for not protesting militarism and injustice is one pre-supposed sacred tenet of Catholic Worker-hood that will have to go. If our movement is to reach its historic potential, the divisive and ill-informed pitting of supposed Hennacy-ites against supposed Maurin-ites in our movement needs to stop. The movement will need to throw off the “false religiosity” that Dorothy condemned, the comforting lie that there is no need to protest injustices, that we can serve soup and weed the garden while we quietly “live in this social order as it is, and settle down to an acceptance of it, and seek to save our souls by prayer and suffering alone.” Catholic Worker communities that have no critique of global war and systemic violence, or who keep theirs secret, will need to speak out and pay the price for that witness.

Peter Maurin’s vision was not one of withdrawal but of engagement. A “back to the land” movement that is not in solidarity with protest and resistance will make itself irrelevant. It will never be “the dynamic revolutionary social force it was meant to be.”



Terrell in the custody of the Royal Dutch Constabulary, protesting U.S. nuclear weapons at Volkel Air Base in the Netherlands on the anniversary of the destruction of Nagasaki, August 9.

What we've been Reading



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