

Letter #9 and #9-A
Diane Has a Baby

Diane was 16, had been on and off the street for over a year. Gruff-voiced, big black eyes, time for everyone, and the saltiest of language. Example: Joe who had some deficiencies in nature and nurture had been gone three days to Florida. Nobody missed him or cared, not even Diane. On the street nobody says goodbye. But when he appeared again at the Deli, she noticed his expectant look for hellos and raising her stentorian tonsils to command all ears, she demanded: "Joe, you m.f. where the hell have you been? I've been worried sick". Joe was aglow. He had been missed. Diane moved on to other duties. That's the way she was. She was also pregnant. "2 months she opined." "8 months" I demurred. We checked. The doctor was aghast. 8 it was.

A week later I heard her familiar "Hi Father Paul, ol'pal, ol'pal". Now at 2 AM I should be able to trace a voice to a place. No where! "Up here". On top of a telephone booth! Cleverly I asked "what are you doing up there, you mumbler?" "I'm getting the frisbie for them two boys. It came up here and they didn't know how to get it so I got it and now I can't get down". With the help of the two zombies and one cop and one manager and 2 girls, we derricked her down. "No sweat". She went off to get a coke and meet some more friends.

In the delivery room, she became serene, awestruck, but still wise-cracking. They held up the baby and then broke up at her animadversions. Reverently, seriously she exclaimed: looking at her baby: "Wow, far out, dynamite...outasight". I lost a two dollar bet; he wasn't born with a hamburger in his mouth. All this by word of mouth since I was gone when she had the baby. Her parents took the child in; she flipped out on bad acid, and is now in a mental hospital.

They do steal. In fact they rob us blind. Not just street kids but this whole generation. Ask a store detective. For a succinct and perhaps over-simplified answer to a complex question, I would say they are in reaction to our over-stress on things vs. people, property vs. humanity. They do not cherish the property right when 90% of property is held by 10% of people. Wrong? Perhaps, but have you heard what priests and nuns are saying in South America? Private property is theft when you have many loaves and your neighbor is dying of starvation.

"Aren't they immoral?" Hang on, this must be the chapter on sex! Immorality and sexual excesses are almost synonymous in the adult Christian American mind. No, they are more moral than any previous generation with which I've worked. That is, if people are more moral who have higher standards, who don't hypocritically speak one way and customarily act another. They have a different scale of values to be sure; they consider racism a greater sin than "impurity". They commit "sins" against our hawkism. They consider excluding people to be worse than sexually touching people. They believe that using the drug marijuana is no worse than using the drug alcohol. Many times reaction is over-reaction. Especially when you are young and all your heroes are dead or exposed frauds.

As Pogo says: "We have met the enemy and he is us", or "We are the People our Parents warned Us against" - by Von Hoffman.

Letter #9-A
A Sermon

Since I am a Priest you might excuse a bit of a sermon especially when it is to take a poke at my own church.

For years now when I have attended folk Masses in various sections of the country, I invariably come upon a poster or banner announcing: "See these Christians; how they love one another". Many have come to think that this is a sign of a Christian. But I suggest to you that it is the sign of a good pagan. If you love those who love you, Jesus warned, you are no better than the pagans or the tax-gatherers. But I say to you, love those who do not love you--- He might have added: those with long hair, a different life style, a concept of patriotism not like yours, a yardstick of sexual morality which has different rulings than yours, (and hasn't yours changed in the last few years anyway?), a different sexual orientation than you who are lucky to be heterosexual, another skin color, who don't value highly your hierarchy of values which places cleanliness next to godliness and industry, efficiency, continency, and smug complacent status next to cleanliness, love the poor and the affluvia, the outcast and the despised, the lonely and the disenfranchised. Then perhaps you will know what it means to be a Christian.

I submit that Catholics in general love those who do not love them, only from afar, antiseptically, theoretically and really not at all. When a man is starving you can hand him a fish or teach him how to fish. Only this year have the Bishops realized that and in their fund drive begun to recognize that our fish-giving was perpetuating the very ills which brought about the need.

"Go in peace" read the banner over the altar of the street kids church, "and may the peace of Christ disturb you profoundly". Only when Catholics become profoundly disturbed will there be peace--disturbed with their officialdom which keeps silent even from the cursed day when Constantine stopped persecuting Her and allied church and state, disturbed with a creed so watered down that any racist or hater of the poor, or killer of children can be a pillar in her halls, disturbed with a church so lacking in courage to confront and criticize the administration that she has come to be considered by the conservative politician as a good friend, disturbed by a church which claims moral leadership but is always five years behind the kids of this country in knowing and exposing immorality in government.

Only when Catholics become disturbed that the real heroes like the Berrigans are aberrations rather than typical Priests will there be peace. When adult Catholics stop telling kids: "it was good enough for me" and start to make it good enough for them. "What's so precious about these kids anyway", I'm often asked, "that they know so much about morality and justice and hypocrisy and we didn't?" The question usually is asked sarcastically and betrays an envy and jealousy instead of pride in the kids we have reared. Why didn't we see it? TV has much to do with it. Progress, leisure; many things. What matter? It is a superfluous question. The point is that they knew, and we punished them for saying it; - that the war was immoral, that C.O. was demanded, that poor people are not poor because they are lazy, that grape workers are unjustly treated, that Catholic communities are almost invariably lily white racist communities, etc. And we still haven't criticized our moral leaders for being the last to know these things. There is no leadership, except here and there a Helder Camara, the Dutch hierarchy, the Bishops of Capetown, So. Africa. If a kid is on fire and thirsting for peace and justice, blessed is he but he must look elsewhere for channels and encouragement than the staid, orderly, uptight, conforming, out of it, establishment we call the Church.

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The Catholic Church is a racist organization. Says who? Say the black priests and nuns who have given their lives to the church and to God as surely as has your parish priest. And now we have a new nigger- - - the long haired, bizarrely dressed young person. We will one day stand accused of the same intransigent, irrational and unjust, therefore unchristian reaction to the new nigger, as will our forebears for the original nigger.

Thought for the Day:

"To think that one can give the Christian message and not have the world with its monolithic, post-Christian culture bear down on us is not to understand the fierceness of the battle in such a day as Jeremiah's or such a day as our own."

Francis Schaeffer - Death in the City.

The Catholic not in jeopardy today is probably not a Christian.

Is the world bearing down on the Catholic Church? Far from it. Then what are we to think of the Christian message - is it held in abeyance? Then why condemn our kids when they look elsewhere?

"We can do without them" said an elderly lady of long-hairs dropping out.

But you see, my friend, the awesome, rending reality is -
we can't. We dare not even try.

Father Paul