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NEW YORK GRAPHIC SOCIETY
Greenwich, Connecticut

October 15, 1958

Mrs. John Van Nostrand Dorr
Washington, Connecticut

Dear Mrs. Dorr:

Let me say first of all that we all enjoyed tremendously our visit with you on Sunday. Everything conspired to make it more than just an ordinary nice lunch in the country. I think there was something in the air to give that day a special sense of importance. Even the boys felt it and enjoyed themselves in more than just a nice adolescent animal way. Jackie and I of course were enchanted with your lovely house and the things you have collected to make it so beautiful inside. I hope this first meeting will lead to others and I trust they will be on the subject of your book, THE BARE FEET, to which I will now turn my thoughts.

The most important thing about the book I feel is the total concept which you have developed as a person about these humble people, be they Mexicans or Chinese or Indians. It takes an artist to see to the heart of things and this you have done. These people are important, and they are important as they are and for what they are. They belong in the world. But they are uneasily poised really between two worlds: one, the world of their old customs and way of life and religion; the other the world that is rushing so madly towards we know not what via the road of modern science and technology.

I don't think such a book as yours should try to do too much. For instance, it cannot possibly answer the questions it raises and produce a solution to the problems faced by its people. It should devote itself to making the clearest and most eloquent and beautiful statement possible with utter simplicity and with blazing truth and logic.

How can this be done? You are right---the camera alone is not quite enough. But the camera is almost enough, as it was once upon a time with the old silent movies where an occasional caption kept the thread of the story alive and carried along the action. We should depend upon the camera for eloquence, for poignancy, for beauty, for anxiety, for sweetness, for dignity, and for the grace and strength of the very humbleness of the people with the bare feet. I believe the camera can show them to a certain extent being uprooted and torn away from the familiar things of their way of life as you have already so well indicated in a few photographs. But I believe

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Mrs. John Van Nostrand Dorr
Westport, Connecticut

that in this case the words must provide the dynamic quality of the book in that they compel the reader to understand the awful moment that is upon the civilized world. The reader must feel and experience this in his body kinetically, and that is what the photographs will do; but he must have the truth written upon the tablets of his mind.

Unless my memory is at fault in THE FAMILY OF MAN there were captions of a sort indicating the contents of the pictures and carrying the spectator into them. But I do not mean that we should stop here. I feel the captions for your pictures will come gradually into being as we become more deeply involved in the process of making the book.

To be somewhat more practical for a moment let me suggest that the pictorial contents of the book be enlarged with more photographs, and I know that you have some wonderful material that is not in the dummy to do this with. Let me also ask you if you could send me a copy of the text of the book just as you have written it for me to study and think about. I feel that I may be able to suggest something here after studying it apart from the photographs. And one last thought for the moment. Have you considered making an exhibition on the subject and theme of THE BARE FEET built around the same idea as the book?

As I told you Sunday I would hope to come and see you again and discuss the book together with you sometime fairly soon. I would like to bring along one of the directors of our company, Herbert Schutz, about whom I have already spoken.

Meanwhile let me say that I believe in the book very much. I feel that it is fine artistically and deeply needed as a strong statement on the side of the angels in todays' fantastic battle of words and ideas.

With best personal regards,

Sincerely,

Burton Cumming

Burton Cumming
Director of Publication

BC:jgc