

## Robert Pickus – a life lived vocationally

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I didn't keep very accurate daybooks in the first years of my professional life, so I'm not sure whether I first met Robert Pickus in November 1976 or May 1977. Perhaps we can sort it out someday. Whenever that meeting was, it was surely one of the three or four most important in my life.

A veteran of the OSS in World War II, "Pick" (as everyone called him) had done doctoral studies in political theory during the University of Chicago's glory years; as a graduate student, he worked with Mortimer Adler on the "Great Books of the Western World," with a special interest in what the "great ideas" said about revolution and war. He then migrated to Berkeley, where he launched a series of peace organizations that culminated in the World Without War Council. I became Scholar-in-Residence at the Council's Seattle office in 1977 and began twelve years of intense collaboration with a most remarkable man.

It was Pick, a Jew, who reminded me that, since Augustine, Catholicism had conceived of peace as the "tranquillity of order" – the fruit of law and politics. It was Pick, a pacifist, who showed me, a theologian committed to the just war tradition, how these two moral commitments could be harnessed when work for peace focused on building legal and political alternatives to war rather than on attacking America's alleged "militarism."

It was Pick who insisted that peace and freedom are inseparable and who convinced me to think about human rights in a disciplined way, rather than labeling every social good a "right." It was Pick, who had opposed both Hanoi's war and the U.S. war in Vietnam, who persuaded me that America could lead in pursuit of a world governed by law and politics rather than by mass violence – even as he understood that, in getting from here to there, proportionate and discriminate armed force would have to be used when other remedies had failed.

And it was Pick who encouraged me to apply for a year-long fellowship at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, then housed at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. I thought he was crazy: how could a thirty-two year old defrocked academic working for an organization with the improbable name "World Without War Council" possibly land one of the plumb sabbatical positions in American intellectual life? He insisted it could be done, and, with the help of several other friends, it was.

So Pick, in effect, sent me to Washington, where we worked together another three years in a sister-organization of the World Without War Council, the James Madison Foundation. If I've survived the Washington scene for almost twenty years, it's in part due to Pick's teaching me more than I ever learned from school about the ways in which non-governmental organizations and government interact in the complex formation of public will and public policy.

In all of this, I've come to revere Robert Pickus as a man of singular vocational integrity. A half-century ago, he discerned what he was to do with his life. He was to build what he came to call "a peace effort worthy of the name," one that cherished American democracy, stoutly resisted communism and other forms of tyranny, defended civil rights and political freedoms, understood the imperfections of this world, didn't make excuses for leftist revolutionary violence, honored the rule of law, acknowledged the present failures and corruptions of international organizations and worked steadily on their reform.

Pick would be the last person to claim success in this endeavor. Much of what calls itself "work for peace" in the United States today disturbs him – even appalls him. And yet he persists in building a "peace effort worthy of the name," while also turning his still formidable energies to questions of citizenship-education and citizen-formation in the America he loves as perhaps only the son of immigrants can.

I've often thought it appropriate that Pick's birthday should be October 31 – a day short of All Saints' Day. He's not a saint, yet. But he's getting there. And as he prepares for his eightieth birthday this coming All Hallows' Eve, I thank the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus that we met.