

More About Cuba

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Summary: A response to critics who view the Catholic Worker as pro-Marxist-Leninist. Reflects on the Catholic Worker's role in the Church. Affirms the need to listen to the truth, whatever the source, and the need for spiritual weapons and nonviolent means to overcome evil. (DDLW #247).

Last month the National Council of Catholic Men, with the consent of the Bishops of the United States, were making a documentary on the Catholic Worker movement, a week's work of filming to be condensed into a one-half hour of television time on a Sunday morning in this coming September on the program, Look Up and Live.

One of the questions asked of a group of the editors sitting in the third floor office on Chrystie Street was, "Do you agree with everything that is written in The Catholic Worker?"

As I remember it, all of them answered "No," and I would have given the same answer myself, if I had been asked. But I was there just to introduce the others.

On another occasion the chancellor of the archdiocese of New York asked me if I saw everything that went into the Catholic Worker, for which after all I am responsible as editor and publisher. I told him yes, and that is true with few exceptions, when the paper was printed during my absence, and the material coming in late was used at once, assuming my approval. Perhaps on two or three occasions I disapproved of the emphasis given by the placing of material, as well as by the articles themselves. But no great harm was done.

Cardinal Hayes sent us word years ago, through Monsignor Chidwick that he approved our good work, and it was to be understood that we would make mistakes and the thing was not to persist in them. On another occasion Cardinal Spellman expressed approval of some of the aspects of our work, though it is undoubtedly true that there are many aspects of it which he is probably very dubious about, if not downright disapproving. The fact remains that we have been given, from the very first, the freedom which it is to be expected we laymen should take in handling temporal affairs, which after all is our province. That is a great gift. It seems to me that if the **Catholic Worker** did nothing else but indicate to critics the enormous freedom there is in the Church, which laymen so far have not taken advantage of, it is doing a good job.

A few months ago when I had a visit with Cardinal Leger in Montreal and he asked me about the position of the Catholic Worker in the church, I replied that we were a group of Catholics, engaged in writing and editing a paper dealing with the great problems of the day—the role of the State in man’s life, war and peace, means and ends. That we had no chaplains, were in no way an organization included in Catholic Action, that we were under no bishop, and that we were therefore free to explore all possibilities of reform and restoration without committing the hierarchy to dangerous positions, and to try to rebuild the social order to make a better society “where it is easier for men to be good.” To be good men, to be holy men is to be whole men, living a full life, developing all their capacities for good, using the talents God has given them.

The Cardinal had been looking at me from under his heavy brows, his deep set eyes scarcely visible. But when he lifted his head he smiled and commented, “St. John the Baptist.”

We are among those who go ahead and prepare the way. This long preliminary is to indicate that we are Catholics in good standing, that we revere our clergy and are not hesitant to speak to the clergy. To print the criticism of others is not to mean that we are anticlerical. We are reporting events and the point of view which led to these events.

Of course we are not in agreement with the most basic and fundamental point of view as expressed by our friend Mario Gonzales in his letter. (It was our printer who put that bold black box around the letter which makes it stand out and which gives it so much prominence. And after all, it is a letter dealing with an issue of terrible importance.)

First of all we must quote Lenin, “Atheism is an integral part of Marxism.” We therefore are not Marxist Leninists. At the same time, we admit to being fascinated by the story of the lives of both Marx and Lenin. We advise our readers to read such a book as “Three Who Made a Revolution” by Bertram Wolfe to understand what I mean. Having heard Trotsky speak back in 1917 at Cooper Union and having interviewed him with another reporter from the *New York Call* who spoke Russian, I was doubly interested in the story of Trotsky, that tragic life ended by an assassin. To be interested in a Garibaldi, a Napoleon, a Castro is to be interested in men who have made and are making history, and to be inspired furthermore by their zeal, their study, their hard labors and to say again and again that until we ourselves as followers of Christ abjure the use of war as a means of achieving justice and truth, we Catholics are going to get nowhere, in criticizing men who are using war to change the social order. Too often, as Cardinal Mundelein said once, we will find ourselves on the wrong side.

We agree of course with the letter’s utter condemnation of the Cuban invasion of a year ago, and the deception of the American people by both President Kennedy and Adlai Stevenson, who had too much conscience and not enough ruthlessness to be all-out villains and make a thorough job of it. So it failed, as it was bound to fail in the long run even if it had been successful at once.

There are all manner of ways of resisting the enemy in an occupied country, and I am not talking about sabotage and destruction either. I am talking about the resistance the Christian ought to give, to be trained to give, with non violence, with Christian love, with what cooperation can be given in all things which are for the common good.

What if men are stripped of their goods? "If a man takes your cloak give your coat too." It is good to be compelled to practice the poverty (not destitution) which is the ideal of the Christian life and most in conformity with the life of Jesus Christ. There is many a young priest throughout the world, and old ones too, caught in the System, going along with building laws, State requirements, involved with building operations, financing, interest, debts—wearing their lives away building ever bigger buildings and institutions while the institution of the family and the poor are left to the state to care for. There is too little personal contact with the poor. See Pius XII Christmas Message 1952.

Helen C. White's book, **To the End of the World** is about the French revolution but she confessed to me that she wrote it for our time. In that book there were priests and bishops who fled to other countries and tried to stir up armed intervention. And there were those who stayed, who went to prison. The head of the Sulpicians sat in jail and said, "Now I have the time to study St. Thomas!"

In our own day the persecution in Mexico was overcome by nonviolence and civil disobedience. The French in Canada live in what to them is an occupied country and hold on to their language and religion and culture. It is the U.S. with press and cinema which corrupts them.

The Church cannot be destroyed, the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. At the same time we recognize the fact that in England the Catholic religion was wiped out so that only a remnant remained. All the Bishops but one went with the State at that time.

Over and over again we hear that such a technique as nonviolence, voluntary poverty, suffering, and prayer and fasting are too heroic weapons to expect the laity to use. And yet in our time they are compelled to use them, and without the training and preparation necessary to such heroism. In the life of the family heroic virtue is expected, in accepting from the hand of God each child sent or accepting continence or celibacy within marriage. The teaching of the Church in regard to marriage and its indissolubility demands over and over again heroic sanctity. And in both cases without the help of the teaching of voluntary poverty and the mutual aid which maternity guilds and credit unions in the parish could give.

Above all, we need to hear more and more about the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ. "We are all members, one of another. Where the health of one member suffers, the health of the entire body is lowered." "An injury to one is an injury to all," the old I.W.'s used to say. We are all members or potential members of the body of Christ, St. Augustine said. And since there is

no time with God, this includes Chinese, Russians, Cubans and yes, even those who profess Marxism-Leninism.

And why else did we print the letter besides our feeling that it presented authentic news from Cuba, giving the actual feeling of a great many of the people. It admits to the Leninist orientation and tells us that parochial schools are all closed and that the clergy have no newspapers and magazines in which to express themselves.

To speak frankly, this is a wonderful opportunity for the Catholic press to practice the silence of the Trappist, using another spiritual weapon. Baron von Hugel, a great Catholic laymen and theologian said once that he was in danger of losing his faith if he read the diocesan press. I can understand such a remark when I read some of the hymns of hate and the Hearstlike editorials, in some of the papers.

In none of the letters sent to us in protest was there recognition of the fact that the writer, Gonzales, was as much opposed in his own way to the Marxist-Leninist position as we ourselves. His position is that of the anarchist, pleading for the principle of subsidiarity, calling for "secular monasticism," using that expression when speaking to the clergy in order to make them understand the idea of farming communes, or collectives, or cooperative farms.

What has not been done voluntarily has now been done with the revolution, by force of arms, by confiscation, though the Castro regime has offered to pay, over the years, for the property nationalized. (Little attention has been paid to such offers.)

I must assure Mario Gonzales that I would not be teaching "socialist morality of generosity and sacrifice," but would certainly try to speak always in terms of the generosity and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, our brother and our God.

Gonzales says, "a good Catholic can easily accept the"materialist" doctrine of paradise on earth." He probably was remembering my oft quoted line from St. Catherine of Sienna, "All the Way to Heaven is Heaven, because He said, I am the Way."

As for the bitterness of soul expressed by Mario, I confess that I too have felt that bitterness, but at the same time felt self judged. I too am immersed in comforts, in luxury even, with enough food to eat, a roof over my head, even the means to travel, thanks to people who pay my way. I know that people look at me and judge me with the same harshness as the clergy are judged. "How hard it is "to be what you want the other fellow to be"asPeter Maurin used to comment when criticisms were hurled about.

I must confess that righteous wrath as well as any kind of wrath wearies me. Rebellion too, I find exhausting. To grow in love, to rejoice, to be happy and thankful even, that we are living in such parlous times and not just benefiting unwittingly by the toil and suffering of others – rejoicing even that there is every sign that we are going to be given a chance to expiate here and now for our

sins of omission and commission – and so to help the revolution and convert the revolutionaries. This is a dream worth dreaming, and the only kind of a vision powerful enough to stand side by side with the Marxism-Leninism which with its vision is working out in our day the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor.