

On Pilgrimage - February 1967

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Summary: Remembers the work of A.J. Muste for peace and justice at his death. Supports demonstrators against the Vietnam War who disrupt a Mass, saying, however, she would not have participated. Regrets her age keeps her from working for peace in Vietnam as a nurse. (DDLW #847).

The Rev. A.J. Muste, known to all of us in the peace movement as A.J., is dead. The name Abraham means Father of a multitude, and he was that. If the peace movement in the United States had one outstanding figure it was A.J., and God gave him length of days to work. He was eighty-two years old when he died and many of us had seen him that last week of his life. Tuesday, the day of the blizzard, A.J. and sixty-one others were due to appear in court at Centre Street, to answer to a number of charges, beginning with “breach of the peace” and “conspiring to commit breach of the peace.” In addition, there was a warrant out for A.J.’s arrest for failing to show up for one of the previous hearings on this charge. He had been in Hanoi at the time talking to Ho Chi Minh, together with an Anglican Archbishop Reeves, Martin Niemöller, and Rabbi Feinberg. The offense had been committed on December 15th and it was now February 7th and he had been around the world in that time, traveling to the ends of the earth, one might say, in search of peace.

The morning of the storm we awoke to find the city blanketed. No cars were running as we looked out of our windows at Kenmare Street, no trucks, and there was a most delightful silence and a most beautiful whiteness over the usually blackened city. Tom Cornell, of the Catholic Peace Fellowship, called up to tell us he would be over in his little Volkswagen to get us through, somehow, to the court, which is only about a mile away. And when he had delivered us, he went to Robert Gilmore’s apartment on Eleventh Street, where A.J. was staying, to pick him up. It had been a bitter cold day on December 15th, when the group of sixty-two, led by A.J., stood on the steps of the recruiting station at Whitehall Street down at the foot of the canyon which was Broadway not far from the bitter gales of the harbor, sang Christmas carols, and called for peace. I was reminded of one of the antiphons in the breviary “Through all the earth their voice resounds, and to the ends of the world their message.”

The courtroom scene ended that day with suspended sentences for some and a continuation of the case for others, and Tom Cornell drove A.J. back home.

Saturday morning saw him stricken with a heart attack. He was taken to St. Luke's hospital where he died in the early evening. Sunday he was to have met with Archbishop Helder Camara of Recife, Brazil.

On Monday, February 13th, he was to have spoken at Community Church with David Dellinger, and Barbara Deming about their recent visits to Hanoi and the meeting turned into a memorial meeting instead.

A.J. was founder and director of Brookwood Labor College at Katonah, New York. (The Reuther Brothers were alumni.) He had not only opposed war since 1918 but also had served the cause of labor, becoming involved in textile strikes in New England and in New Jersey and was arrested for picketing both in Lawrence, Massachusetts and Paterson, New Jersey.

Peter Maurin and I first met him when he took over the directorship of the old Presbyterian Labor Temple where he served from 1937 to 1940. As I remember it, the Labor Temple on the corner of Fourteenth Street and Second Avenue, functioned then

as Community Church does now, and Peter Maurin felt that here was a beginning of what he called a new synthesis, an attempt to apply the teachings of the Gospel to the world today, the world around us. Above all, A.J. felt that war could not be reconciled with the spirit of Christ. "War does not bring peace, it merely breeds more wars," he said.

The thing that marked him especially was his relationship to the young. He listened to them and they listened to him, well "over thirty" though he was. He never judged the young, nor criticized them. He criticized the social order and by his writing as well as by his actions, tried to bring about a change in that social order. He walked on picket lines,

he trespassed on missile bases, he was to be found in courtrooms and in jails as well as in the lecture hall and behind the editorial desk. He truly worked to make that kind of a world where it is easier to be good.

Mass Protest

Who are they, these 23 young people who went into the Cathedral on Fifth Avenue, while a score or so others picketed outside, at the ten o'clock Sunday Mass late in January, all with signs folded up underneath their coat? At the offertory, right after the sermon, they got up from their aisle seats where they had been following the ritual of the

Mass, and displaying their signs, started to walk down the center aisle. The signs read, THOU SHALT NOT KILL.

At the same time twice twenty-three detectives tore the signs from their hands and hurried the protestors out of the Cathedral. The story made the front pages of the **New York Times** and also was repeated again and again on

radio (we do not have a television so I do not know whether there was such covering then or later.) Aside from the tearing up of the signs there was no disorder, but all was accomplished with such dispatch that those who took part did not think that any of the congregation saw either signs or those who carried them. Announcement had just been made from the altar or pulpit however, that the congregation should remain calm, and later the charge was made that the parishioners experienced “emotional upset.”

“We would have torn them apart,” one old Italian woman in our neighborhood said, “if that had happened at old St. Patrick’s,” which I for one doubt. There is a strong anarchistic streak in all Italians. This neighborhood is their village, not to be confounded with Greenwich or East Village, and they have their own government of streets and neighborhood associations. In a way they are used to us, we have lived in Little Italy so long (fifteen years on Mott Street) and right now, the ten apartments the Catholic Workers family live in are just off Mott or Mulberry Streets. Once eight years ago when I had been arrested for protesting compulsory air raid drills and was about to be sentenced together with a dozen others, the pastor at old St. Patrick’s asked me to speak at a Mother’s Day communion breakfast, and when I told him I might be in jail at the time, he told me the invitation stood, and I was able to give the talk.

There would have been no occasion for such a demonstration at Mott Street’s old St. Patrick’s because it was the nationalist attitude of Cardinal Spellman which the young people were protesting. “My country, right or wrong,” he had said, And “Nothing less than total victory... This is a war for civilization.”

According to the **Village Voice**, one of the defendants, Richard Lourie, said that each of the detectives had a typewritten slip of paper with offenses listed: unlawful assembly, disturbing a religious meeting, creating a public nuisance, conspiracy and disorderly conduct. “But after we were there several hours a more serious charge was added, unlawful entry. The police were very polite but we didn’t have anything to eat until seven o’clock when they fed us bread with marmalade and a cup of cocoa.”

Could this be possible? In all the jail experiences around the Catholic Worker and a number of the editors have been jailed, we never had more than tea and two slices of bread with a slice of bologna between that tasted like rubber bands. Could it have been that the chancery office provided this little treat, marmalade and cocoa,—perhaps suffering from misgivings at their harshness?

I had not been at all shocked myself at the action of this group, all of whom knew each other, and who were part of larger groups protesting against the war in Vietnam. Catholics themselves, in stories of the lives of saints, have been guilty of much more violent behavior. His own monks tried to poison St. Benedict and there was scandalous behavior within the monastery itself, as a protest then against the so-called rigor of the saint. There must have been an awful fuss made too when St. Francis insisted on offering up the holy Sacrifice at Christmas in a stable.

One might say the chancery office behaved too harshly, and the judge later in the day did nothing to increase the respect of the protestors for law and order, with his innuendoes. At least ten of those arrested taught at New York University, New York and Brooklyn Community Colleges, New School, and Fairleigh Dickinson, and it was a first arrest for all but two, and they had been arrested in previous demonstrations.

I have always been struck by the unconscious esteem in which the Church is held, and the shock people feel when churchmen and Christians in general do not live up to their

professions of faith. I can remember thinking, over forty years ago, before I was a Catholic, “What is this Church that people can say of those who profess membership in it, ‘And he is a Catholic’! in tones of condemnation because they were not living up to their professions of belief?” It was so, I felt, that Cardinal Spellman was being judged. It was one thing for him to be visiting the soldiers, so far away from home and family Christmas time, but for him to **not love his enemy**, the so-called enemy,—not to follow the peace-directives of the Holy Father, Pope Paul V...

It is heartbreaking to think how often we all dishonor God the Father of us all, by not acting as though we believed that God was Father of all, that all men are brothers. As St. Paul wrote, “Because of you, the name of God is dishonored among the Gentiles.”

I would not have participated in this demonstration—could it not be that these young people felt a sense of God’s presence there, a sense of worship, of awe too, as I have always felt in church, a place set apart for worship? No, I would not myself have chosen

such a place for a demonstration, but I have permitted my name to be used by the group in their effort to raise funds to defend themselves.

Houses of Hospitality

During the month we had a visit from Michael Cullen and his wife and a student from Marquette University, Maryjo Rozycki, who is majoring in Latin American history and has spent the last three summers in Mexico. It was one of the most stimulating visits we

have had for some time, not only because of their vivid personalities, but because they epitomized for us some of the problems of the day and of the CW movement. To begin with Maryjo: here was a student who was really studying, and devoting her young zeal and health to cultivating that attraction she felt for seeking solutions to the particular problems relating to hunger and health and education in this hemisphere and preparing herself to give service and dedication to this work in the world. I did not ask her if she was working on grants or scholarships, although I should have. These might seem like personal questions, but the

problems of poverty beset students everywhere, and to have no money for education, for subsistence during these years of study is a heartbreaking problem with many students. No use talking about state loans or scholarships; students may have great talents which are not brought out by our competitive system. Anyone who has children or grandchildren will know what I mean. And in how many fields knowledgeable laymen are needed! Even in the field of teaching itself, how few good teachers there are, who love their work and love their students. Where there is a good teacher it would be worthwhile to travel to the ends of the earth to find him, to sit at his feet and to open up one's mind to know, to learn. I can remember one such teacher, Dr. Matheson, at Robert Walter High School in Chicago, who taught us Latin and history in our third and fourth years and who so encouraged us that we accepted his offer to study Greek after school for four afternoons a week. I remember one frivolous creature who looked and often acted as though boys were the only subject she was interested in, taking this course with the deepest interest.

Casa Maria, Milwaukee

The Casa Maria is the name of the new house in Milwaukee where Michael Cullen and his wife live. In January there were five families there, staying until they could find a place to live, and ten single men. "Believe it or not," Michael writes in the editorial of the **Casa Maria Cry**, a bulletin the house puts out, "we have enough food for all. But of course there is always a shortage of milk with fourteen children and two expectant mothers in the house."

One of the biggest jobs at the Casa Maria is to try to find homes for families; as in all other cities, housing is the greatest problem. The housing situation is worse now than when we in New York started the work in 1934. The four-room apartments we used to live in, have been chopped up into two-room apartments and the rents have increased enormously.

Casa Maria publishes a mimeographed bulletin which our readers in the midwest should send for. In fact all who are interested in houses of hospitality should send for it.

Address, 1112 South Third Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 53204.

Chicago

Michael was making a little tour of houses through the country, and he had already visited Karl Meyer's St. Stephen House in Chicago, but he had missed the Peter Maurin House, which had faithfully provided thousands of nights' lodging for men over the years, and who daily feeds the men on West Madison Street from a truck-canteen every night. Bob Bosshart has kept his leadership in this place for many years, and though there

is no “ideology” expressed verbally, the most fundamental of the works of mercy are being performed, feeding the hungry, sheltering the harborless.

Detroit

Michael visited Louis Murphy and the two houses of hospitality in Detroit, putting up at Martha House at 1818 Leverette Street. There had been two other houses, run by young people but they are not operating now. Dan Shay ran one house for a few years but is now married and living at the farm at South Lyons, Michigan—a farm given The Catholic Worker by Maryknoll Fr. Hessler years ago, and now is divided between four or five families. Lou’s farmhouse is a house of hospitality on the land, and countless are the activities carried on there over the years.

Houses have begun and ended in other cities in Michigan and in other parts of the country too and the cause may be urban renewal, new highways, or the presence of some discouraging soul who casts a blight on all around so that the project is given up. It takes a certain temperament to keep a house of hospitality going.

Boston

Our visitors had also been to Boston, Massachusetts where they visited Cathie and John McKenna. Catherine Sullivan had been one of the leaders in the Young Christian Students before her work in the peace movement put her in the vanguard of the apostolate, one might say, and removed her from organized “Catholic Action” where clerical influence is too often nationalist.

John McKenna is a teacher, but involuntary servitude (conscriptio) will be catching up with him soon. I have heard that he will accept alternative service, as David Miller’s brother did, but we have had no direct word from them. The house there has grown from an apartment where they took in men, to a house at 23 Dartmouth Street.

Family Leadership

It is interesting to see young families in charge of houses of hospitality. David and Catherine Miller are looking around for a house in Washington, D.C. The Cullens, the McKennas and the Millers are the youngest in the field. But the Murphy family in Detroit, the Gauchat family in Avon, Ohio have been operating for more than twenty years and Karl Meyer’s house in Chicago has been going five years. At Tivoli the Corbin family are in charge. It is a harder and more realistic approach, this family leadership, and there is less room for pride and dissipation of energy. But it is a most particular vocation, and certainly none should undertake it without a vocation.

Sir Victor Gollancz

This morning, as is usual on Saturday, there was a Requiem Mass. The epistle read: I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth. Yes, says the Spirit, let them rest from their labors, for their works follow them."

It rejoiced my heart to hear that because yesterday I read in the New York **Times** the obituary of Victor Gollancz, with whom Eileen Egan and I dined in London a few years ago. Head of a large publishing house, he brought out the English edition of my **Loaves and Fishes**. He visited us when he was in the United States and had lunch with us at our old House of Hospitality on Chrystie Street. He wrote books himself, **Our Threatened Values**, **A year of Grace**, **Letters to Timothy**. The first quotation in **A Year of Grace**, which is a collection of passages "arranged to express a mood about God and Man," is from St. Thomas: God loves all existing things.

Sir Victor advocated "an absolute living of the Christian ethic." "By socialism," he wrote, "I mean living with a community of goods, the kind of socialism that used to be true, and perhaps still is true of life in the kibbutzim of Israel. Equal incomes? No, —people with beastly jobs—scavengers, and lavatory attendants and the like—should be paid a great deal more than anyone else."

Before World War II, according to the **Times**, he campaigned to "halt Hitler without war and for rescue of the victims of Nazi terror; but after the war he supported a Save Europe Now movement which aimed at relief of starvation in Germany." As a Jew, he said, "I felt that these Germans, active Jew baiters included, were also my brothers."

During the Arab-Israel war he organized relief for Arab refugees. When Adolf Eichmann went on trial in Israel he published a booklet setting out his reasons why the former Nazi elite guard officer should not be hanged.

Like Ammon Hennacy, his favorite cause was the abolition of capital punishment. He was a member of the Music in Prisons Society. He founded the Association for World Peace, a charitable organization later called War on Want.

He could say, late in life, as we all can, "I am an exceedingly weak human being with a great liking for the good things of life. I would say a hundred times that I have compromised too much with Mammon. If I were summoned before the Heavenly Tribunal and asked to defend myself against this charge, I'd prefer to be silent."

Victor Gollancz was 73 when he died and we express our deep sympathy to his wife, the former Ruth Lowy, architect and painter, whom he married in 1919. May God grant him a place of refreshment, light and peace.

Vietnam

One of the visitors to Hanoi in January was Msgr. Georg Hussler, secretary general of a West German Catholic Welfare organization which is part of Caritas International and has for some time been making a financial contribution to the North Vietnam Red Cross and to the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front's Red Cross Organization and to the Red Cross in South Vietnam. Msgr. Hussler is the first Catholic high-ranking functionary, according to Harrison Salisbury of the New York **Times**, to visit North Vietnam since the establishment of the Communist regime, the first contact between Rome and Hanoi since 1954 when the Communists took over.

Here are the statistics about Catholics in North Vietnam, according to Msgr. Hussler. There are about 700,000 Catholics in the north. The generally accepted figure for the south is a million.

In Hanoi itself, which is not as heavily Catholic as the countryside, there are twelve churches with ten priests and about 20,000 worshipers. There are from 300 to 400 priests serving in North Vietnam but no Catholic schools. Children are taught at church and especially during two regular vacation periods each year. There are still a number of nuns and "many convents operating," the churchmen said, but conceded that many nuns had gone south. They said the official position was non-interference in religious matters.

The Vatican itself expressed gratitude to the **New York Times** for the Hanoi dispatches of Harrison Salisbury who was the first American newsman to report from North Vietnam, though many European newsmen had been sending similar reports.

Our dear friend A.J. Muste visited both Saigon and Hanoi these last months and met with hostility only in Saigon. A group of women, including the valiant Barbara Deming, also visited Hanoi and spoke for the women in the peace movement. Three times I have been invited to go to Vietnam and three times I have refused, not seeing any possible good served by my leaving my work at home. But for once, I regret my age, and wish that I were younger, and then indeed I would want to go as nurse or in some such service capacity, and so work for peace. I have been in too many demonstrations, have spent my short sentences in jail, and once again I long to witness as the Little Brothers and Little Sisters of Brother Charles de Foucauld are witnessing today, in North and South Vietnam. Little St. Therese Martin was almost sent to Hanoi Carmel but could not go on account of her failing health. There are two Carmels in Vietnam, one in Saigon and one in Hanoi, and they are praying, we know, not for victory but for peace. Not just for peace in Vietnam, but for peace in the world. But we can only "hope against hope." If peace were declared in Vietnam tomorrow, there would still be world suffering, famine, injustice on a giant scale and the war between the rich and the destitute would go on. It was good to read this profession of faith of Habacuc in the Old Testament in the Lenten Lauds for Friday:

"Though the fig tree blossom not nor fruit be on the vines,
Though the yield of the olive fail and the terraces produce no nourishment.
Though the flocks disappear from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls,
Yet, will I rejoice in the Lord and exult in my saving God.
God, my Lord, is my strength."