On Pilgrimage - December 1968

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Summary: Reflects on her recent reading–about priests witnessing in prison, especially the Berrigan brothers whom she admires. Comments also on essays about the Civil War and the freedom struggle of blacks. (DDLW #891).

Readings and Ruminations: One of my bedside books, **The Days of the Lord**, is a compilation of the writings of the saints, past and present, published by Herder and Herder and edited by William G. Storey, and old friend of the Catholic Worker, teacher at Notre Dame, husband and father. Here you can find the best of the theologians and scripture scholars of all periods. If that doesn't tempt you to buy this book, which comes in three parts (you can buy one at a time), let me illustrate how it works for me.

For December first, Blessed Edmund Campion is represented: a Jesuit, educated in Germany and Bohemia (now part of Czechoslovakia) he was, back in England in 1580, a true underground priest, (not a playboy) knowing that sooner or later he would be captured, tortured and killed. He begins: "I confess that I am a priest, though unworthy, of the Catholic Church, and through the great mercy of God vowed now these eight years into the religion of the Society of Jesus. Hereby I have taken upon me a special kind of warfare under the banner of obedience, and also resigned all my interests or possibilities of wealth, honor, pleasure and other worldly felicity." He goes on to tell how under obedience he journeyed from Prague to England (he would go anywhere as bidden) and "my charge is of free cost to preach the gospel, to instruct the simple, to reform sinners, to confute errors – in brief to crie alarm spiritual against proud vice and proud ignorance, whererewith many of my dear countrymen are abused."

And I began to think of Father Dan Berrigan, also a Jesuit, and his approaching martyrdom of three years in prison for destroying draft records and the debate which has gone on among the Catholic brethren as to whether or not this is an effective way of reaching the conscience of Catholics bred to a more conventional style of priesthood and apostolate. I will leave it to our readers, who I hope will get hold of this encyclopedic treasure of a book, to continue the reading which started in me a train of reflection. Most of our readers will begin by wondering why Father Berrigan does not fit the conventional image of a saint. Even those quotations from priests of the present day who have suffered martyrdom, imprisonment or suppression do not immediately help us

understand him. I am thinking of the excerpts from Father Alfred Delp's prison letters, from the writings of Father Henri de Lubac, S.J. and Father Yves Congar, O.P. There were two other books that helped me greatly; both by Robert L. Short, a theologian student at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, who started working his way towards a degree by interpreting the theological significance of the famous cartoon, "Peanuts," drawn by Charles M. Schulz. The first book, **The Gospel According to Peanuts**, was published by the John Knox Press, of Richmond, Virginia, in 1964 and had gone into 17 printings by March, '67 (the edition I have.) The second, **The Parables of Peanuts**, is by the same author and published this Fall by Harper and Row (paper back, $1.95). Both books are delightful; but it is from the first that I would like to quote.

Why can't Father Berrigan be like Campion or other Jesuit heroes? I might have quoted Hugh of St. Victor, who brought most forcibly to my attention that each human being created by God is **unique** and that God has the special love for each one that such uniqueness requires, but more telling for today is Robert Short's explanation, in his essay "The Church and the Arts," which introduces his **Gospel**.

Mr. Short reminds us that: "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" is the question the Church, always finding itself **in** but not **of** the world, urgently needs to consider today. And illustrating the indirect approach of Fr. Dan Berrigan, one might quote with him from Kierkegaard's **Journals**; "If one is to lift up the whole age, one must truly know it. That is why those ministers of Christianity who begin at once with orthodoxy have so little effect and only on few. ... One must begin with paganism." And St. Paul: "To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews ... to those outside the law I became as one outside the law ... to the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some."

I'd like readers to send those **Peanuts** books to all our fellow workers who are in prison, beginning with our editors and special friends: Father Phil Berrigan, S.S.J., Dan Kelly and David Miller, at Federal Prison Camp, Allenwood, Pennsylvania; Thomas Lewis, Federal Penitentiary, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania; Robert Gilliam, Federal Correctional Institute, Sandstone, Minnesota; Mike Vogeler, Medical Center for Federal Prisoners, Springfield, Missouri; Suzanne Williams, Federal Penitentiary, Alderson, West Virginia. You can get a list of prisoners for peace from the War Resisters League, 5 Beekman St., New York, N.Y. 10038. Anyone sending books must send them directly from the publisher, and that means, of course, that such gifts will arriving long after Christmas. However, the traditional Catholic season ends on February 2nd, so that there is plenty of time. It is to be hoped that the books will be passed on to other prisoners who have little contact with their friends outside.

One of the saddest things Jim Wilson told us on coming out of Allenwood after 22 months in prison, was that so many prisoners did not get even one Christmas card, while the conscientious objectors got thousands. And the saddest thing about Jim's and David Miller's imprisonment is that each became a father after

he went to jail. Their only contacts with their little ones are the meager visits permitted. Jim did not watch the 22 months growing of his little son Nathan, and David is still being deprived of seeing those early years of his two little ones. Thank God Cathy and the children have moved fifteen miles from the prison and started a guest house for the relatives of prisoners who cannot afford the high cost of motels or hotels or tourist rooms in the area. "He who loves sons and daughters more than me is not worthy of me," said Jesus. It is because they love children, and learn about love through their own children; because they see Christ in the least ones, the littlest ones, that they can perhaps begin to love all children, neighbors' children, children near and far, loving them in practice as well as in dreams.

Another Day

The December 6th issue of **Commonweal** has a long letter from Phil Berrigan to his bother Dan, telling, warning, perhaps, of the tedium of prison, the deserts to cross, the death in life, the lovelessness – in fact, the dark night of the senses and the dark night of the soul. It seems to me that they often intermingle. I pray that in writing it, in the very ability to articulate it, the dull grey of his situation was somewhat lightened. I was always much impressed, in reading prison memoirs of revoluntionists, such as Lenin and Trotsky (not to speak of Father Walter Cizek, S.J.) by the amount of reading they did, the languages they studied, the range of their plans for a better social order. (Or rather, for a new social order.) In the Acts of the Apostles there are constant references to the **Way** and the New Man. So in spite of the fact that priests are not ordained in order to start farming communes and replace the banking system and installment-plan buying with the credit union and cooperative, their very preaching of voluntary poverty and, above all, their setting the example, will do much to further the revolution. And what greater and purer means are there than prayer and suffering?

These are great men, the Berrigan brothers, and they are both young, they already have a following among the young, in and out of the Church. So read, Phil and Dan, read in season and out, and if you cannot concentrate, if the noise is too continual, as it usually is in armies and in jails, then read action stories like **The Centurions** by Jean Larteguy, first printed in France in 1960, about the end of the French war in Indo-China and the beginning of the Algerian conflict.

Best of all, the history of the Negroes, written by a Negro such as W. E. Burghardt DuBois. I am reading **The Soul of Black Folk** now and recommend it as a good beginning in the study of African and American history in relation to slavery past and present. This is an early book of this great writer. He had just published his first book, a history of **The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to America** (first volume of the new Harvard Historical Studies in 1896). His second book, **Philadelphia Negro**, was published by the University of Pennsylvania in 1899. **The Soul of Black Folk** is made up of articles which

appeared in the **Atlantic Monthly**, the **Dial**, and other magazines. When he wrote another introduction in a reprint fifty years later he said that he still thought the "color line is the great problem of this century ... but today I see more clearly than yesterday that back of the problem of race and color lies a greater problem, which both obscures and implements it; and that is the fact that so many civilized persons are willing to live in comfort even if the price of this is the poverty, ignorance and disease of the majority of their fellow men; that to maintain this privilege men have waged war until today war tends to become universal and continuous, and the excuse for this war continues largely to be color and race."

The essay which I like most especially is "Of the Dawn of Freedom." I come from a family which was very conscious of the Civil War, because my father's father fought on the side of the South and my mother's on the North.

My Southern grandmother used to point out that I took after my mother, and there was always a note of distaste in her voice when she said this. My father used to speak of "hardshell Baptitst" cousins in Georgia, where my grandmother came from, and Campbellites in Tennessee, where he came from, and after I became a Catholic he used to say something once in a while about the "damned papists," but always with a smile. Needless to say, he had a paternalistic fondness for the Negro. With all this background we children had a colossal ignorance of the history of our country. When he caught us singing the martial air, "Marching through Georgia," he took us severely to task and forbade us ever to sing it again. I thought of this when I read this beautiful paragraph:

> **Three characteristic things one might have seen in Sherman's raid through Georgia, which threw the new situation in shadowy relief. The conqueror, the conquered, and the Negro. Some see all the significance in the grim front of the destroyer, and some in the bitter sufferer of the Lost Cause. But to me neither soldier nor fugitive speaks with so deep a meaning as that dark human cloud that clung like remorse on the rear of those swift columns, swelling at times to half their size, almost engulfing and choking them. In vain were they ordered back, in vain were bridges hewn from beneath their feet; on they trudged and writhed and surged, until they rolled into Savannah, a starved and naked horde of tens of thousands.**

The simplistic military remedy for this was to turn the islands from Charleston south, and the abandoned rice fields along the river for thirty miles back from the sea, and the country bordering the St. John's River in Florida, over to the Negroes "now made free by act of war."

I thought of Resurrection City when I read how confiscated estates outside of Washington were turned over to the fugitives from the South, "and there in the

shadow of the dome there appeared black farm villages." The same happened all through the South and West and "strange little governments sprang up." Not so little, I would say, when we read of the ninety thousand black subjects of General Banks in Louisiana. Colonel Eaton, superintendent of Tennessee and Arkansas, ruled over a hundred thousand freedmen, leased and cultivated seven thousand acres of cotton land, and fed ten thousand paupers a year. Bills were drawn up by Congress and defeated by the Senate, and the control of lands and blacks kept passing from the hands of the Army to civilians, and it was the non-governmental agencies that were called over and over again to search for solutions for the problems created by the violence of war. Finally, one man, Major General Oliver O. Howard, was appointed by Lincoln's successor as administrator of the newly formed Freedman's Bureau. "Probably no one but a soldier would have answered such a call promptly; and indeed no one but a soldier could be called, for Congress had appropriated no money for salaries and expenses."

I thought as I read this that a soldier could not get out of it; he was under orders and he had to do what he could under the most impossible conditions. A lesson for us who find Christianity difficult and abandon it! "A curious mess he looked upon: little despotisms, communistic experiments, slavery, peonage, business speculations, organized charity, unorganized almsgiving – all reeling on under the guise of helping the freedmen, and all enshrined in the smoke and blood of war and the cursing and silence of angry men." Settling the former slaves on the confiscated lands of their masters! Strangely enough, this plan is still being considered by black folk themselves, when they talk of "self-determination for the Black Belt," a phrase coined by the Communists back in the depression, and now echoed by black militants who ask for a number of states to be handed over to them to establish separate but equal regional territory. One cannot help but see how meager have been the solutions to the problems of the Negro today.

When I read of the "Ninth Crusade" of the New England schoolma'ms, I thought how that crusade was duplicated during the last decade, especially among the COFO organizers who went into the South to set up little Freedom Schools, suffered beatings and jail and in the case of the three young martyrs, Schwermer, Goodman and Cheyney, death itself.

"The annals of the Ninth Crusade are yet to be written," DuBois tells us, and we are grateful to him for this glimpse of it. During the first year they taught a hundred thousand souls and more. It is impossible to do more than suggest the richness of this essay, the exalted strivings and the inevitable failures that make one lament and wonder why it is always the wicked who thrive and prosper, especially in wartime and in the aftermath of war.

Another essay, on the "Training of Black Man," deals with the founding of such colleges as Atlanta, Fisk, Howard, Wilberforce, Claflin, Shaw and the rest, a type of college DuBois called peculiar, almost unique.

This was the gift of New England to the freed Negro; not

> **alms but a friend; not cash but character. It was not and is not money these seething millions want, but love and sympathy, the pulse of hearts beating with red blood; a gift which today only their own kindred and race can bring to the masses, but which once saintly souls brought to their favored children in the crusade of the sixties, that finest thing in American history and one of the few things untainted by greed or and cheap vainglory ... The colleges they founded were social settlements, homes where the best of the freedmen came in close and sympathetic touch with the best traditions of New England. They lived and ate together, studied and worked.**

This is the kind of thing Peter Maurin hoped for from his idea of the farming communes, which he also called agronomic universities. I have always been attracted by the English expression, "**reading** history, **reading** literature," not **taking courses**in these "subjects." And it makes me happy that both in the houses of hospitality and on our "farming communes," where there is no charge for room and board and tuition (and we are indeed a school), there is a great deal of reading, (not to speak of discussion) going on, night and day.

"Attend to reading," St. Paul wrote to Timothy. St. Jerome wrote to Eustochium, "Let sleep creep over you holding a book and let the sacred page receive your drooping face."