

On Pilgrimage - June 1967

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Summary: Describes the flight of Catholics, clergy and laity, from North Vietnam and the work of Caritas International to get aid to all Vietnam. Says the work for peace involves the works of mercy. Recommends a book about the Antarctic explorer Ernest Shackleton. Relates his notion of "a mysterious forth man" to guardian angels. (DDLW #852).

This summer, at a conference at the Catholic Worker Farm which we call attention to in a box in this issue, there will be a great deal of talk about conscientious objection and working for peace. We have already had articles on the economics of peace, one by Robert Swann (January 1967) and another by the economist, E. F. Schumacher (March-April 1967).

Of course the emphasis is always on helping the people to help themselves when it comes to dealing with under-developed areas, and that is perfectly right because people do not want handouts, they do not want to be recipients of charity when they know full well that in justice they should have received the fruits of their toil and recompense for their labors. In this issue of the paper, for instance, there is a reference to the economic aid given to a cooperative venture involving six hundred farmers of Alabama.

Caritas International

But the fact remains that in the work for peace we still have to think in terms of the works of mercy. These may be thought of as restitution on the part of American peacemakers for the great evils inflicted upon the Vietnamese by our own country. I think we should never forget this and that we should try to learn from what the Quakers, Mennonites, and the Fellowship of Reconciliation are trying to do in Vietnam, North and South. It is too bad that we have to remind our fellow Catholics that there is a tremendous work of relief being done by the **Caritas International**, which has been making financial contributions to the North Vietnamese Red Cross, to the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front Red Cross organization, and to the Red Cross of South Vietnam.

We only learned of this work when we read of the visit of Monsignor Georg Hussler, secretary-general of a West German Catholic welfare organization which is a part of **Caritas International**. He was the first foreign Catholic official to visit North Vietnam since the Communist regime began there. He went there to find out what medical supplies the North Vietnamese needed most, such as antibiotics, quinine, and surgical instruments. He was conferring also with the Catholic hierarchy there and so made the first personal contact between Rome and

the Hanoi churches since 1954. His visit, which took place last January, was an example of Pope Paul's work for peace in Vietnam and showed, too, according to a report by Harrison E. Salisbury in the New York Times that the Vatican's interest was not concentrated exclusively on the church in South Vietnam.

There are just under a million Catholics in the North, according to Father Ho Thanh Bein, pastor of St. Dominic's Church in Hanoi. Seventy-five miles east of Hanoi there is a heavily Catholic district. Local officials reported that ten thousand of the area's eighty thousand went to South Vietnam in 1954. Father Bein said that this exodus was the consequence of an intensive campaign by representatives of the Diem government, who insisted the Communists would suppress the Church completely in the North.

In Contact with Rome

In this area there are eighty-two churches functioning for a population which is again about eighty thousand. Father Bein said that six of the North's ten bishops went south and that all ten seminaries operating in the North were closed. He estimated that two-thirds of the Northern priests went south and said that the North Vietnamese now had six new bishops consecrated since 1955 and that all ten dioceses now have bishops. The seminaries have reopened and there are about a hundred seminarians studying for the priesthood. The Archbishop of Hanoi, named in 1962, is Most Reverend Trinh Nhu Khue. The priests of North Vietnam are in contact with Rome and the Pope's encyclicals and other messages are being received. Church functionaries estimated that three to four hundred priests are serving in the North. Hanoi, which has never been as strongly Catholic as the countryside, has twelve parishes, with ten priests and possibly twenty thousand communicants.

Schools Closed

There are no Catholic schools in North Vietnam, but the children are given instruction at the church, especially during vacation periods. Despite the number of nuns who went south, many convents are still operating. The official policy is non-interference in religious matters. According to Catholic spokesmen, the government provided funds for rebuilding churches after partition. Harrison Salisbury reported constant references, in conversation with both laymen and priests, to the exodus of Catholics in 1954 and the deep and bitter wounds that were left. He was also told that many churches had been destroyed by American bombing and two priests killed. It seems to me that in the light of all this Catholics should seriously attempt to get aid through **Caritas International** to the North Vietnamese as well as to the South. Some have suggested that aid be addressed to **Caritas International**, Vatican City. Perhaps some of our readers have other suggestions to offer.

There are always books that I want to share with our readers, and one of these is a wonderful story called **Whales and Men**, by R. B. Robertson, published by Knopf in 1954. After reading this book I wanted to get the explorer Ernest Shackleton's book and read his comment about the **mysterious fourth man** who accompanied him on the rescue trip, which is so

vividly described. Shackleton wrote: “When I look back at those days, I have no doubt that providence guided us, not only across these snow fields, but across the stormy white sea that separated Elephant Island from our landing place on South Georgia. I know that during that long and racking march of thirty-six hours over the unnamed mountains and glaciers of South Georgia, it seemed to me often that we were four, not three. I said nothing to my companions on the point, but afterwards Worsely said to me, ‘Boss, I had a curious feeling on the march that there was another person with us.’ Crean confessed to the same idea. One feels ‘the dearth of human words, the roughness of mortal speech’ in trying to describe things intangible, but a record of our journey would not be complete without a reference very near to our hearts.”

The men in the Robertson book have been discussing why they are whalers, or working on a factory ship in the Antarctic. One of them says that they are people who do not fit in – the world does not want them and they do not want the world. And they have no escape in writing and painting, and so on, so Shackleton and explorers and whalers go off to these most far off places, such as Georgia Island, which was called a “South Atlantic slum.” But another of the men says: “You all talk nonsense, and you know it. Shackleton and the best kind of explorers and maybe old whalers too, come here because they know there is **something else**, that man can feel but not quite understand in this world. And they get closer to that thing – that sense of the fourth man who walked Shackleton across South Georgia – when they are down here, more than anywhere else in the world . . .”

When I read this I remembered the story of the three young men in the fiery furnace and how there was another standing beside them. In the Douay version of the Bible in the Third Chapter of Daniel, “They walked about in flames praising God and blessing the Lord . . . But the angel of the Lord went down into the furnace with Azarias and his companions drove the fiery flames out of the furnace and made the inside of the furnace as though a dew-laden breeze were blowing through it. The fire in no way touched them nor caused them harm. Then these three with one mouth praised and glorified and blessed God in the furnace.” And then follows that long and beautiful “song of the three children,” **All ye works of the Lord, bless the Lord,**

It is not only the angel guide of Tobias that makes me remember the Guardian Angels. (These are both apocryphal stories.) I am so firmly convinced of their existence this day that I pray for them daily. It was good to find my faith confirmed by Shackleton. I strongly recommend this prayer to our readers.

Retreat Cancelled

We are sorry to announce the cancellation of the retreat I wrote about in the last “On Pilgrimage” column. Word from Father John Hugo came right after we had gone to press. I have written to those who had planned to make it. This too is a late issue. The enormous amount of work involved in changing all our stencils to Zip code and the refilling of our entire list is our only excuse for this notification.