

On Pilgrimage - March/April 1967

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The Catholic Worker, March-April 1967, 2, 7, 8.

Summary: Considers many things—books on scripture, help from the Christian Brothers, a sick roommate, war protests, economics and non-violence, the need to do work in line with the works of mercy. (DDLW #848).

Tivoli, New York. All Lent and Easter season I have been reading **The Two-Edged Sword** by Fr. John McKenzie, S.J. (Bruce) which answered many of my questions about the New Testament as well as the Old. I had recently read Fr. Bruce Vawter's **A Path Through Genesis**, a fascinating account. Both answered some long-standing questions in my mind, which I had put to one side, knowing that some day an answer would come that would satisfy me. I just received a letter from my granddaughter Margaret, thirteen, who is starting to read the Bible, and I am wondering what comparable book there is for her.

Fr. Mc Kenzie's books on the Old and New Testament were given me by the Christian Brothers at nearby Barrytown. They have a novitiate, a place for the aged and sick brothers and a high school for boys. Cursillos and retreats are given here on this big estate, but the grounds are not used for farming or gardening.

When we moved into the "mansion" class, as someone had called it, thanks to the Verrazano Bridge, and the resulting rise in price of Staten Island real estate, which brought us enough money to purchase this 86 acres and three buildings along the Hudson, we had already been preceded in our move by the Marist novitiate, which used to be in Staten Island on the waterfront. I had once worked for them for a summer, back in 1928. There were so many associations with Staten Island that I hated to move. But we found the Marists nearby in Rhinebeck and dear Father Guerin, who used to give us Sunday afternoon conferences, those same conferences that Charles Butterworth used to come all the way from Philadelphia to Staten Island to hear. Now Fr. Guerin has been coming to offer Holy Mass for us every week in our little winter chapel, which is all windows on three sides and he again gives us conferences. I don't think he uses the words **new morality** or **new theology**, and he probably would think, with St. Paul, that today's Athenians are spending all their time in "saying or hearing some new thing," but I was surprised to see in the spring issue of Sheed and Ward's **Own Trumpet** the essence of Father Guerin's ideas on life and death expressed in a long passage from the new book by Marc Oraison, **The Mystery of Human Sexuality**, which is causing quite a stir. I had been so impressed by one of Father's conferences of some years ago, that I mentioned it several times in my column. He said that if a babe in the womb were asked to be born it would prefer to hang on to its present comfort and security, and that we too feel that way, in this life, about death and the life to come. "We do not

know what we shall be,” in St. Paul’s words, and we don’t like not knowing. We’ll hang on to this life, which we know, just as long as we can, for all its pains and miseries.

When we moved up the Hudson we had never lived near the Christian Brothers and knew little of them except what Peter Maurin had told us. He had been a Christian Brother once himself, and we still hear from one of his family who is a Christian Brother in Belgium, in fact the head of a school.

The Brothers at nearby Barrytown knew that we wanted to get a garden in, a big one to feed our multitude and some of the multitude of the Bowery. So one of the Brothers came over and ploughed up a field for us, giving us a good start in preparing the land, which had been used as pasture for many years. They also lent us fifty beds, with good mattresses, and if it were not for the fact that they needed every available bed for their high-school retreats, they would gladly have let us keep them. As it is, we sleep under the blankets they have given us and wear many of the clothes they pass on to us. Just yesterday they brought boxes of shoes for men, and overcoats, so that we will have a goodly supply of men’s clothed to send to Chrystie Street.

Every Saturday at eleven-fifteen we go to the Mass sung by the Brothers and some of the students, a folk Mass accompanied by four guitars. The music is haunting and the words descriptive of what the Mass is. Afterwards, we are always invited to lunch—even when we bring a dozen people. Neighborhood families come too, and I have heard the littlest children sing the refrain, **Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus!** of the long communion hymn.

In the Vineyards

I had reached this point in my writing when the mail arrived with news that the Christian Brothers and the National Farm Workers Organizing Committee were in conflict on the West Coast. Cesar Chavez had refused to take part in an election, charging that the farm workers he represents had been intimidated and fired from the vineyards because of their ardent work for unionization. Not long after I read this, Brother James came in, bringing gifts as usual, and I lamented over the story I had just been reading. “I’ll have to add this to my On Pilgrimage column,” I told him, but before we even had a chance to get into a discussion of the controversy, the March 22nd issue of the invaluable **National Catholic Reporter** (P.O. Box 281, Kansas City, Missouri 64141; seven dollars a year) came in, carrying the story of the recognition of the union by the Christian Brothers, without an election. The National Farm Workers Organizing Committee had been certified as the representative of the workers at the Christian Brothers Mont LaSalle vineyard in Napa County, California. The N.F.W.O.C. was approved by the State Conciliation Service Office after a check showed that more than half the winery’s workers were members of the organizing committee. Bishop Hugh A. Donahoe of Stockton, chairman of the California Bishops’ social-justice committee, had urged the Christian Brothers to resume labor negotiations after Chavez called off the election. The agreement provided that union elections would be held later at two other vineyards belonging to the Christian Brothers.

Agnes

Cesar Chavez will be speaking in Community Church in New York on April 8th and I shall certainly, God willing, go to hear him and learn more of what is going on, not only on the West Coast but in our own neighborhood: Long Island, the Hudson Valley and New Jersey. The migrants are starting to come up into New York state by the thousands and there is talk of an organizing drive on the East Coast.

I say "God willing," because we have a seriously ill person on the farm, who has been with us many a year, and we are short-handed when it comes to nurses. Agnes Sydney always reminds me that she came to Peter Maurin farm the year my granddaughter Mary, who will be sixteen in July, was born. She keeps Mary's picture on her dresser and has a special love for her. I sleep in the room with Agnes, and a more uncomplaining patient I have never seen. One morning when Mike Sullivan (hearing us talking at six a.m.) brought us cups of fragrant coffee, she looked over at me and smiled. "The Life of Riley," she said, appreciatively. There are poppies on her dresser from Peggy, and a little pot of shamrock. She comes from County Longford in what is now the Free State, not too

far a ride from Dublin. They had two acres of fertile soil, and her father was a tailor who hired three men from England in the busy season to help him. There was a mill nearby to spin the wool from their own sheep, which were kept with other sheep in nearby pastures. She tells me long stories of her life, of the beautiful field of cattle next to their two acres and of the wild bullock that leaped the fence and began to eat her mother's corset, which was drying on a hedge. "There were no clotheslines, and we hung the wash on hedges then." There were two sisters, who went to America, and two brothers, one of whom worked for a doctor while the other worked a bit of land, raised all their vegetables and took care of her mother after she had a stroke. Her father was dead by then. Then, when the mother died, Agnes joined her sisters in New York. She worked hard, she said, from the time she was a little girl, and she danced all Saturday nights and missed Mass on Sunday, and the priest was often harsh with her. But she spoke admiringly of priests, who, from the pulpit, "gave it to them straight from the shoulder, and dragged the men out of the taverns along the waterfront before they could drink up their pay." And these rough ones often paid the rent for families when they were in trouble. Agnes married a man who was a captain of a barge, and they made the trip between New York and Boston with their coal barges, for thirty years.

Agnes is often in much pain, and today she said that a good remedy for a pain in the side, such as she was having, was oakum, obtainable in shipyards, of course, and which smelled strongly of creosote and was damp with the oil, which drew out the pain. And, because I had a cough, she added that I should take a few drops of turpentine on a spoon; once swallowed, it would cure me in a moment.

Old and New

Called to the phone one day from Agnes' bedside, I learned from Nicole d'Entremont that a new Catholic Worker, Nathan Peter Wilson had been born of Raona and Jim Wilson on March 22nd. Jim is in Allenwood prison for refusing induction. But it was not the first baby

to be born among us while the father was in prison. There was Ellen Paulsen, born of Carl and Mary Paulsen at Upton, Massachusetts, where the Boston Catholic Workers had started their first farm, St. Benedict's, with John Magee and Arthur

Sheehan in charge. Carl was in prison at the time because he had been refused conscientious-objector status in the Second World War, and my daughter Tamar went to Upton to help Mary when she came home from the hospital after Ellen's birth. Ellen herself is married now and living with her husband Al Learnard and their two children in Easthaven, Vermont.

On April first news came of how David Miller's protest against conscription and the war in Vietnam disrupted Selective Services headquarters in Washington, D.C. David Miller sat in the door at the entrance doorway to block the passage. The **Times** and the **News** carried pictures of him obstructing the entrance while a handsome young woman

in the usual short skirt, and carrying flowers and a large white handbag, attempted to step over him. David was supported by eighteen pickets, a group which included his wife, Catherine Miller and their five-month old baby Juanita Clare. The Millers have worked not only with the Catholic Worker but with the Committee for Non-Violent Action in Voluntown, Connecticut, and lately in Washington, D.C. David will appear in court April 6th for a hearing before a U.S. District Judge on whether he violated the terms of a suspended sentence given him last March for having burnt his draft card. The sentence had been appealed. The appeal was denied and David was ordered to obtain a new draft card which he has refused to do.

The young people opposing the war in Vietnam today scarcely know the history of all the Catholic Workers in past wars, some of whom served in the armed forces and some who served prison sentences, and worked in conscientious objectors' camps, and they are so busy living with their own immediate problems that they do not even have time to go over back issues of the **CW** to see what happened in other Houses and on other CW farms a generation before. There are not enough historians among us. If each one who ran a house or started a farm all over this vast country, in the name of the Catholic Worker, could write even a few pages for the record, what a book it would be! Farms near Rutland and Cuttingsville, Vermont. Houses of hospitality in Burlington and Rutland, Boston and Worcester. Farms in the state of Washington, and houses of hospitality in Seattle and Portland; houses of hospitality in Houma, Louisiana, and Memphis, Tennessee. But the records are written on the hearts of those who partook of the work. They knew Christ in the breaking of bread with the hungry from coast to coast.

Winter Visitors

It would be hard to list all the people who have been visiting us these past two months.

Through hail, ice, snow and stormy winds, visitors came, some to stay the night, some for the day. Thanks to Father Jude Mili, who teaches in the Franciscan Seminary at Wappingers Falls, we had services Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday, and he brought with him four or five men and several families, members of the Third Order or of the Christian Family Movement. The beauty of those nights, the singing, the wholehearted participation of all during this holy season strengthened the heart. Two theology students,

one with a guitar, drove up from Washington to visit Emmaus House in New York and came to spend twenty-four hours with us. Their singing delighted the little flock of children who sat around them in the big living room and sang with them most heartily. Two of the songs we will never forget, one called “**First Comes the Dying**,” and the other, “**The Lord of the Dance**.” Before they left they sang them to Agnes, sitting by her bed, and she loved this serenade. The refrain of “First Comes the Dying” is

First comes the searching, the longing, the losing, First comes the sadness, the sorrow, the bruising, Only fools would challenge the beauty of this mystery, Only fools would fail to see the meaning of this history. First comes the dying, then comes the rising.

If there are records of **The Lord of the Dance** we’d be glad to know about them. The first verse is: I danced in the morning when the world was begun, I danced on the moon and the stars and the sun, I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth. At Bethlehem I had my birth.

This is the March-April issue and we do not go to press until April 5, which means that our readers won’t get their copies until the middle of the month. But we beg them to be patient with us.

Economics and Peace

Besides, we feel that most of the articles in the Catholic Worker are timeless. The Pope’s great new Encyclical, an excerpt from which we publish this month will repay a great deal of study, and with it in this issue is printed the article “Economic Development

and Poverty” by E.F. Schumacher, a British economist, having to do with the problems of economic aid to the poor of the world. In speaking on the works of mercy as direct action, I have often quoted Father Jimmy Tompkins, who said that all work should be considered in the light of the Lord’s command to practice the works of mercy, as expressed in the 25th chapter of St. Matthew. Engineers, homebuilders, agronomists, chemists, oceanographers—all have to do with feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, in a long-range plan which involves the community, the municipality, the state and the nation. It is the individuals who think in terms of pilot projects, and who voice the overall problem of man’s need to find meaningful work, creative work for the common good.

The great problems of the day are not just Vietnam and the rest of Asia but Africa and Latin America too. The recent brave criticisms made by Monsignor Ivan Illich of the aid offered Latin America need to be most seriously considered. We need, too, to remember the earlier words of Pope Paul:

There is no need... to stress the tragic inadequacy, both short and long term, of all programs of aid to less developed countries, whether by international agencies, national governments or religious organizations... What then should be done... to prevent men from dying of hunger, to fill the chasm between the possessor peoples and nations in misery?... Experts will reply that nothing less will do than to change the worldwide economic and financial system, to seek out new sources of subsistence in a world still awaiting the plough... to uncover new methods capable of multiplying productivity, to transform the mechanism of international

trade—all this and still other things which are not within our competence but whose necessity we are anxious to stress, while congratulating all those working upon them efficaciously and unselfishly.

This illustrates again what we mean by expanding the works of mercy in these ways. Students should consider these words when preparing for their life work, striving to become competent in these fields, exploring every possibility and opportunity to work along these lines. Priests and laymen and laywomen working together among the “republics” we mentioned in Colombia, among the tin miners in Bolivia, the fishermen of Recife, Brazil.

When Dom Helder Camara of Recife came on the briefest of speaking trips to this country six weeks ago, he ran into Monsignor Illich at a Methodist Church meeting in Greenwich Village. It was just a meeting in passing, I understand, and all I can report of it is that Dom Helder shook his finger at Monsignor Illich and smiling, called out to him, “Ivan the Terrible!”

But Ivan the Terrible is thinking, it seems to me, as the Pope is thinking, and we hope he reads such articles as Prof. Schumacher’s and we hope that he subscribes to the **Bulletin** of the Intermediate Technology Development Group, Ltd., (9 King Street, Covent Garden, London, WC2.) And we hope too that he read the article by Bob Swann, – “The Economics of Peace,” in our January issue, so that he will find himself on the side of non-violence, where men of God are supposed to be, and which will or may well mean martyrdom.

The Fast

Jack Cook’s article in this issue of the CW has somewhat the flavor of Monsignor Illich’s criticism of charity in Latin America which appeared some months back. At first I was shocked and disturbed by it. I could not help but think of December eighth in 1932 when I went to Mass in the crypt of that same shrine he is writing about, after spending days with the Hunger Marchers in Washington, and prayed with all my strength for some way to open up to work for the dispossessed of this world. That petition of mine was answered immediately. I returned to New York to find Peter Maurin sitting in my kitchen with his program and his teaching, which we have tried to follow all these years. It was a single visit I made to the shrine—a single Mass I participated in. There was all the pomp of the great feast. But the cumulative effect of all those Holy Week pilgrims that Jack and Bob and Dan saw day after day, who were making their own single pilgrimage to the shrine, was too much for them. Those young men fasting on the steps of the shrine, were not judging the individual pilgrims but the scene as a whole. The picture of American Catholicism as it appears in the eyes of the world—the picture of comfortable, materialistic Catholicism, of which we are all very much a part. We have come from this **bourgeois** background ourselves, we have partaken of its comforts. But our eyes have been opened to see more clearly the words of the Gospel, and the words of the Pope today. We must pray that those same visitors may make the prayer, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” God takes us at our word, and will answer each one, will call each one to his vocation, which may not be our own particular kind of works of mercy.