

The Incompatibility of Love and Violence

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Summary: Affirms that all men are brothers—a view shared by Communists and Christians alike. Disavows violent means of change and cites Peter Maurin’s pacifism. Love requires suffering and the Cross is the path to joy and life. (DDLW #232).

With the May issue of the paper we are beginning our nineteenth year. And with this beginning we wish to state again our faith, in this our life here on earth, that All *men are brothers*. It is our faith, our conviction, and we do state it again solemnly, in regard to Russians, Chinese, Indians, all the people of the east and the west, and we must treat them so, and love them so. It is only in this way that we can show our love for God. To love God and to love our brother as Christ loved him, to the laying down of His life for him—this is the great command, and Christ also said, “Do this and thou shalt live.”

It is because of this affirmation that we write as we do in the Catholic Worker month after month, year after year, and why we tell of houses of hospitality, farming groups, retreat houses on the land, and the works of mercy that are the life of these communities. It is not enough to say it, to repeat it, to hear it sing in our hearts, as in that great chorus in the last movement of the Ninth Symphony of Beethoven. It must be translated into act, into flesh and blood, into our eating and drinking and working and loving.

It is the great and glorious hope of all men, the longing of all hearts. The great Chinese classic that nurtured Mao-tse-Tung was “All Men Are Brothers,” a robin hood tale of bandits who afflicted the rich and took care of the poor. In the book of rites of Confucius, there is that picture of the Great Unity “When the great Tao was practiced, the world was common to all men; men of talents, virtue and ability were selected; sincerity emphasized and friendship cultivated. Therefore men do not only love their own parents, nor do they treat as children their own sons. Provision was secured for the aged until their death, employment was given to the able bodied, and meals were provided for the upbringing of the young. Kindness and compassion were shown to widows, orphans and childless men, and those who were disabled by disease, so that all had the wherewithal for support. Men had their proper work, women had their homes. They hated to see the wealth of natural resources undeveloped, but when they developed these resources, they do not put them to their own use. They hated not to work, but when they worked it was for the common profit. This was known as the great unity.” Mao Tse Tung, (our enemy) employs this ancient phrase when he tells the great masses of China what they are working for. It is again a question of means and ends. We cannot quarrel with the end.

Karl Marx said that Communists would aim for that society where each worked according to his ability and received according to his need, and he too inveighed against the profit motive as against the brother motive, and he lived in exile, in poverty and hunger in London and saw his child die and had no funds to bury him, and suffered the anguish of his wife. Lenin lived and worked in exile and his wife's diary tells of their life in France, and their conferences with workers, their living in the slums on horse meat, and vacationing in walking trips, picking mushrooms in the woods.

These men were animated by the love of brother and this we must believe though their ends meant the seizure of power, and the building of mighty armies, the compulsion of concentration camps, the forced labor and torture and killing of tens of thousands, even millions.

Our Lady of Fatima says we must do penance.

We too have used force in a way so gigantic that in its very magnitude it outdoes the compulsion of the enemy. Compared to their individual tortures and imprisonments, of which we hear much detail, we did a clean job of wiping out whole cities, by obliteration bombing, flame throwers, making human torches of countless number of human beings. I wonder how long it takes them to die, how long they suffer? How many hospitals are full of those who live now only to suffer? The atom bomb, released by a flick of the hand, a pressure of a finger, makes a clean sweep of an entire city.

The atom bomb was dropped when negotiations were under way, when there had already been a plea for peace. And not only one bomb was dropped but a second city suffered, and strangely, and perhaps significantly it was a city where Catholics had held their faith for centuries, after the martyrdom of their priests.

The great story of the **Bhagavad Gita** is the story of the war between good and evil and it is actual warfare, just as the men in **All Men are Brothers** engage in actual warfare.

But our strife is not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers, the mystery of iniquity.

Peter Maurin, the founder of the Catholic Worker movement, always emphasized this, the liberty of Christ; his message was the message of the active life of the works of mercy, and the active life of prayer, of Wisdom which is the most active of all active things.

Peter Maurin was a great apostle to the world and his message was the Christian message of poverty, manual labor, being the servant of all, being the least, the message of suffering which is also the message of love. Because love brings with it suffering.

Peter Maurin did not believe in majority rule and he did not believe in a planned economy. "Fifty thousand Frenchmen can be wrong," he used to say. "Our Lord taught us in His great sermons, The Sermon on the Mount, in His instructions to his missionary apostles, in His parables. His kingdom was not of this world. He spoke of humility and charity, and of the necessity to put on Christ, to partake of His divinity, to partake of His Body and Blood. And many went away sorrowing. He did not force them to believe. He wanted the freely given love of his creatures.

Peter Maurin was a great teacher and leader. A peasant from the Basque country of France, he understood the people. He wanted a new world too, but he abhorred revolution in its violent sense and preached the folly of the cross, the green revolution, the revolution of death that leads to life, failure that leads to victory.

On two occasions Peter almost left the Catholic Worker which he had founded. Once when some of the young intellectuals back in 1936 wanted to throw out the “dead wood,” “the rotten lumber,” (meaning the poor) and concentrate on the “message,” on propaganda. And once when two of the men who were in charge of the house struck others. In his horror and indignation he spoke strongly. On the first instance he arose from the round table where the discussion was going on and said, “let us go, let us leave this to them,” like the retiring abbot in the writing in G. P. Fedortov’s collection of Russian spirituality. And on the other occasion he stated strongly that if he ever again saw evidence of violence such as he had just witnessed, he would leave the work.

Peter went as far as the gospel which emphasized that lack of respect for our brother was an injury, and that he who said “thou fool” was in danger of the judgment.

This is the pacifism that Peter preached, and this is the anarchism too that he talked of. “Call no man Master for ye are all brothers.” Christ had said and then went on to show us and teach us how we were to behave. His kingdom was not of this world, He spoke in one sense, and yet “God so loved the world,” there was that other sense of the word, a paradox.

Once I heard Peter discussing with a Russian who was a theocrat, and with a Mexican general who frankly believed in the use of armed force to defend religion, and a German Benedictine priest who was preaching Victim Souls, and the conversation was so interesting I tried to take it down. Strange and unlikely people meet together always in the offices of the Catholic Worker, in our houses of hospitality. The prince and the pauper, princes of this world and princes of the Church, students and workers, generals and pacifists. We have had a Lieutenant Colonel’s letters assuring us of rightness of our position and letters from Dominican theologians assuring us of the error of it.

Undoubtedly we err constantly in the way we state our case, in our inexactitude of expression, lack of moderation in tone, lack of a sense of proportion, which E. I. Watkin stated in a letter last month to be our greatest fault. We are beginning our nineteenth year, and it seems we have just begun.

Peter Maurin was constantly restating our position, and finding authorities from all faiths, and races, all authorities. He used to embarrass us sometimes by dragging in Marshall Petain and Fr. Coughlin and citing something good they had said, even when we were combating the point of view they were representing. Just as we shock people by quoting Marx, Lenin, Mao-Tse-Tung, or Ramakrishna to restate the case for our common humanity, the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God.

But perhaps these people are nearer to us because we know Communists personally, because we bought our house from Koreans, because we lived in Chinatown, because we have a Japanese from Nagasaki staying in the house, because we are in a Jewish neighborhood now, because we have negro fellow workers in the house.

One of our former companions, a Spaniard who lived in a Franco concentration camp for years, and so spent his youth in civil war, said that what this country, this United States lacked, was joy. And although he rejected our dear old 85-year-old Father Shritz' overtures to him to return to the sacraments, he was expressing a Catholic truth that our prosperous America has lost sight of. That it is only in suffering, only in the Cross the symbol of suffering, that we find joy.

We love life, we hunger and thirst for it and only suffering will bring us to life. For this we are put into the world, to love and give up our life for others. It is this which differentiates Christianity from every other religion, a God which is dragged through the streets in utter and ignominious failure, just as Bishop Ford was last month in China.

This faith, this love is a force not yet explored since Christianity is yet young, as world religions go. It is a force to be sought for with the same zeal that the scientist seeks the secrets of atomic energy, but it is to bring joy and healing in the world not destruction.

We reaffirm these truths, this position we take in regard to war and peace and the state, and General MacArthur and President Truman. It may seem most trite to say that the New Testament has all the answers.

Again if we begin now, this year, May Day, 1951, to live also with the Gospels, we can say, with the psalmist, "Now I have begun." And God give us strength.