

On Pilgrimage - June 1953

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Summary: Societal structures need to be built so that it will be "easy to be good." Advocates the four-hour work day in order that workers become scholars and Scholars workers. Speaks of Vinoba Bhave, whose personalist views enabled people to solve their own problems, by promoting "the little way." (DDLW #171).

A very good way of comforting yourself when you are in affliction is to keep a notebook from year to year, and look back and see how past troubles have evaporated. Or how you have been given strength to bear them. I find that on June first last year, I have complained that every weekend has been stormy!

I notice that June first last year, Arthur Sheehan was talking to us on St. Bernard, and on June third, John Cogley was talking St. Thomas, "What is God." His last of ten talks came in the middle of June. Men and women who lived in the house came to all of them, and some of our readers. How much one understands is hard to say. But the mind is enlightened, the heart expands. As they said of St. Francis, "When he heard the love of God mentioned, he felt in his soul an interior jubilation." And Simone Weil said, "From earliest childhood to the grave there is something in the depths of every human heart which in spite of all the experience of crimes that have been committed, endured, observed, invincibly expects people to do good and not evil. More than any other thing, this is the sacred element in every human being."

Peter Maurin always expected so much understanding from people. He took it for granted that they wanted the good, the best, that there would be a response to hearing tremendous things about God and man. Natalie Darcy and Fr. Oestereich spoke too last year, on Edith Stein, on Scheler, Landsberg, etc. By that time the weather evidently had cleared because this meeting, which was to discuss his book, *Walls Are Crumbling*, was held in the back yard. That yard now is in an awful mess since the fire, filled with burnt wood, furniture, plaster, etc.

We talked of silence that night. Silence and the Word, and there was not much silence round about because I find in my notes, "Planes overhead. Next door in the tenement, a child crying terribly, hoarse and harsh. A tortured cry that tears your heart out. Silence—the wellspring of all great things—and a man next door goes on sawing; filing; there is truck traffic, and the sound of conversation from

a kitchen which overlooks the yard. And then later, wonderful release, there is only the sound of Natalie's quiet words, and one feels sudden silence, and above the blue cope of heaven."

Pilgrimage

I notice too in my notes for last year, that while I was speaking at Pendle Hill, Betty Lou and Rita and Roger and Annabelle went on a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church on her feast, up on 115th street and First avenue, New York. I had made it the year before, and I had wanted to make it again. We set out from the Catholic Worker at about ten in the evening and walk up the one hundred and twenty blocks to the Shrine where the first Mass is said at Midnight, and Masses continue right through until noon on the day of the feast. Anyone who wishes to join us this year, get in touch with us at the office. It is a long walk, but a short pilgrimage. Betty Lou made it in her bare feet as many of the Italian women do! They come from Brooklyn and the Bronx and walk all the way. Not much promotion about this pilgrimage—it just grew by itself.

What he means by the damned wantlessness of the poor, and I don't know where that quotation comes from, is this: the poor want what they are persuaded to want by advertisements, radio, television. They want radio and television, cars, clothes, cosmetics, cigarettes, good food and drink. They don't want to take over the factories, land, in any decentralist or distributist movement. They don't think it possible. They are more intent on preserving the status quo of our industrial capitalist system. So what they get is capitalism or communism, and we don't want either. We would like to see a country made up of farming communes, agronomic universities, hospices, unions, cooperatives, small units of all those necessary institutions to be preserved, and a doing away with luxury in order to have the essential which is ownership of house and field and job, and the responsibility which goes with that ownership. We wish to abolish the proletariat state, rather than establish the dictatorship of the proletariat, abolish the wage system which provides men with luxuries but not the essentials. And it is good to think of the "four hour day" of manual labor that Peter Maurin stresses so that we will have time to study and to pray. And that last comes first. If we prayed enough, great things would come to pass. If we prayed enough, we would grow in strength of soul and body and there would be love in our hearts, not fear.

Two Examples

We have to make the kind of society where it is easy for people to be good, Peter Maurin used to say. And we have to have good men to make that society. And so we go around in a circle.

But here are two examples of goodness and love without fear in this present day. There is a scornful term used nowadays. “Do-gooders.” And yet “Christ went around doing good,” as the Gospel says. To love God is to love your brother. “In this we have come to know His love,” St. John says, “that he laid down his life for us, and we likewise ought to lay down our life for the brethren. . . He who has the goods of this world and sees his brother in need and closes his heart to him, how does the love of God abide in him?”

When I read of Adlai Stevenson going around Indo China in an armoured car, I thought of Lydwine van Karsbergen going around Africa in an old car with a companion, another woman, and penetrating the most inaccessible places. St. Ignatius of Antioch went to the wild beasts with joy and I am sure that the spirit of the lay missionary movement is that if either wild beasts, or Mau Mau devour them, in the chance they take in trying to reach the least of their brothers, then they will rejoice to be “ground like wheat.”

Another Great Soul

Time magazine gave the cover story to Vinoba Bhave this month, and his two year hike around India persuading the rich to give to the poor. In the last two weeks alone, he has distributed 356,000 acres, and these he “looted” from the rich, “with love.” One poor peasant gave one fortieth of an acre, when he had only one acre to call his own. Bhave came from a well-to-do family, he was a student when he joined Gandhi, he knew Sanskrit and many Indian dialects and was a learned man as well as a man of prayer. He travels by foot always, he lives with the poor, and when he starts walking from one to another of India’s 700,000 villages, he starts the day with prayer and walks singing hymns. At first he preached *ahimsa*, non violence, but this was not enough.

“I confess that the incendiary and murderous activities of the communists did not unnerve me, because I know that the birth of a new culture has always been accompanied in the past by blood baths. What is needed is not to get panicky, but to keep cool and find a peaceful means to resolve the conflict. The police are not expected to think out and execute reforms. To clear a jungle of tigers their employment would be useful. But here we have to do with human beings, however mistaken or misguided. When a new idea is born, new repression cannot combat it.”

“You must perform every action sacramentally and be free from all attachment to result.” “The way of love is always new.” “My object is to transform the whole of society.” “The people are going to solve their own problems, not I. I am simply creating an atmosphere. The beginning is always small, but when the atmosphere spreads someone will ask, and someone will give.”

How Peter Maurin would have loved Bhave!

Speaking

To get back to this year, during the month of May, I spoke first at our own Friday night meeting on May first. There were a few of our number distributing copies of the *Catholic Worker* in Union Square, as usual. On Sunday May 3, I spoke at Basking Ridge, New Jersey, at a communion breakfast, and that evening at Palm Garden, at a meeting for free speech, and as a protest against Senator McCarthy and his investigations, which I consider a manifestation of evil, and giving birth to fear and repression in the world. Man's freedom stems from his free will, and he must respect the freedom of other men because they are made to the image and likeness of God and are temples of the Holy Spirit. To build up fear of other men is to build up hatred too. "Perfect love casts out fear." Such a witch hunt as has been set loose in the country today, serves to distract the mind from our own militarization and enslavement, our growing materialism, and to set us in the self righteous position of rooting out the evil in other men, paying no attention to the beam in our own eye. It is always so satisfactory to find a scapegoat on which to heap our sins. During the depression it was the international Jewish bankers. Now it is the communist.

The teacher is afraid to speak of interracial justice, of peace, of social justice these days, for fear he may be considered subversive. Loyalty oaths are beginning to be required at some state universities before a speaker can give an address to the students. This last month, Fritz Eichenberg, Quaker, who does magnificent illustrations for *The Catholic Worker*, refused to take the loyalty oath at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn where he teaches. I suppose that means he loses his job. One must accept voluntary poverty these days to keep his integrity.

The occupied countries became the occupied countries because people were terrorized into saying yes, when they should have said no. Hitler and Stalin, Mussolini and Franco—this is the age of repression and McCarthy, in the guise of fighting Communism, is finding it in any honest criticism of the status quo. (Our Lady of Fatima said, "*Do penance*, and Russia will be converted.")

The Status Quo

David Riesman in *The Lonely Crowd*—a study of the changing American character, published by the Yale University Press, writes (and I think of this when I think of our anarchist-pacifist position):

"We need to insist today on bringing to consciousness the kind of ideas that Marx dismissed as utopian. However, since we live in a time of disenchantment, such thinking, where it is rational in aim and method and not simply escapism, is not easy. It is easier to concentrate on programs for choosing among lesser evils. We are well aware of 'the damned wantlessness of the poor,' . . . Both rich and poor avoid any goals, personal or social, that seem out of step with peer-group aspirations. In dynamic political context, it is the modest, commonsense goals

of constructive critics that are unattainable. It often seems that the retention of a given status quo is a modest hope; many lawyers, political scientists and economists occupy themselves by suggesting the minimal changes which are necessary to stand still; yet today this hope is almost invariably disappointed; the status quo proves the most illusory of goals."

Report of the Month

What else has happened during this month this year. We went to press last month on a hot and beautiful day, April 27. From the printer I went down to Peter Maurin Farm, and at seven the next morning a group of us drove to Maryfarm to make a day of recollection, Hans and Ed, Pat Rusk and Lucille Smith and baby Paul, my godchild, and Bernadette who is twelve and came along to hold the baby so her mother could make the conferences given by Msgr. Fiorentino. It was a beautiful day for us all. We drove back at five and instead of going down the turnpike to Staten Island and avoiding New York city, we drove to the house of hospitality, so the others could see the results of the fire, and get copies of the new issue of the paper.

Then Pat drove them all home, coming in again the next day for the funeral of Jack Simms from St. Thomas Aquinas Church. There was a beautiful solemn high requiem Mass and then Marie Kinsley, Roger O'Neil, Pat and I drove out to St. Charles cemetery near Farmingdale. It was a fearful drive through traffic, at fifty miles an hour and after narrowly avoiding a collision a few times I decided to drop behind the procession which waited for me some miles on. The driver of the hearse leaned out of his car and shouted at me, "Got to make time, you know"! "Time is money," I replied, but he did not hear my sarcasm. It is sad that there must be such haste at funerals and the sense of quiet and peace is destroyed by speed.

After a brief ceremony at the cemetery we drove on out to the Edgewood Division of Pilgrim State Hospital at Brentwood, way out on Long Island, where Frank Wagner and John Pohl are held for tuberculosis. It is a long trip, and hard to take without a car. On the way back, we stopped at Bayside to visit the de Montfort Fathers, who gave us copies of the **Secret of Mary**, which I like to reread every May in honor of our Lady.

It is St. Augustine who says that the flesh of Jesus is the flesh of Mary, and that we must be formed, as Jesus was, in her womb. I know what it means now to sign oneself "In Mary." If we wish to be formed in the image of Christ, there is the mold.

Secularism

Speaking at a dockworkers' breakfast last month, Msgr. John J. O'Donnell, known as "port chaplain," defended Joseph P. Ryan, who has been indicted on

grand larceny charges. “Mr. Ryan is a personal friend of mine and a trustee of Guardian Angels’ Church. He keeps his hands off the spiritual things of my church an [sic] I keep my hands out of his business,” said Msgr. O’Donnell.