

On Pilgrimage - December 1963

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Summary: Notes the assassination of President Kennedy. Says she wants to write a book about how the retreats of the 1940s strengthened her. Goes on to stress the need for spiritual training. Acknowledges Peter Maurin's influence on her. (DDLW #810).

The gigantic nature of the struggle in which we are each one of us engaged, a struggle between the forces of good and evil was clearly shown to us this last month by the assassination of our President. This story of horror is still unfolding in the daily press. It is not for us to reiterate what all are reading in their daily papers and listening to on their radios. And all who read and listen are relating what occurred to all that went before, the recent past with its murder of little children in Birmingham, bombings and shootings in the South, the assassinations of the president of Viet Nam and his brother-in-law. Violence in the rest of the world more or less accepted as "a fact of life" inevitable in the struggle for a better world, but resulting in shocked grief and bitter tears by our own people when it happens to us.

I was in Chicago when I heard the news. I had just gotten off the bus from South Bend, where I had been speaking to Notre Dame students, seminarians, Brothers, and parishioners at the liturgical fair held in St. Therese' parish. I had gone to Nina Polcyn's whose guest I always am in Chicago, and she had left St. Benet's book shop on South Wabash to go to Mass with me at the Paulist church and then to lunch. The news came to us then over the radio and we could only sit and weep at the senseless violence that had erupted again, this time striking down a young and vital leader of a State, a husband, son and father.

Two days later, as we came from the liturgy in Fr. Chrysostom's Eastern rite church on West Fullerton, we heard the news of the second blow struck, another assassination, even more horrible than the first in that it took place in a police station, where men are supposed to be mindful of "law and order," the protection of the weak and innocent, and where all men are presumed innocent, so it is said, until they are proven guilty. To this we had come. To these low depths we had fallen.

Christmas

Yet here we are at this happy season, the time of the birth of Jesus Christ into the world as an infant in a manger, and “the government of this world is on His shoulders,” and we know that God can bring good out of evil, that all things can work together for good to those who love God, that the time of rejoicing comes almost simultaneously with the time of sorrow, of repentance, that there is no “time” with God, that we are living in eternity this moment, and the “all the way to heaven is heaven, because He said, I am the Way.”

In this column I do not wish to write about those things which everyone can read in his daily papers, or diocesan papers, except to call to our readers’ attention some of the things which are going on, especially in the Church today.

My job, my vocation is to write, not only to write for *The Catholic Worker*, but also for other papers, and also to write another book. I wish to write one more book before I die and that will be about a spiritual adventure, our retreats which began in the early forties which influenced my life and gave me the courage to persevere, and so filled my heart with joy that “this joy no man can take from me.” In my recent book, published last month, *LOAVES AND FISHES*, I tell a bit of it in the chapter on Father Roy, but the story begins even before that, and continues long after, – that story of a spiritual adventure. When I saw Father Putz recently at Notre Dame and he told me he had just reviewed my book for the **Davenport Messenger**, he asked me why I had not written about Fr. Hugo. “It is because I wish to devote an entire book to the movement of which he was a vital part,” I told him. And that very night I met two young graduate students, of Notre Dame, who had just come from their home in Pittsburgh where they had made the retreat with Fr. Hugo which he is giving them now in St. Germaine’s parish, to the families of the parish. Fr. Hugo is mentioned too in the leading article in December’s **Harpers**, “Muzzling the Reformers Inside American Catholicism.”

I could not do justice to Fr. Hugo in a chapter, indeed not even in a book, but as a journalist, as an essayist, I can at least call attention to his teachings, and what it has meant to a large segment of our fellow Catholics not only throughout the country but throughout the world. In a way the suppression of his thought in America has been an illustration of that new Testament teaching, “unless the seed fall into the ground and die, it remains alone, but when it dies it bears much fruit.” There have been years when it would seem that those who gave the retreat which Fr. Hugo also gave were also dead but the tree is budding forth and will bear more fruit. There will be ebb and flow, there will be winter and spring, and periods of growing and the harvest. Where sin abounds, grace did more abound, as St. Paul said, and what stirrings there are in the Church today.

The entire world has acclaimed Pope John, and he increased the sum total of love in the world and renewed the health of the Mystical Body of which we are all members, or potential members.

There are the **cursillos** now, courses in Christianity, a tremendous movement among the people, beginning with the Spanish speaking ones, Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in our own country.

There is the Better World movement of Fr. Lombardi, S.J.

All of these are movements to deepen the spiritual life of men of good will, men of desires. And of course these need to go hand in hand with all the work in the world today.

As I write letters, answering the cartons of mail which await me when I return from a month's trip, I feel as though I were talking to our readers and they to me, and I think of all the things I would like to say to them personally which are hard to get down on paper, but which come so readily when one is face to face with others.

When Bea Brickey wrote to me from Colifornia and told me of some of the work being done for the migrant workers, she sent me also a wonderful booklet called Children Count (copies are available from Emma Gunterman, Rte. One, Box 746, Gridley, Calif.), which tells of the volunteer educational program for farm labor children for which 60 volunteers contributed from two hours to six weeks of their time, conducting a summer school, nursery school and library program during the peak of one harvest season. How to get started on such a program, and the case histories of some of the migrant families are given, and it is good to get the actual figures as to amount of work available, pay earned, how many of the children worked, and so on. It is a good study and I wished that others could read it who tried to work in other parts of the country, slum or city, along those lines.

Rev. J. H. Steele

From Chicago Fr. Steele writes of his Inter-American Cooperative Institute (1300 South Wabash Ave., Chicago 5, Ill.) and his literature tells of a six month training course for work in the socio-economic fields in Latin America. This work is all according to the teaching on subsidiarity of Pope John in his encyclical Mater et Magistra. There are so many opportunities to work, to get the training needed, that it seems strange that more are not taking advantage of it. What we need are not only men of desires with a strong sense of the need to help their fellows, but also a strong reform in the field of education. Mostly our education is materialistic, our newspapers and magazines increase our desires for the things of this world – young people are taught to “get on in the world,” be educated in order to get a good job, earn a good living, and pay in turn for their children to get to good schools where they will get the same kind of training.

Basic Need

The basic need is for a change in the hearts and souls, and when we write of destitution and voluntary poverty as one of the means to combat it, it is to emphasize the primacy of the spiritual.

Thank God we also have such a movement as that of the Little Brothers and Sisters of Charles de Foucauld who by their poverty and manual labor are pointing the way. They too have long periods of spiritual formation and training so that the richness of their interior life is in some way a compensation for the barrenness of their existence. There is a story about their beginnings in this country, in a slum in Detroit in the November number of **Jubilee** where there is also a story about Louis Murphy and the House of Hospitality in Detroit.

Do write for booklets about the Little Brothers of Charles de Foucauld from Jesus Caritas, 700 Irving St., N.E., Washington, D.C.

And speaking about destitution – The Catholic Worker in Detroit needs a new furnace for Martha House, 1212 Leverette St. We have been hoping to send them some money towards one, but have not been able as yet.

The Lesson of Cuba

On Pilgrimage – December 3

It makes me happy to have this excellent review of Les Dewart's book *Christianity and Revolution: the Lesson of Cuba*, for this issue of the paper. Dr. Dewart teaches at St. Michael's College in Toronto. The review is by James Douglass, who has a degree in theology from Notre Dame, and who is at present studying in Rome, theology in relation to war and peace. It was his wife Sally who travelled with me in Italy last spring, on my week's trip to Assisi, Milan, Florence and Siena. The latest news of the family is that Sally gave birth to a little girl who was baptized by Bishop Wright in St. Peter's (there were a thousand seminarians present at the time) and the infant was presented by Bishop Wright to the Blessed Mother of Michael Angelo's Pieta, the very one I suppose which will be loaned to the World's Fair next year. What a child that should be – another Therese or Catherine – a valiant woman to work for God. She is their third child, and she has two little brothers.

Loaves and Fishes

I reprint the review of my own book which appeared in *PEACE NEWS* which is published in England at 5 Caledonian Road, London, N. 1. I reprint it because there is a recognition of the all important part Peter Maurin played in the work of the CW and still plays. There is some praise of me which I would like to cut but that would be stupid because I know that as a journalist and as a

housekeeper and as a “slow learner” I played a most important part, thanks to God’s providence in getting the work started and keeping it going. Youth demands the heroic, as Paul Claudel says, and youth is still responding to Peter Maurin’s ideas. All ages, in fact. I reprint the review because F. A. Lea recognized Peter for what he was. It made me feel good about the book.

I’d like to say too, in relation to that sentence which is quoted about whether I “really liked Peter.” I was calling attention to the fact that regardless of the great dissimilarity of our tastes, in music, literature, and so on, it was not attractiveness of person, or personality that won people to him, but simply what he was. A French priest whose name escapes me and who died in a concentration camp during the Second World War pointed out how we should be careful not to exert personal influence to win people to ideas – that their freedom is so sacred a gift that they must not be constrained, or forced in any way. It is the truth which should attract. Or rather Jesus, who is the way, the truth and the life, who attracts. More often than not, we ourselves get in the way.