

On Pilgrimage - July/August 1957

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Summary: Promotes non-violent resistance to atomic bomb testing and all preparations for war. Defends the Catholic Worker's civil disobedience actions in refusing to participate in civil defense drills. Says all Americans need to atone for Hiroshima and Nagasaki as she anticipates being jailed again for her protest. (DDLW #724).

The feast of St. Cyril and Methodius, July 7. Sunday, at the office. It is as hot as blazes, real dog days, and most of the office is out, at meetings or at the beach. The soup line is finished, two hundred or so fed, and Roy Duke is out in the courtyard, in the shade of the tenement next door, slicing tomatoes. There is a basket of celery and one of green peppers on either side of him, a colorful setting. I would like to say that these came from our garden farm in Staten Island, but there the crops have not come in yet, and a drought has not helped matters. The vegetables were purchased by Chas. McCormack on his weekly shopping trip to Washington Market, with Tommie and Red or Mike. Some Fridays they arrive happily with strawberries, or peaches, and this week it was blue berries.

It is one of those quiet Sunday afternoons, after a manic Saturday night at the Chateau Garden on Houston street just around the corner, where a wedding was being celebrated on one floor and a wild dance on the next. I could not sleep so got up and wrote letters until one a.m.

There is an article in PEACE NEWS (England) by Count Michael de la Bedoyere, about the Hydrogen bomb. He wishes that England would not make it, would give up the use of Nuclear weapons. But he does not wish England to be protected by America. He wishes people would explore the possibilities of non-violent resistance, but someone from Poland said that this would work only when the adversary had a moral sense or was stupid. It worked in the case of India versus England because England had a moral sense, and it was used in Germany by Germans during Hitler because the Germans were stupid, presumably, but it would not work in the satellite countries because the Russians themselves outdid the German Nazis (the Germans could go to school to the Russians) and they had no moral sense.

At least this is the gist of the article as I read it on a hot day. The Count's conclusion is that one has to be prepared and fight rather than let civilization be destroyed. But the 2,000 scientists who recently signed a protest against the tests of nuclear weapons believe that atomic warfare will destroy civilization. There is no question of saving it. I believe the Pope has also said this. And how can one keep small wars localized, especially when we are sending jet bombers and nuclear weapons around the world to our air bases, and to South Korea.

While disarmament talks go on, we continue to arm, we continue defense spending. Friday night on the radio Victor Riesel the blind labor reporter said that representatives of unions were in London to beg consideration for the plight of their membership if disarmament really went through. From ten to fifteen million men would be unemployed! So it is recognized that it is defense spending that keeps our prosperity going. We live on the threat of war. It is a hopeful fact that the newspapers give more and more attention to the dangers of atomic war, the words of the scientists as well as the moral leaders of the world.

There is the usual complaint of some of the older readers who also drop in to call, that the paper is not what it used to be. Too much stuff about war and preparation for war, and the duty of building up resistance. But I repeat, in Peter Maurin's day, the problem was unemployment. It was the time of depression. We still need to build up the vision of a new social order wherein justice dwells, and try to work for it here and now. We still need to perform the works of mercy because in spite of full employment there is still sin, sickness and death, and the hunger and homelessness and destitution that go with so much sickness, and our industrial system.

But the work of non-violent resistance to our militarist state must go on. Some readers, and old friends too, ask us why we do not protest Russian tests as well as English and American. We can only say that we have – over and over. In the two talks I gave on May Day before left wing groups, I stressed the numbers of unannounced nuclear tests made in Russia. Why don't we picket the Russian embassy, another wants to know. For one thing, we have only one chronic picketer, Ammon Hennacy, and for another, we believe in taking the beam out of our own eye, we believe in loving our enemy, and not contributing to the sum total of hatred and fear of him already in the world.

Today is the feast of Saints Cyril and Methodius, the apostles to the Slavs, and in **Jubilee** magazine it is stressed how they were persecuted by their own, by the Roman Catholics, and how Roman Catholic bishops of Germany contributed to bringing about the schism between west and east.

The Gospel for this feast gives the directives of Jesus Christ.

“At that time, the Lord appointed also other seventy-two; and He sent them two and two before His face into every city and place whither He Himself was to come. And He said to them, The harvest indeed is great, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that He send laborers into His harvest. Go, behold, I send you as lambs among wolves. Carry neither purse, nor script, nor shoes, and salute no man by the way. Into whatsoever house you enter, first say, Peace be to this house. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon him. But if not, it shall return to you.”

The Bible reading of the day in the Roman breviary is about David and Goliath and also contains a lesson for us all. David could not walk in the armor Saul sought to clothe him in, but went out with a staff and stone. And the staff prefigured the cross and the stone Christ, according to St. Augustine.

Sts. Cyril and Methodius ent to conquer a barbarous people and won them to Christianity. It was the so called Christians who martyred these saints.

Here on page 8 we publish the commentary of St. Chrysostom on this passage of the gospel “behold I send you as lambs among wolves.”

A Sister who was in prison for several years under the Chinese said that they came to her then and said, “Now you are like us, you are even poorer than we. Your Lord told you to go with neither purse nor script and you come with your higher standards of living, with rich among the poor, with schools and hospitals and missions. The Communists come with neither scrip nor staff and go from village to village and teach the people how to help themselves.”

Of course we know that the Communists also come with arms, with the use of force, with the threat of liquidation to all who do not conform. It is that very use of force that is the heart of the problem today. The means become the ends. We cannot force people to be good, to be just, to share with their brothers. But Peter Maurin said, We must make the kind of society in which it is easier to be good. We must make it, and we can only begin with the works of mercy, with sharing what we have, with voluntary poverty.

We must do more. We cannot keep silent in the face of the bomb tests, we cannot ignore what we have done in the past to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Each year on that anniversary, beginning August 6, Ammon Hennacy fasts for as many days as there are years since the bomb was dropped. This year he will fast. He has already fasted twelve days last month in front of the Atomic Energy Commission offices in Las Vegas, Nevada.

In addition to this demonstration of dissent, there will be our third annual protest during the civil defense drill in which the public is supposed to participate by taking shelter, next Friday, July 12. This will be before we go to press for our July-August issue, and is one of the reasons why I wish to write this column now. If we again refuse to take shelter, but go out into the streets, in our refusal to play war games as Ammon Hennacy puts it, we are liable again to a jail sentence. The first year we were only in prison a day or two days awaiting bail, – the second year we were sentenced to five days, and it is hard to tell what will happen this year. We may be ignored as crackpots, but we have to reconcile ourselves to being a “spectacle to the world, to angels and to men,” – “to being fools for Christ.”

Why Do We Do It

It is not because we can say with St. Peter that we are obeying God rather than man, that we do this. There is nothing in this command of the civil defense authorities in itself that is against the law of God. It is generally acknowledged, that **there is no defense**. So it is a farce to pretend there is. There is no defense but decentralization, a return of those in the city to the land, or to the small town. One young physicist instructor from Purdue demonstrated at the same time we did, - allowed himself to be arrested, and sentenced, just so that he could protest the foolishness of these games last year. He paid his \$25 fine and left the court, always careful not to associate himself with us

The main reason we make our protest, those of us from **The Catholic Worker**, is to do penance publicly for our sin as Americans for having been the first to make and use the atom bomb. As the priest editor of the Boston Pilot said, “This is an unconfessed sin, and as such not forgiven.” We publicly confess our share in the guilt of our country, and are willing to give up our freedom by this act of civil disobedience. It is not an easy thing to do, physically speaking. As I woke up this morning I thought of that hard narrow iron bed which was suspended from the wall, in the tiny cell at the Woman’s House of Detention. I thought of the crowded conditions, how Deane’s bed was moved into my single cell to make room for another prisoner. I thought of the gray ugliness of the surroundings that the girls tried to alleviate in little ways as they served out their long sentences, by scrubbing, draping, decorating in whatever way they could through the long months. The sooty few feet of recreation space on the roof, the capacious floors for medicinal services, and the scanty space for recreation and occupational therapy. The work is all done by the inmates and there is not enough of that to go around. There are long periods to lie in your bunk and contemplate the four narrow walls, the tiny sink, the toilet in the corner which is also a chair with a metal table in front which comes down from the wall – your dining cubicle in case you are confined to your cell. You find nothing there you want to satisfy but the most elementary instinct of mind or body or soul. And yet the strange and tragic thing is that so many women have found temporary content and safety there from their drab and sin-filled lives while their health was built up and with it the craving to go out and continue the only life they knew.

We know what we are in for, the risk we run in openly setting ourselves against this most powerful country in the world. It is a tiny Christian gesture, the gesture of a David against a Goliath in an infinitesimal way.

We do not wish to be defiant, we do not wish to antagonize. We love our country and are only saddened to see its great virtues matched by equally great faults. We are a part of it, we are responsible too.

We do not wish to be defiant, we atone in some way, with this small gesture, for what we did in Hiroshima, and what we are still doing by the manufacture and testing of such weapons.