

# On Pilgrimage In Cuba: Part III

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*Summary: Continues the account of her pilgrimage in Cuba with a story of getting lost on the bus system. Delivers supplies to the National Hospital. Stays with several families and visits collective farms. Admires many new homes going up, sturdy furniture, and pockets of free enterprise. Notes everyone's hunger for education. Describes Catholics who struggle with the language of the revolution but work for the common good in building up society. Sees similarities between Peter Maurin's philosophy of work and efforts to build up Cuban society. (DDLW #796).*

On the way home from Cuba, through Mexico, I have spoken at San Antonio, Texas, the University of Minnesota Newman Club (twice) at a meeting at Mary Humphrey's in St. Cloud, at St. John's university at Collegeville, at North Dakota State College in Fargo, at Marquette University School of Journalism (twice), at the University of Chicago Calvert Club, and to small groups and at dinners which included a college presidents, nurses, nuns, family groups, and others.

"Do you think they will let you tell about Cuba when you get back to the United States" a few people in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs asked me while I was still in Cuba. "They" meant of course our "imperialistic, capitalistic, militaristic government." We may be all of that, though I would hesitate to use those terms, being, as I am, a Catholic peacemaker and pacifist as well as a member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Those are not the terms one uses when trying to reconcile peoples. I convinced my interrogators that there was freedom of speech and of assembly in this country even though it sometimes resulted in lynching or prison.

I am going to try not to be the occasion of sin for our opponents in the future, which means that I will try and try again to think things out, study, read more, find more authorities for our positions, stimulate others to that same study, and so express myself that I will evoke in others what is really there to be evoked—a desire to do what is right, to follow conscience, to love one's brother and find what there is of God in every man.

Listening to Maurice Friedman who teaches at Sarah Lawrence and the New School and who is the author of many books on Martin Buber, I was converted to trying harder for the I-Thou relationship. That goes for fellow Americans, fellow Cubans and fellow workers everywhere.

My meetings convince me that there is an intense interest in Cuba, whether it takes the form of wishing to invade, or to overcome the barriers between us and resume friendly relations. I

pray that what I write will bring about more understanding.

## **Chronological**

To go back to my voyage to Cuba, the fact of note was that the tourist class was filled with families returning with all their household goods. I went to Cuba on the Guadalupe and left on the Covadonga, ships of the Spanish Line which sail from Barcelona to New York, Havana and Vera Cruz once a month. The Guadalupe sailed in September and the Covadonga in October, and that was the last voyage. The Transatlantica announced that no more ships of that line would put in at Havana. This was before the crisis and it was almost as though they knew a week ahead of time of what was to come.

This morning I went to Mass at St. Rita's church where there are Masses each morning at 7:30; 8:15; and 9 a.m. and in the evening rosary at six thirty and Mass again at seven. There is also a holy hour each day at five thirty for the children. Perhaps it is a way of instructing them now that the Catholic schools are closed.

The side chapel was full of worshipers and I stayed for two Masses. One of the priests heard confessions before the Masses. Those who served the Mass were youths of sixteen or eighteen.

The main church was being painted though it seemed to me a very new church and I had been told it had been built by an American Augustinian who had built two other churches on the island and also had started a clinic. Since it is the feeling of many of the well to do and well educated Catholic that one is a traitor to one's faith if one does not make the effort at least to emigrate, it is hard for those to remain. They had had the heartbreaking experience too of seeing their friends and brothers coming back with the invasion and being taken prisoner. Every appeal to youth is made on both sides, of course, and both sides think themselves serving a holy cause. There is no knowledge of any kind of pacifism and Catholic as well as Socialist believe that there is nothing nobler than for a man to bear arms for his country. "Youth demand the heroic," Claudel wrote.

## **Credentials**

After Mass I took bus number 32 down towards the ministry of Foreign Relations where I was supposed to pick up my credentials. I had been there yesterday morning and filled out forms, answered questions as to what magazines I wrote for as well as our own, and then was directed to get four photographs to be brought back the next day.

Raul Lazo, the young man in charge of the section for foreign correspondence asked me what I particularly wished to see, and again I asked about the granjos, the collectivos, the schools, clinics, students picking coffee, housing cooperatives and so on. I said I should also like to go and see Guantanamo naval base,—just to stand there and look at it, the Hong Kong of Cuba. And then, I said, I should like to write to President John Kennedy and ask him to voluntarily relinquish it, as a great and unprecedented gesture of good will, which would have tremendous moral effect on the entire world. Of course he would be impeached at once. But such a mad gesture would not be without its effect. Senor Lazo was young enough and

serious enough to recognize my desire. After all, this is a country where a revolution was begun with a handful of men.

I had been escorted yesterday by Jean Curtis Hagelberg who is the lawyer Rabinowitz's representative in Havana. Her husband works for HOY, one of the three daily papers. She has three children and lives not too far from the ministry. She knows Gert Granich, Mike Gold's sister in law, an old friend of mine in Mexico where she lived for five years. She told me of the murder of one of the leaders of the peasants in Mexico, a communist. They came by night and took him, last April, and his family insisted on going with him, so all were shot, one a pregnant woman. The blood of martyrs is the seed of communism.

I was always getting lost in Havana when I travelled by myself. I took the bus, as directed but instead of proceeding east on the Avenue of the Presidents it turned south and began its meandering course through the city. When you pay your eight cents fare (two cents additional for transfer) you get a little ticket like a receipt and on the back of each one is a saying of one or another of the revolutionary leaders. During the course of the morning, in finding my way, I collected three of them.

La Revolucion delante y los revolucionarios a la ofensiva siempre. —**Dr. Osvoldo Dorticos. Patria o Muerte.**

Estudia: Estamos construyendo un pueblo de hombres capacitados. Inscríbete en los Cursos de Seguimiento y Superación Obrera. **Patria o Muerte.**

Orientar, no gobernar, en todos los niveles, es la función del Partido. **Dr. Fidel Castro. Patria o Muerte.**

My ride was very pleasant and I finally made the conductor understand with the assistance of half the bus where I wanted to go. They identified me first as Russ, then as American. I got off at the railroad station with a transfer and was told to take a 103 bus. I bought copy of **Bohemia**, a monthly, which is only twenty cents. I opened to the picture of George Bernard Shaw with the inscription underneath: in Spanish of course, "The United States is the only nation in history which has passed from feudalism to decadence without any intermediate steps."

## **Bohemia**

(There is a **Bohemia** published in the United States which is against the revolution.)

I bought also a copy of **El Mundo**, one of three dailies which cost five cents. **Revolution** was founded by Fidel. **Hoy** always was the communist paper, and **El Mundo** has 2 columns of Catholic news every Sunday though of course it is not a Catholic paper.

There was time between buses to look over the news stands in the station, and of course there are many such in every Plaza. The Russians are way ahead of us there. The stands are flooded with Spanish translations of every kind of novel, with history, science, theory and so on.

There was **Moby Dick** by Melville, **Anna Karenina** by Tolstoi; **Mother** by Maxim Gorki. There were Darwin, Engels, Marx and Jose Marti and many others, a wealth of cheap paper

backs and many popular science books. There were the **Iliad** and the **Odyssey**. Also a history of the world by H. G. Wells. All kinds of stuff to testify to the hunger of the poor for knowledge.

In addition to the books, which contained many primers too of Spanish grammar, reading, declensions, etc. there are the popular slogans everywhere. "Eternal glory to the martyrs of Mondado." "Children are born to be happy." "The revolution is made for the children." And of course the little verses chanted by the students from all the trucks on the way to the Sierra Maestre.

**I don't drink whiskey,  
I don't drink tea.  
I am going to Oriente  
To pick coffee.**

One bus I took gave me an interesting ride through the Central Park, past the Capital which is a copy of our own, past the statue of Jose Marti, along the harbor with its bars for sailors, pilots, navy, etc. everything looking incredibly poor and shabby now that the revolution has taken over. "But of course there still are night clubs, and they are good," one young girl from the militia said indignantly. All hotels are nationalized and there are no more red light districts.

One bus was marked **Old Havana** and we went through the most crowded sections and the narrowest streets I have ever seen except our own down town financial district in New York at noon.

But it was not the right bus and after half an hour I found myself back at the railroad station where I had a delightful drink of mixed fruit juices and took a cab to the ministry. I had another good drive along the Malicon where there was some fishing going on, and finally reached the ministry at eleven. There I received my card with my picture pasted on (by the stubby finger of the clerk) and was given an official stamp.

## **The National Hospital**

I had brought to Cuba some cartons of hospital supplies that the Medical Aid for Cuba had entrusted to me, so I called the National Hospital in Havana and was able to reach Dr. Juan Ortega, a young Cuban doctor who had been trained in New York and had practiced there for some years and had returned to work for his country with his wife and children. He was enthusiastic about the revolution and spoke eloquently on the necessity of dealing with the whole man, his work, his living quarters, his family, his problems of work and his talents and capacities.

Next day Dr. Ortega sent two young men, Lazaro Corujo, the administrator of the National Hospital and Rolando Aedo. who spoke English, having lived in Tampa for some years. He was the auxiliar casero, the paymaster. They drove me to the outskirts of Havana to the great new hospital and took me over the new buildings, through the wards and later we had dinner in the dining room where doctors, administrators, porters, orderlies, nurses, anesthetists, colored and white, all eat together. Collective Farm —————

The first week I spent at the home of Lou and Lenna Jones and at the end of the week I paid my first visit to a collective farm, or granja which was located near the Matanzas border some hours out of Havana.

I was driven by the Rios family, husband, wife and two daughters and another friend whose brother was studying in Red China to be a jet flier. The mother and her fourteen year old daughter Pamela had been engaged in alphabetizing the winter before. They lived in the village for six months were returning to meet their old pupils and to find out about the continuation course that was going to begin in another month. We had lunch at Santa Cruz del Norte, a fishing village, and from there left the coast to go up into the hills, through lovely lush scenery to the village of Bainoa, a village of narrow streets, thatched huts, as well as better houses, a locked up church, a small factory where uniforms were made, and a country store where I bought a few cans of evaporated milk and a box of colored pencils from Russia. (There is little to buy in Cuba in the way of souvenirs). Then we drove all around over rutted roads. It was still the rainy season and one can go ankle deep in mud.

According to published figures (American sources) the U. S. owned half the farm land, where 70% of the population lived and half the farming land was put to sugar cane, 45 millions tons being raised. The tourists were the second largest industry, 200,000 from the United States visiting yearly. Previously it took only two hours to fly and 6 and a half hours by auto ferry. It is hard to remember these things, isolated and poor as Cuba is now. Everywhere now there was evidence of the attempts to convert agriculture to more diversified crops. Cuba can support three times its population, Dr. Ortego had told me, explaining their utter condemnation of birth control.

## Visits to Home

It was good to be visiting in the homes of people as we did that afternoon. Marjorie, her daughter Pamela and Marietta, the other young woman, were all greeted by their first names and embraced and when I was introduced as an aunt mia tia, I was given the same welcome. We drank innumerable little cups of the black sweet coffee and news was exchanged back and forth. They knew that Marjorie was an American, so I as an American was accepted also, and somehow they did not associate us with their fear of an invasion. Radio SWAN broadcast constantly about impending invasions and the mothers grieved. But everyone, young men and women in the militia were prepared to fight in this most hopeless situation, which could only mean obliteration.

There on the land, where a great transformation was taking place in the economy of a country, there was not so much evidence of the militarizing of the country. I saw no women in militia uniform and the men and boys only when they had to go out to guard duty on the hills.

On one page of my note book I find I have written that there are 400 inhabitants in the village of Bainoa and on another page it is 700. Perhaps one figure is for the little village and the other for the entire granja including the people who live in the 64 new houses, for which they drew lots. All the new houses had three bedrooms; one for the parents, one for the young men and boys, and one for the girls. The bedrooms were large—I looked into one

and saw two big double beds. The living room extended out on to the terrace and garden, which in turn looked away off to the horizon and the setting sun.

The houses were so much better than I expected (and more were being built) that I was surprised that there could be a refusal on the part of some of the small farmers to join. But it was a question of property which to them meant freedom. Freedom for themselves perhaps, but what of the others? “When we get to heaven,” Peguy writes, “God is going to ask us first of all, ‘Where are the others?’”

One small farmer had eighteen head of cattle, seven of them milk cows from which altogether he got 22 quarts of milk a day. Of course there had been a terrible drought last year when everything dried up and the cattle wasted away. But this year it is lush. This farmer had two pigs, and there were many chickens wandering around. Plenty of fruit on the trees and I suppose vegetables. His houses were primitive, made of the palm, some with dirt floors, but all swept clean and others had stone floors. His married sons lived with him. Hanging from the middle of the ceiling was a great kerosene lamp from China. There was no electricity, and this was used only when the peasants were being alphabetized, as they call it. They welcomed their former teachers with joy and affection and again we had to drink little cups of coffee, very strong and very sweet. We had to travel very slowly along the dirt roads, deeply rutted and bright orange like some of the clay in the South. It was good to be out on a Sunday where everyone was on the streets and resting and visiting and happy.

The revolution says, “Children are made to be happy,” but St. Thomas says all men are meant for happiness. It was good to see so much of it around. It was evident in the home of the store keeper, another capitalist, whose sons worked with him, as those of the farmer miles down the road. One son especially kept dragging visitors in to see his three-month-old son. If he were asleep, he waked him so admirers could see his eyes, and it was indeed adorable to see how the baby flopped over into sleep again, either on the shoulder of the one who was holding him, or in the beautiful crib, made of several different kinds of Cuban woods, of contrasting colors.

I was always having a chance to admire Cuban furniture, beautifully made, capacious and sturdy, even in the poorest homes. (Everywhere there were little carpenter shops, in Cobre, Oriente province especially.) We admired the baby dutifully while the mother plucked the eyebrows of a younger daughter whose hair was done up in huge plastic cylinders, just like all the teenagers in the States. The young wife still pale from the heat and her new responsibilities, talked babies and their health with her former teacher. They were very much petty bourgeois like the world over, storekeepers and prosperous, even though there was little on their shelves. We bought a few cans of evaporated milk and some cans of tomato juice and some Russian baby food like pablum, and I bought some Russian colored pencils to bring home to the grandchildren. There was also Russian canned beef on the shelves. There is indeed a shortage, yet none can say there is any starvation. (Every child under seven has its quart of milk.) It is rationing as we had it during the war, and I think better administered.

After visiting these two examples of still existing Capitalism, and later I found many such, I was pleasantly surprised at the beauty and comfort of the new houses going up everywhere in Oriente, Camaguey, Matanzas and Santa Clara provinces.

It was good we were visiting on Sunday and saw the men and talked to them, and to the girls too. Many of the woman worked in the clothing factory in the town or in the tomato cannery when it was open. School starts October first and the school building on the granja rivals our own in the States. As we passed there were many chairs outside the school, showing that some meetings and classes were already being held out of doors on a terrace. The workers go to school nights, and one out of every twenty five will be elected to go to Havana to learn everything, including mechanics—how to take care of the machinery. The middle, educated, professional classes having abandoned the country, there is a crying need for administration.

There was the real hardship, the biggest problem. Everything that had come from America was breaking down and they could no longer get parts. Every now and then on the main road one passed cars and trucks which were broken down. And on every bus were signs – This engine from USSR. This from Czechoslovakia. The Czecho-Technicos were always, it seemed to me, as much in evidence as the Russ.

The granja we were visiting was Called La Cooperativa Juan Abrahantes and later I read an article about it in CUBA. The Nov. 1961 edition in which the article appeared was called INRA then, and the title was “Ini Fidel se imagina mi alegria!” Even Fidel cannot imagine my joy! I drank coffee in dozens of houses, and we drove through the village, the surrounding country and through the cooperative proper, with its 62 houses, good roads, big truck gardens, pigs and chickens and beautiful flower gardens. And everywhere the houses were furnished with good hardwood furniture, with cane seats and backs for coolness, and everywhere there were rocking chairs. I told them all that President Kennedy had brought the rocking chair back into favor in the United States. There were shrines in many of the homes, but no church open nearby. The closed church I saw in the village was only visited by a priest every two weeks. Floors of these homes are tile, there is a laundry on a terrace outside the kitchen, and the terrace in front is shaded with trees and shrubs. Pictures I had seen had made these developments look like a Levittown, but they were far more spacious and cultivated than I expected. The men worked on the granja which is not truly a cooperative but a state farm, and the work was year-round work, not just for a few months a year. The private farm sold all its produce to the state. But there is private ownership in homes and half-acre plots. It was as I had envisioned it, and I was not disappointed. It is the model for agricultural reform in our own country where the braceros and migrant families suffer destitution most of the year like that of Latin America.

As I write this, still in Cuba, I look out the window at Dellis the Jamaican servant hanging out the clothes, and making room on the line where there are many clumps of ears of bright yellow corn, hung there not for decoration, but to feed the chickens which everyone has begun to keep in their gardens. When there are an influx of chickens on the market, people get them alive four or five at a time. My hostess had decided to keep a hen to see if she would lay. Sure enough her optimism was rewarded and there was an egg in the flower border. So she saved four more, and raised two tiny chicks and now she is getting perhaps four or five eggs a day. The corn is for the chickens and the children love to feed them. It is a comforting sound to hear the murmuring of hens, their triumphant call as they finish laying an egg, having performed their trabajo productivo as others in the revolution. There are fruit trees too, banana trees, mangos, lime and guava, and people have in some cases cultivated the empty

lots. The becados, scholarship students, across the street from the first place I stayed, while waiting to be sent to pick coffee in Oriente cleared the large lot next to the big apartment house where they were quartered, and planted corn which has grown ten feet high. Pumpkin is a plentiful crop and we have eaten it as a vegetable every day since I came. Rice, bread, pumpkins, avocado, black beans, white beans, many kinds of beans, this is the diet, and plenty of sugar so there are sweets after each meal, cakes, puddings made without milk and so on.

It is the rainy season, the cyclone season, and every day there are periods of rain and thunder and lightning. The corn hanging on the line is getting wet again. The baskets of corn dragged into the porch attract huge black ants which swarm around the floor. The rain brings mosquitos and there are no screens. I am offered a mosquito net, but it is so humid in this season that I could not sleep so covered, and I turn thankfully to a small bottle of insect repellent. Dellis is washing, the little cook is getting lunch, and there is a gardener just now cleaning up the yard. All of these workers are going to classes at night. Voluntarily. There is a great hunger and thirst for knowledge. What are they thinking about? Probably of the time when all mothers will either take care of their own children, or put them in the nurseries provided and work in one or another branch of industry or agriculture or service job. The nursery I visited yesterday was named "Valley of Tenderness."

Certainly in the South of the United States there is a big servant class miserably paid and in addition despised. The insulted and injured. But in the States in the North there are very few who can afford anything more than a girl to come in to clean once a week, or to baby-sit occasionally. But here there are large numbers of people who are still living in former comfort affording several servants. And the rents are moderate from American standards. In one place I stayed, the family was paying seventy dollars a month. In another ninety, and this for luxurious apartments and houses in Mirimar.

"And is it true that you will own this house after you have paid rent for a while," I asked. "Yes, we will own this in five years. It is a rather old house." But it is a dream of a home, with an enclosed garden with flowers and fruits. We in the states are self conscious in the presence of a servant class and are uncomfortable at being waited on, but are quite happy with student workers and baby sitters. With everyone going to school in Cuba there is a new dignity to work in the home and one can think of functional rather than acquisitive classes. One Catholic mother was indignant at Fidel when he said in one of his speeches that the aim was to do away with prostitutes and servants as a class. "I will never forgive him," she said indignantly. "The idea of classing the two together!"

Among the Catholics I met there was complete freedom of speech and there was criticism as well as praise of the regime. It was in the field of education that parents were in a quandary. "How can we let our children go to schools where Marxism-Leninism is taught?"

I spoke to many Catholics and it was hard to answer such a question. I could only say as Fr. Ignacio Biain, Franciscan, said, "Have more faith in Divine Providence." And in one's own courage, in the effectiveness of prayer to build up courage. I told them of the courage of our own American Negro families who brought their little children with heroic courage through lines and mobs of jeering and insulting and threatening whites, in an effort to integrate the schools, and urged them to build up that same courage in their own children. And to find



concordances as our own Holy Father has urged, rather than to seek out heresies, to work as far as one could with the revolution, and to always be ready to give a reason for the faith that is in one.

There is the singing of the **International**, for instance, most of the verses of which can be joined in with enthusiasm. “Arise, poor of the world/On your feet slaves without bread/ and let us shout all together/ All united, Long live the International. 2. Let us remove all shackles/ that tie humanity /let us change the face of the earth/burying the bourgeois empire.”

The third verse is the one where I would recommend that the children sit down. It is—“No more Supreme Saviors/no Caesar, no bourgeois, no God. We ourselves have our own redemption.”

The fourth verse is—“Where the proletariat/enjoy the good/it has to be the workers/who guide the train. Verse 5. The day that we reach triumph/there will be neither slave nor owners/ and the fury that poisons the world/will at that point be extinguished. 6. Man is brother to man/let inequality cease/ let the earth be the paradise/and homeland of humanity.” This is a rough translation which a Catholic mother gave me, who said wistfully, “We could well sing the other verses. We ourselves have been ashamed of our position in the face of poverty and ignorance, of not having done more about it.”

## A Weak Lay Apostolat

Fr. Matteo said once that the churches could all remain open in a persecution of the church, provided that religion was strong in the home. Groups should keep meeting together to discuss, not their oppositions with the revolution but Scripture, social justice, theology. I left Emmanuel Mounier’s book, **Be Not Afraid** with them and all the others I had brought down in my too heavy suit case. There was nothing left of the Christian Family movement, the Young Christian Workers, Catholic Action, and it was better for them to meet and discuss the spiritual life rather than politics. The main thing was to have courage, to stand fast in one’s faith, and find out every way in which one could lawfully participate. One example of courage was that of a young family man, a lawyer who was asked by the security police on his street to work with them in prosecuting “counter revolutionaries,” a request which he refused. To be put in the position of a spy on people he might know, and to inform and be a party to their prosecution—this he could not do. When later he was persecuted by a woman member of the security police, he complained to the authorities, perhaps to Castro himself, and was upheld. The persecutions ceased and he attended block meetings, continued his work in the teaching field and gave an example of a man of principle. One day there was a story in **El Mundo** about St. Thomas More whom the Communists have long claimed as one of their own, perhaps because of his book, **Utopia**. I wish I could send the play, **A Man for All Seasons**, to my Catholic friends in Cuba who like Thomas More are Fidel Castro’s good cooperators, but first of all, God’s servants.

On the outside of one church in Guantanamo (the town not the base) I saw posters with quotations from Pius XII about the need for secular institutes, and I visited with the girls of one such secular institute in Havana where they lived in a big house together, sixteen of them and worked to help Fr. Iglesia with his catechetical groups.

In Santiago de Cuba I visited the shrine of our Lady of Cobre, an hour up in the mountains in the little mining town of Cobre (copper) and there I found a Sister Mercedes, one of the Social service sisters, who was as serene and calm as though it were the most natural thing in the world to live under a Marxist-Leninist government, proudly calling itself socialist. They ran a guest house, which was like a most modern retreat house and it would have been a lovely place to stay and make a retreat. Retreats were still going on in Havana I knew. In Santa Clara I met a happy priest, Fr. Joseph, who reminded me of Fr. Roy. The priests at the shrine were still offering Mass each day.

## **Guantanamo Bay**

When I mention Guantanamo, I must add that it was only a visit of a few hours to that town which looked to be comfortably off, probably thanks to the high wages of the Cuban workers at the base. But a young newly married couple told us that those who worked on the base were now forbidden to leave the base and that they had to take their vacations in Jamaica. This was long before the crisis. One morning I went to what was formerly Camp Columbia, next to the air field, which is now transformed into the Ministry of Education, and built up into a school city called Liberty City. This is what has happened in every city I visited. The army was out. I saw the cavalry headquarters where Batista lived under guard, and which is now for the administration of scholarships. As you enter the gates of Liberty City, you pass a great building which houses the League against blindness, and next door the entrance to Tropicana Night Club, one of the most famous of Havana and now used by the workers. When we passed guards (against sabotage) Lou would say, "I am a functionary of the ministry," and we would pass in. The architecture of the Ministry of Education is a lively combination of tiles and cement blocks and all the barracks have been transformed into dormitories and classrooms by students. Everywhere in the city of course there are classrooms, even in the Havana Libre, the most luxurious hotel, formerly the Havana Hilton. Lenna works for the diagnostic institute, and handles children and the teachers of children with special problems, and Lou is an educational psychologist setting up systems for evaluation and orientation.

I visited Batista's bomb shelter—or rather it was one for the generals I suppose, and one was reminded of Hitler's bunker where he met his end. It is air-conditioned, so well lighted one did not get the feeling of being underground. The map room was especially interesting with one wall covered with a map of Cuba with well-outlined sections showing where "Che," "Raul," and "Fidel" were in command of troops. Crosses marked the desire to obliterate these forces, and in the case of Fidel there was not only a cross but a hole where a cigaret had burned a circle on the map.

## **Work and Pray**

I talked with one young woman who was a devout Catholic who up to the time of the March 13 speech which I wrote about in my October article had been most fearful about the

revolution and its attitude towards religion. She wears a medal of the Blessed Virgin, and is a good and conscientious worker in the field of education, which Fidel considers the most important branch of the revolution. But she feels the pressures of her fellow Catholics who tell her she is cooperating with communism by working for the government. This girl told me that there are four churches open in her city, not a large one— that at the cathedral of the province there are four Masses and at the other churches three and two a day. That in the eastern part of the state of Matanzas there are ten Canadian priests and twelve Sisters teaching catechism.

But if they do not teach together with their catechism an acceptance of voluntary poverty, manual labor, a devotion to the common good, the works of mercy as worked out by the government in housing, agriculture, clothing factories, hospital work, care of children in nurseries, harvesting of crops, studying to become literate and to cultivate their talents, catechism becomes principle divorced from practice.

Man is a creature of body and soul, and he must work to live, he must work to be co-creator with God, taking raw materials and producing for man's needs. He becomes God-like, he is divinized not only by the sacrament but by his work, in which he intimates his Creator, in which he is truly "putting on Christ and putting off the old man, who is fearful and alienated from his material surrounding. He must be taught those words of Catherine of Sienna," "I have left myself in the midst of you," Jesus said to her, "so that what you cannot do for me, you can do for those around you." And "All the way to Heaven is heaven, for He said, 'I am the Way.'"

Later I met a Canadian girl from British Colombia who had been picking coffee berries for the past two weeks. She was a sturdy, blond girl, well educated one felt and evidently from a radical Catholic background. She was here alone, and had been teaching English for a year. Thousands of students are being taught English and as many Russian, with intensive courses of four hours a day. How many are being sent to Russia? One student told me 4,000 are preparing to go.

The girl who was a **brigadista** in the granja which I visited Sunday, has not only a brother who is studying to be a jet flier in China, but one who is in the regular army. She herself works every day in the department of commerce studying the produce of Cuba and the foreign markets for it; her teaching is at night.

The Canadian girl had Canadian friends, who had come from Mexico and lived in a trailer.

## Catechism

I have two copies of newly printed catechisms, printed on Cuban government presses and paper, for beginners and secondary students. I am not minimizing the importance of catechism, no matter how dogmatic—"Who made you?" "God made me." "What did He make you for?" "To know him, to love Him and to serve Him." But it seems to me never too early to begin teaching a child—"How can you love God whom you have not seen, unless you love your brother whom you do see?" And how can you know God, to love Him, unless you use all knowledge to go to God, all beauty, all truth, all goodness? As it says in the **Acts of the**

**Apostles**, God did not leave us without testimony of Himself, in the whole world of nature the visible world giving evidence of the invisible world, “filling our hearts with food and gladness.”

When catechism is taught with what Peter Maurin called a philosophy of work, and Catholic students can enter into work for the poor and oppressed and the illiterate, it is good. But if they are denied that work in education or other fields because of their faith then they could undertake obscure and humble work by which to earn their living, becoming contemplatives in the world like the Little Brothers of Jesus, of Charles de Foucauld. With Peter Maurin’s philosophy of work how religion will flourish and spread!

But of course too, there will always be persecution. The servant is not above his master. There is no redemption without the shedding of blood (one’s own blood, not the blood of others).

The Canadian girl said, “There is no electricity in those county districts where we were picking coffee, so it is hard to teach. But the brigadistas go about in the dark with their pockets full of candies, and the alphabetizing goes on just the same.” What dedication! Another visit that day in the ministry of education with a man who was preparing art appreciation courses. “He who is without culture is not free,” is another slogan in school rooms, on billboards and carved on bullfrogs.

Peter Maurin again and his synthesis of “Cult, Culture and Cultivation.” He too insisted that education and culture was fundamental in building a new social order. But his clarification of thought began with Cult—religion, worship, man’s acknowledgment of his Creator, source of all joy and strength.

## **So Little Time**

Things I would have liked to have done and people I would have liked to have seen. I would like to have taken one of those little ferries, the launches which went across the harbor to Las Mercedes and to have eaten at the little restaurant in a boat on the shore. I would like to have visited the movie houses where the theaters were showing films from China, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, the USSR as well as other countries in Eastern Europe. To have seen the performances of *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes, and those put on by the aficionados, which meant in Cuban speech, not the lovers of the theater as we use it in terms of lovers of horse racing or bull fights, but amateurs, brought in to the theaters to play, sing and dance on the stages of theaters not only in Havana but in Santiago de Cuba, Manzanillo, Santa Clara and other cities.

I was not able to find our friend by correspondence, Mario Gonzales, parts of whose letter, three typewritten, single-spaced pages, we will quote from later. I would like to have visited Cedric Belfrage, former editor of the **National Guardian**, who was just coming back from South America when I was leaving.

I would liked to have had a visit with Carlos Rafael Rodriguez whose daughter has become a Catholic. He is an old time Communist and is now head of the agricultural reform. I would like to have talked to Blas Roca, head of the Communist party there, whose brother,

I heard has a chicken farm (looks like private property there). I would like to verify the rumor, printed in a Mexico City Newspaper circulated in all the hotels, that Fidel Castro has married again, a woman from Santiago de Cuba. I would like to write further on the cults among the Negroes in the city slums, and about the slums I saw but which are really unnecessary to describe as we have heard of them many times before.

And next month we will run the story of Robert Williams, the American exile, anything but a pacifist, who came to public attention a few years back by advocating that the Negroes arm in the South to defend themselves, and who was suspended from his position in the NAACP for a time. I grew to love him and his wife in my visits with them in Havana, and I would like to have our readers know them too.

To be concluded next month.