

On Pilgrimage - April 1966

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Summary: Attends a conference on inter-religious dialogue and goes on a speaking trip through the Midwest. Visits friends and describes their work. Mentions progress in the farm workers strike. Keywords: Vietnam (DDLW #837).

April 7

This is truly a period of pilgrimage; since March 15th I have been invited to many places. First of all, by Bishop John J. Wright of Pittsburgh, to the National Inter-Religious Conference, held in Washington from March 15-17. The keynote address, by Dr. John C. Bennett, president of Union Theological Seminary, stirred immediate controversy, which continued throughout the meetings, especially at Workshop No. III, which dealt with: 'Forms of Intervention: Moral Responsibilities and Limits.'

As far as I know, this was the first conference of its kind held in the United States that dealt with the specific issue of Vietnam, and many of the participants tried to keep discussion of this undeclared war out of the meetings. Dr. Bennett's paper was more than twelve typewritten pages long and it was distributed to the hundreds of people present on the opening day of the conference. The subsequent discussion did not give the paper the attention it deserved. That is the trouble with such conferences. There are too many workshops, too many meetings, so many speakers, making the sessions too long. Everyone tried to keep to the time schedule, but a day beginning at 9:00 a.m. and ending at 10:30 or 11:30 p.m. and including luncheon and dinner with more speakers, is too much. There were many first-rate minds present, Catholic, Protestant and Jewish, clergymen and laymen although there were too few Catholic laymen. One who did participate was Dr. Gordon Zahn, whose point of view was opposed by representatives of the Catholic Association for International Peace, which many of us feel is subservient to the State Department and overly loyal to the administration. However, they have performed a service in helping start this discussion of **peace** with other religious leaders. We hope that the Conference will continue in existence and meet more frequently and that there will be greater participation by those Catholics who believe in nonviolence and personal responsibility. We hope too, that the thoughtful position papers, such as the one drafted by Rabbi Jacob Agus, Tilford Dudley, of the National Council of Churches, and Arthur I. Waskow, of the Institute of Policy Studies, will be sent to the participants well in advance of the next meeting.

While in Washington I attended another conference involving a score or so of thinkers from the fields of education, health, religion and science. This conference was personally sponsored

by Dr. Leonard J. Duhl, of the National Institute of Health, and was held in the faculty lounge of Georgetown University. The program is somewhat similar to that of the “think” group at the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, at Santa Barbara, but they meet informally only twice a year to converse and exchange ideas, and I do not know whether they publish papers. Peter Maurin would have been interested in such gatherings for the clarification of thought.

In Hartford, Connecticut, I spoke at the monthly meeting of the Catholic Graduates Club. I also spoke to the priests and seminarians at St. Louis de Montfort Seminary, at Litchfield, Connecticut, who have a storefront and apartment in a slum area of nearby Waterbury. They are anxious not only to help the poor directly but to study the problem of poverty and their duties in regard to it. They are learners. The sung mass was most beautiful.

At Regina Laudis, the Benedictine monastery at Bethlehem, Connecticut, I had a happy visit with my godchild Sister Prisca. We talked of Shakers, and herb gardens, and worship and hospitality, contemplation and meditation, authority and obedience, and voluntary poverty. It is a happy place. Norman Langlois, his wife Margaret and six of their nine children live in a rambling house in Bethlehem proper, which has a population of perhaps a hundred. Norman gave me some money to plant trees for him; according to a Russian saying, this planting will save his soul. I hope that other friends will bring a few trees with them to plant when they come to visit our farm at Tivoli. Fruit or nut trees, ginkgo trees or sycamores or pines—we love them all. (Speaking of gifts, if anyone has a trailer in which a family could live and which is not being used, we could store it. We know three families right now who would like to camp out on our property in Tivoli this summer if they could have the use of a trailer. In the summer there are often more people who want to come than we can accommodate.) Norman and his brother Donald used to run a house of hospitality in Burlington, Vermont. When the truckmen in that area were on strike they used the house as their meeting hall and headquarters. Donald, who still lives on a farm near Burlington, says that he may start another house now that his children are growing up.

We (Pat Rusk is accompanying me on these trips) drove to Hyde Park, New York, in time for an evening meeting at the Episcopal Church. The parish was hospitable (there was a pot luck supper) and there was little opposition, except from the young incoming pastor, who differed strongly with our C.W. position on Vietnam and criticized my interpretation of Scripture. Since Hyde Park is only three-quarters of an hour from Tivoli, we drove home to gather our clothes and papers together for our long trip to Minneapolis, St. Louis and points in between. On the following day, we drove to New York and arrived just in time for me to attend a meeting of some of our Associates, together with lawyers and real-estate friends, to discuss the buying of a new house in New York City.

That night, Ammon Hennacy, who was making a short visit East, spoke at our Friday night meeting, and the house was packed to the doors. The next morning after Mass he came over to the Kenmare Street apartment (he had stayed the night before with Bob Steed on Mulberry Street) and spent the rest of the morning with us. He had lunch in Chinatown with Bob and Walter Kerrell, brought us back a few orders of chop suey and stayed around for a while longer. Marge Hughes and Johnny came over to greet him. That evening there was a supper party for him at Janet Burwash’s and the next day he was to go up to Tivoli

and on to Worcester, Massachusetts.

Next morning Pat and I started out for the Midwest. Early the following evening we arrived at Bill and Dorothy Gauchats' Our Lady of the Wayside, which is now a house of hospitality for children rather than a farm (although there is a goodly piece of property surrounding their big home).

Work of Compassion

It was a joy to visit the Gauchats and see the work they are doing for little ones, seven children, all under seven years of age, who are retarded or spastic or afflicted with cerebral palsy. There is one child of two, blind and deaf but with a "thinking" look, and one wonders how he will ever be able to communicate with others. They adopted one spastic child to save him from being institutionalized. He is now eight and although he cannot articulate words, he is able to write notes to other members of the family by using the hunt-and-peck system on a special typewriter, which has a guard over the keys to keep his fingers from slipping.

The Gauchats are writing a book about their work with these children, in the hope that it will be of help to parents of similarly afflicted children and induce them to keep them in the home as long as possible. A very special love for such little ones grows in the heart, and the other children of the family learn compassion. Dorothy has helpers, of course, but above all she has the help of her husband after his working hours and the help of her own devoted children. We are looking for a publisher for this book, which is half completed.

When we left Lorain, Ohio, we found a spot along the shore of Lake Erie where Pat looked for shells while I just sat and rested and prayed by this great inland sea. It rained and snowed intermittently all through Ohio and Indiana that day, and it was good to arrive in Chicago and go home with Nina Polcyn, who operates St. Benet's Book Shop, and seize upon my mail, which had been forwarded there.

Grape Strikers

Passing through Ohio, we had learned that the Lorain Catholic Interracial Council had invited a guest speaker: Ida Cousino, of the National Farm Workers Association, who showed slides of the grape strike which has been going on in Delano, California, since last September. Then in Chicago we learned that the Chicago C.I.C. was sending a doctor and a team of workers to the strike area. This morning, we had as breakfast guest Monsignor John J. Egan, of Presentation parish (a new assignment, as pastor in addition to his job as one of the consultants of the archdiocese, and his previous commitment as director of the Office of Urban Affairs), who brought us the good news of the end of the strike. The heads of the Schenley interests, who control the growing and marketing of the major grape crops in California, have agreed to negotiate within thirty days. There are thirty other growers who have not yet followed suit. DiGiorgio officials propose a secret vote of farm workers to see if they want the N.F.W.A. to represent them.

“Does this mean that the owners have abdicated in favor of worker ownership?” Pat asked. It does not, of course, but it does mean that the first steps have been made to provide an adequate wage, so that the workers in the field may begin to enjoy a more human life may begin to think. Nonviolence has been taught and practiced throughout the strike, and the only violence has been on the part of the employers and the scabs.

The report came while a march from Delano to Sacramento was in progress. Men, women and children, three hundred of them, walked through the vast valley, with the banner of Our Lady of Guadalupe at their head. Today some priests and laymen flew to the West Coast to make the last lap of the march with the victorious workers, in what is now a procession of thanksgiving rather than supplication. There has been superb coverage of the strike in the **National Catholic Reporter**.

News of the eviction of twenty-two hundred people from their homes in Mississippi comes in a report from the Snick Shop (65 Main St., Worcester, Massachusetts), which goes on to quote from the Delta Ministry of the National Council of Churches estimate that from ten to twelve thousand more people will lose their homes this winter or spring. Farm workers are not covered by the Federal Social Security system or by unemployment compensation. The Snick Shop sells magazines, Negro history books for children, Freedom Song albums, and cloth and leather goods made in the Poor People’s Co-ops of Mississippi. (See article elsewhere in this issue.) The Friends of S.N.C.C. (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) in Worcester are assuming the responsibility of helping the people in Lowndes County, Alabama, where conditions, they say, are as bad as in Mississippi. We call this project to the attention of our New England readers.

Tonight we go to Monsignor Frederick Hillenbrand’s church in Evanston for Holy Thursday services and the Mass. We’ll spend Good Friday in Milwaukee and make our Easter vigil there. Then on to Minneapolis for a three-day conference with the University of Minnesota Newman Club, and after that to St. Louis University for a talk on April 18th.