

On Pilgrimage - March 1969

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Summary: Explains why the paper is often late. Describes recent Friday Night Meetingsâ€“a scholar of Martin Buber, volunteers to China during the cultural revolution, a PAX meeting and an article by Thomas Merton on non-violence. (DDLW #896).

We went to press last month on February 20th. This month we are going to press on March 26th. When our readers will get their papers is another question. We are what one might call a home industry; sometimes the mailing room is full of workers and sometimes the work of mailing out the paper drags along interminably, it seems. We have many volunteers and many young people coming to help, but there are also the wounded in mind and body, who seem to be constantly increasing in number. Fear and violence grow in the neighborhood (and even at the farm) and our St. Joseph's house seems an oasis of peace and quiet. But sometimes the more people there are, the less work gets done on the paper, perhaps just because it is paper work and our young ones wish to be dealing with human beings and not with paper. I make this involved justification for our delays, because I realize that our readers are living beings too; they write in and ask why the delays. Our paper is a vital communication with them. The most complimentary letters we get are from far distant parts, Australia and South America, where readers tell me that they do not mind getting the March paper in May, since we are discussing eternal truths in the light of history, past and present, and not reporting spot news.

So I call attention to the fact that from now on we will publish nine times a year instead of eleven. There will be a March-April, a July-August and an October-November issue, and some issues will be twelve pages instead of eight.

Friday Night Meetings

We have had some memorable meetings lately for some time now. Our first Friday meetings have been PAX meetings, which used to be held in the upper room of the Paraclete Book Shop on East 74th Street. The last one was about Martin Buber, and the speaker was Natalie Barton, a Sister of the Ladies of Zion. She had spent the last six years in writing her dissertation on this great and controversial figure. She spoke of the I-thou relationship and said that to love takes all our creativity. Martin Buber has written of the time when he spent the morning in prayer and, filled with the joy of it, responded inadequately to a young man who visited him. His visitor afterwards committed suicide and Buber realized that he had

been too full of himself and too little open to the other. There had been too little creativeness in this encounter, the creativeness which takes every ounce of one's spiritual energy and which is so intense that it cannot be sustained for more than a twenty-minute period, but which is so fruitful that there grows after that, between the I and the Thou a pool of living water from which one can draw strength. I am sure my explanation, my understanding of what she said, is most inadequate, but the point is so important that one must try to voice it.

I felt this most intensely because a similar incident once occurred in our lives. Many years ago a young man came to us for the summer to help us at Maryfarm, Newburgh. He had left the seminary and, though he did not seem morose, he was silent and it was hard to get close to him. It is hard to talk to silent people. One begins to feel garrulous rather than communicative. At any rate, we all failed him, and there are always so many of us around, priest, seminarian, layman, worker, scholar. There were so many talking about all the things that interested them, all the latest news, the latest theology, philosophy, Biblical scholarship; not to speak of all the theories in the economic, educational, and psychological fields. A few months later after he had left us someone saw a brief report in the **Daily News** of the suicide of this same young man. How great his depression must have been that summer, and how little we knew of him!

My notes of Sister Natalie's talk as I read them over are not anything I can transcribe here. After all, I did not spend six years over a seven-hundred-page thesis! But how grateful we should be for such scholarship.

Another most interesting talk last Friday was given by Neil and Deirdre Hunter, who will spend Sunday, April 20 with us at Tivoli, speaking at our regular third-Sunday-of-the-month afternoon meeting there. They are two beautiful young people who have spent the last two years in Peking, teaching English. They are Australian and while visiting London they had run into an advertisement in an English newspaper asking for teachers in Peking. They were accepted and went first to Shanghai and then to Peking, living there during the Cultural Revolution. When they returned they taught at the Institute of Chinese Studies at Berkeley. They are pacifists and Catholics and intend, I hope, to lecture around the United States before returning to Australia. They have written a book, published by Frederick Praeger. I recommend it highly. But you will have to order it from your local bookstore, as it seems that most of the books which we consider important are hard to get. One can go to a dozen bookstores for **A Penny a Copy**, the Catholic Worker reader published by Macmillan, and not find a copy. It has to be ordered, which takes some weeks.

The Hunters showed slides and told us of the communes, which are sometimes made up of as many as thirty villages. Each house has land around it, food and vegetables are cultivated, and there may be a few animals. I saw the same pattern in Cuba on one of the collective farms. Agriculture and small industry go on in the villages so that in time of massive war guerrilla warfare can be carried on. When cities are bombed out, people can endure. This decentralization of the people has made the Vietnam war drag on, as it will indefinitely (so it is predicted now) unless some progress is made in the peace talks.

As for religion, the Taoists, far more than the Buddhists or Christians, have been able to cooperate with the social aims of the new China. On one of the Hunters' walking trips they visited a mountain inhabited by hermits, and they showed slides of the one mountain with

three monasteries inhabited by Taoist monks. The home has not been done away with and in some places one will find four generations under one roof. Grandmothers have their place of honor in the home and care for the children, as they do in the Puerto Rican families in New York.

The cultural revolution they described as a tremendous pilgrimage on the part of the young all over China. They brought out the fact that a new generation has grown up who have never known the misery of the old China and who did not go through the stirring days of the Great March, of the schooling in the caves. The cultural revolution took the place of all that, and it was a revolution of education, of slogans, of the pen rather than the sword. (Of course there was some violence, but never the kind of violence depicted by our press.) The Hunters showed slides of the walls covered with propaganda. The beautiful script was often illustrated by pictures, one of which showed a peasant brandishing a pen as large as a sword from which dangled three bureaucrats. These represented the Maoists, who were defending the teachings of Mao against the attacks of the bureaucrats.

The accusation was that the educational system was still for the sons and daughters of those who had been rich, and that too much emphasis was being put on life in the big cities, too much dependence on big industry in the face of danger threatened by Soviet Russia on the one hand and the United States on the other. The peasants, in other words, were being neglected, and the cultural revolution was being waged to bring the emphasis back to the land, the source of all our life.

At the annual meeting of PAX, the peace group of which I have been a member and a sponsor since the second World War, Father Thomas Berry, C.P., author, theologian and authority on Buddhism who teaches at Fordham University, was the main speaker, and it was one of the richest meetings I have attended.

The latest issue of PEACE, the organ of PAX is just out and includes a magnificent article by Thomas Merton, which he sent to be read at the annual conference at Tivoli last summer. It is a commentary on the encounter in James Joyce's *Ulysses* between Leopold Bloom, a peaceful Odysseus, and the Irish revolutionary Cyclops, the violent Citizen, who is a Sinn Feiner.

How can people point guns at each other? Sometimes they go off. Love, says Bloom, I mean the opposite of hatred.

And Merton asks, Has non-violence been found wanting? Yes and no. It has been found wanting whenever it has been the nonviolence of the weak.â€

Read his provocative commentary in PEACE by sending for a copy to: American Pax Association, Box 139 Murray Hill Sta., New York, N.Y. 10016. The issue contains two other articles by and about Thomas Merton, and an account by our own Stanley Vishnewski of the PAX conference at Tivoli last summer. This year's conference will take place during the first three days of August.

Danilo Dolci

I am glad to say that a committee is being formed called Friends of Danilo Dolci, which will acquaint people in this country with his work in Sicily and call attention to the needs of his people for education and health and the know-how to get the dams for irrigation and better farming, for more food to meet the starvation of that barren land. Anyone who has seen the **Gospel According to St. Matthew**, with its mountain and desert setting, knows what Sicily looks like. The new committee will acquaint people with Dolci 's books, many of which have been printed in England and a few like **Waste, Report from Palermo**, and now **The Man Who Stands Alone** in this country. James Douglass, in his **Non-Violent Cross**, has told of Dolci 's work, and I wrote about my meeting with him in the December 1967, issue of the **Catholic Worker**.

Dolci was in this country for three days to be interviewed about his new book, published by Pantheon, so our meeting was necessarily short and with a dozen other people, reporters, friends and committee-in-formation. Jerre Mangione interpreted for those of us who could not speak Italian.

Dolci hopes to come for a longer visit later and he expressed a desire to visit Appalachia, to him a mysterious region. I told him of the cooperatives in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Small beginnings. He is a man of vision. He expressed a desire to meet Lewis Mumford, and also some members of the Peace Corps, to get their reaction to it, and their opinion as to how much it could accomplish. We will review Danilo Dolci 's new book in a future issue.

Today as I write it is the feast of St. Joseph, our particular patron, since we too have been so hard put to find shelter not only in New York but in other cities where we have houses of hospitality. We have always looked to him as to one who found a home, poor as it was, for Mary and the holy Child. He is a model for the worker, for the craftsman, for the husband and father, and we beg him most especially to guard our newly acquired house on East First Street, named for him. Hideous violence broke out only a few doors away from us this last week between two motorcycle gangs and resulted in the death of one unidentified youth who was found bound and burned to death in a tenement apartment.

St. Joseph, pray for us all. And pray that the spirit of penance will strengthen us to overcome hatred with love. Drug addiction results in such tragedies, and with many alcohol itself is an addiction. To help our brothers let us do without what maddens the heart of man only too often. Drugs are a good to alleviate pain, and on festivals wine gladdens the heart of men. But we see too much of tragedy. Have pity, have pity on the poor around us, and fast from the unnecessary that the destitute may have more.