



They Had No Future

Jewish children in a concert given in honor of one of the nuns' feast day. "The youngsters," Sister Mary noted on this picture, "ultimately ended up in Auschwitz, with one or two exceptions."

She Recalls Her First Class . . . Sadly

Catholic Press Features

San Francisco—Few teachers have trouble remembering their first class. Many of them keep photographs and mementoes like puppets, workbooks and gifts from the children. Many older teachers take pleasure in following the careers of some of the pupils.

Sister Mary of St. Helen isn't much different. She has the photographs, the mementoes, the gifts. But there are not very many careers she can follow. The nun's first classes were in a Nazi concentration camp, and nearly all of her pupils were destined to die very shortly in the ovens at Auschwitz.

In 1941, having just been professed as a member of the Helpers of the Holy Souls, Sister Mary of St. Helen was arrested near Paris and sent, along with hundreds of other nuns, to a concentration camp at Vitte, France. Vitte, she was soon to learn, was a stopping-off place for thousands of doomed Jewish scientists, artists and intellectuals and their families.

The Jewish men and women knew what their fate was, but in one of the many odd "conspiracies" of the war, the Nazis and the Jewish adults and the nuns at Vitte saw to it that the children did not find out—that the little ones remained children a while longer.

Sister Mary, who recently returned to her native England after serving as a C.C.D. principal in San Francisco, talked about Vitte, showed photographs of the doomed children and drawings by some of the artists.

Her "collection," if it can be called that, differs sharply from one that just went on tour in the U.S.—drawings and poetry by the adults and children who were inmates of the Nazi death camp at Terezin, another stopping-off place on the way to Auschwitz.

The Terezin children's drawings



SISTER MARY

and poems are sad: drawings of pigs and cows with forks stuck in them, and a boy lamenting, "Here in Terezin life is hell. And when I'll go home again, I can't tell."

By contrast, the art work of the children at Vitte is light-hearted. They had no books, so they made their own. A folded piece of lined paper became a "reader," telling the story of a playful got ("Baa-aa-aa. I am Billy. I play with Jack I play with Jane . . ."), brightly illustrated with drawings in red, blue, yellow and green.

Books like these were used in a "school" which the German commandant set up to keep the children occupied. Sister Mary although just professed, was nearly 40 and was placed in charge of a crew of instructors, drawn from the brilliant professional people of the camp.

Together, they made up textbooks

in English, French, German Polish, Turkish, Arabic, Italian, Greek, Hebrew, Iranian, Russian and Dutch — to meet the varying needs of the prison population. Sister Mary taught math, reading, writing and spelling to the children and some adults.

But while there, the children lived the happy days of innocence, playing and learning. They put on children's concerts, in makeshift costumes, cardboard top hats, playing toy drums and horns. They put on plays and learned to act and express themselves. They danced in ballets with costumes made out of scraps by women in the camp.

It is all recorded in Sister Mary's photographs: scenes of a "commandant's picnic," with all the children crowding around the smiling commandant for the photographer, with Sister Mary's notation on the back that "100% of these were sent off to the ovens of Auschwitz."

She still keeps a hand-made Christmas card created by a prisoner from Warsaw on behalf of the parents in the camp. She remembers that the artist "decorated the camp-endlessly before he was taken off to Auschwitz."

But undoubtedly among the dearest to her of all her remembrances from Vitte is a 5" x 3" hand-made booklet with the cover showing a cut-out picture of Christ giving the Eucharist to a youth.

The title page, dated October 18, 1944, reads, "A Remembrance of Our Lady's Center, Vitte," and on each of the pages, in 12 different languages, is the same message — signed by the girls from Our Lady's Center.

"Dear Mother,
"We do not know how to thank you for all you have done for us. We will never forget you and we will always think of you in our prayers."



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Young Refugee Says North Vietnam Pressures Catholics, Buddhists

By FATHER PATRICK J. BURKE, S.S.C. NC News Service

Saigon — Life is difficult for everyone in North Vietnam, but it is doubly difficult for Catholics and Buddhists, according to an eyewitness.

The report of a Catholic boy who escaped from North Vietnam in mid-1967 has just been published by Mekong Features, a service specializing in articles for foreign publications. The 18-year-old youth is Nguyen van Truong. Most of his family left the North in 1954 when the country was divided by the 17th parallel, but he could not escape for 13 years.

Truong described the hardships of living in North Vietnam and the oppression of the Communist regime. He said Catholics and Buddhists are under constant pressure from the Communist party and government.

The party cadre tells Christians: "Suppose you live a lazy life and sit all day to worship Christ, will He give you rice to eat and clothes to put on?"

"Christians are the foes of our people," they say.

After the arrest in 1966 of Father Tran dinh Can, pastor of Quynh Lau parish, the cadre arrested Bishop Paul Tran dinh Nhiem of Vinh. Three months later Father Can was brought back to his church, where the cadre assembled the population and read a verdict condemning Father Can as guilty of crimes against the people. "Then he was taken away and no one ever heard from him again," Truong said.

Truong said that many churches and Buddhist pagodas have been turned into offices and storehouses for the government. The little church in Quynh Ban has been used as a state granary since 1965, he said.

Truong confirmed the reports of the regime's repressive attitude toward marriage summed up in the "three delays" — delay in choosing a mate, delay in getting married, delay in having children.

Truong said that all the young people in North Vietnam must learn by heart the following slogan:

"Delay making a choice of your mate. If the choice has been made, postpone marriage. If the marriage has been made, wait to have children. If the children are born, limit their number; one child is not enough, two children will do, three are too many."

Agency to Drop Viet Program

New York — (NC) — Bishop Edward E. Swannstrom, executive director, said here plans are under way by which Catholic Relief Services, overseas relief agency of U.S. Catholics, will withdraw from the controversial food program for families and dependents of Popular Forces in South Vietnam.

The relief program for the families and dependents of the Vietnamese forces was instituted about two years ago, after the South Vietnamese government failed to provide a pay raise for the militia-type organization.

He also revealed that marriage is not allowed for men under 22 and women under 20 years. The engaged couple must get permission from the state and pay a tax that sometimes is more than they can afford. If a third child is born the state will tolerate "the misfortune," but if the wife becomes pregnant a fourth time she must have an abortion and is forced to undergo a hysterectomy, he said.

Truong lived in a fishing village in Nghe An province of North Vietnam.

The program became the target of criticism by certain elements in this country, including Catholic publications, which claimed the program amounted to aiding the Vietnam war effort, while the Catholic agency failed to provide relief for the needy in North Vietnam.

Some Catholic groups and publications advocated that U.S. Catholics discontinue contributions to CRS and, instead, contribute to Caritas Internationalis, international Catholic charities organization in Rome, which is giving aid to North Vietnam.

The boy managed his escape with the help of a resistance movement in the North called the League of the Holy Sword. He was picked up at sea from his fishing boat by members of the league, blindfolded and taken to a secret zone in the mountains. Later, when he said he wanted to join his family in the south, he was taken to sea again, transferred to a small boat and told to row for the shore. He came ashore near Da Nang and went to the Open Arms (Chieu Hoi) Center.

**2 Views on Vietnam War
Johnson Defended
Bishops Critical**

Boston — (NC) — Interviewed at an informal press conference here minutes before he spoke at a Boston College symposium on the Vatican and Peace, Eugene Rostow, under secretary of state for political affairs, told newsmen that no presidential candidate could offer a workable alternative to President Johnson's Vietnam policy.

He said that the president's policy held forth more hope for genuine peace than any plan revealed by a presidential candidate. He assumed, he added, that proponents of all-out war or outright surrender are not taken seriously by the public.

Later, in the course of a public question-and-answer period, Rostow supported the present course of American activity in Vietnam. He said that the decision whether or not the war was costing more than it was worth must be left to the South Vietnamese.

Santiago, Chile — (NC) — The bishops of Chile have called the war in Vietnam "an unprecedentedly cruel war" and appealed to both sides for a quick settlement that excludes violence.

"We, the Chilean bishops, wish to voice our anguish for the climate of war and violence that is spreading throughout the world, and particularly for the unprecedentedly cruel war taking place in Vietnam," the statement declared.

"We cannot show indifference before the extermination, the sufferings and death of thousands of soldiers and civilians from the nations involved in this conflict."

The bishops called for "an urgent disarmament of the spirit, excluding violence as a means to settle human conflicts."