First Place
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HAVANA -- From a newly built altar in the great Plaza de la Revolucion, beneath an enormous and surely temporary portrait of Christ, Pope John Paul II used the final homily of his five-day Cuba tour yesterday to warn the world that both Godless communism and blind capitalism can crush the human spirit.

"It is necessary to keep speaking on these themes as long as any injustice, however small, is present in the world," the Roman Catholic leader told a crowd estimated at 300,000, which interrupted his 45-minute talk with cheers more than two dozen times.

Last evening, after several meetings with Catholic bishops, clergy and lay people, the pontiff boarded a jet at Havana's international airport and returned to Rome.

Just before he left, the Pope issued a tough condemnation of the U.S. economic embargo against the communist island, saying it was an indiscriminate measure that hurt the poor.

"The . . . imposed isolation strikes the people indiscriminately," the pontiff declared, "making it ever more difficult for the weakest to enjoy the bare essentials of decent living, things such as food, health and education."

This trip, the first papal visit in Cuban history, began Wednesday and took him Thursday to the city of Santa Clara, Friday to Camaguey and Saturday to the easternmost city, Santiago de Cuba, where he crowned a statue of Our Lady of Charity, Cuba's patron saint, before cheering throngs.

Throughout the tour, John Paul called on the Cuban people and the government to allow religion to play a larger part in their lives. But in yesterday's pointed homily, the Pope also declared that he brought them "a message of love and solidarity," an apparent reference to the Solidarity labor movement that toppled the Communist regime in his native Poland in the mid-1980s.

"The attainment of freedom in responsibility is a duty no one can shirk," he said, before the vast throng in the plaza, which is dedicated to the heroes of the Spanish Revolution of 1898 and Castro's Marxist revolution of 1959.

Skies yesterday were gray; temperatures were in the upper 60s; and a northerly breeze blew all day across this once elegant, now crumbling capital city.

The Mass was a sight unlike anything that this nation - officially atheist from 1962 to 1992, and today officially "secular" - had ever seen in the capital.

Here in the plaza where Castro has so many times exhorted the Cuban people
to be socialist revolutionaries and sworn "socialism or death" for Cuba, there now stood a curved white canopy in the shape of a Spanish-style mission church.

Beneath the canopy was a large, white altar where the Pope celebrated Mass with Havana's archbishop, Cardinal Jaime Ortega, and dozens of visiting cardinals and priests, including Philadelphia's Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua.

With Castro listening attentively from a seat close to the altar, John Paul complained of economic and political systems (such as communism) that relegate religion to the private sphere, "stripping it of any social influence or importance."

The Pope also called on such states to "encourage a harmonious social climate and a suitable legislation which enables every person and every religious confession to live their faith freely."

Then he recited words of Jose Marti, Cuba's beloved poet and revolutionary martyr: "Every people need to be religious, for an irreligious people will die because nothing in it promotes virtue."

Although the 77-year-old pontiff is a passionate critic of communist materialism, yesterday he used his pulpit - an armchair - to lament how "a small number of countries [are] growing exceedingly rich at the cost of the increasing impoverishment of a greater number of other countries."

Pointing to the global spread of "capitalist neoliberalism, which subordinates the person to blind market forces," John Paul lamented how "the wealthy grow ever wealthier, while the poor grow ever poorer."

And, in another reference to the United States and its 35-year effort to oust Castro with its near-total embargo against U.S. commerce with Cuba, the Pope complained of how, in "various places," such neoliberalism "often places unbearable burdens upon less favored countries."

The pontiff's message, with his repeated references to the suffering poor, was clearly a hit with the crowd, which interrupted him many times with cheers and chants.

Minutes later, after yet another round of cheers and chants of "Viva Papa!" he glanced up and smiled. "You are a very active audience," he quipped.

Then, echoing a line from his first speech here Wednesday, John Paul declared that Cuba "needs to open herself to the world, and the world needs to draw close to Cuba."

Asserting that "Cuba has a Christian soul," he closed by urging the 11 million Cuban people to heed the nation's religious leaders, whom he called "the true educators of the national conscience."

If Castro, 71, was annoyed, he didn't show it. At the peace greeting of the Mass, he smiled and greeted a half-dozen prelates.

Cardinal Bevilacqua, who traveled with the Holy Father to several cities last week, said yesterday he was surprised at how vigorously the Cuban people had responded to John Paul's presence.

"At every Mass, there was an exuberant crying out: people singing and waving flags," marveled the cardinal, who said the overflow of emotion in
Havana was so great that many young children came up to him asking to be blessed.

"This was a nation that was supposed to be atheistic, but I think we have changed the symbols here," he continued. "Before, all you saw were images of Che Guevara [leader of the 1959 revolution] and Castro and socialist slogans. But you look around now, and there is a whole new set of symbols: the Pope and Jesus Christ."

It remains uncertain, however, what sort of Christianity or Catholicism might flourish in Cuba if Castro accedes to John Paul's requests and reopens the Catholic schools, permits foreign clergy, and allows religious leaders access to the state-run media.

Even before the revolution, most Cubans were Catholic more in name than in practice. A national survey of 4,000 people in 1954 showed that while 91 percent of the population was baptized Catholic, and 72 percent identified themselves as such, only 24 percent of Catholics went to Mass.

Only 16 percent of marriages were officiated by clergy, and of the people who called themselves Catholic, 27 percent said they had never once seen a priest.

Many Cubans - including those who call themselves Catholic - are also devoted to the Afro-Cuban deity worship called Santeria.

"In short, institutional religion had an extremely weak hold on the population in prerevolutionary Cuba, according to Jorge Dominguez, an authority on Cuba at Harvard University.

Now, with the Catholic schools shut down for nearly 40 years, and just 250 priests to serve 11 million people, the task of grafting Christianity onto the shallow, withered but ubiquitous rootstock of Cuban religion will be daunting. Indeed, just how much of John Paul's message got through to his enthusiastic audience seemed uncertain yesterday afternoon.

His message? "God bless everybody," said Rafael Gonzalez, 16, who was wearing little Cuban and papal flags in his hat.

"The Pope came to bless the people and to unite all the Cubans," said Odalyz Hernandez, 32.

"He talked about unity, about peace," said Teresa Lapaz, 54.

Asked if she thought socialism and religion could exist side by side in Cuba, Lapaz thought hard for a moment. "I cannot answer," she said. "That is too hard a question."
The love of God, unutterable and perfect, flows into a pure soul the way light rushes into a transparent object. —Dante

Total deafferentation of the left posterior superior parietal lobe results in the obliteration of the self-other dichotomy at almost the same moment that the deafferentation of the right posterior superior parietal lobe generates a sense of absolute transcendent wholeness. —Eugene d’Aquili and Andrew Newberg

Right posterior what? Deafferentation who?
Is it any wonder that religion feels more at home with poetry than science?
In his poem about enlightenment, the Zen poet Kukai spoke of the “singing image of fire.” The Christian mystic Angelus Silesius wrote of the “pure no-thing, concealed in now and here.”

Now, brain research suggests such beatific visions can be described neurologically in terms of eruptive overflows, “reverberating circuits,” and blood flows and blockages involving the prefrontal cortex and various lobes of the brain.

Dante it’s not. But Eugene d’Aquili, professor of psychiatry at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, and Andrew Newberg, a fellow at the hospital’s nuclear medicine program, scan brains, not verse.

In a talk on “Science and the Soul” Tuesday at Germantown Jewish Centre, Newberg described how their two-year study of the brains of people engaged in Buddhist meditation provides “mounting evidence” that sensations of calm, unity, and transcendence correspond to increased activity in the brain’s frontal lobes (behind the forehead) and decreased activity in the parietal lobes at the top-rear of the head.

“We can’t say we can see God with these imaging studies,” Newberg, 31, said with a laugh last week at his office. “What we can say is: When somebody has religious experiences, this is what it’s doing to them.”

Newberg, d’Aquili’s research associate since 1993, titled his Tuesday talk, attended by about 160 people, “Why God Won’t Go Away.” By that, he means an intuition of transcendent reality may be hard-wired into the human mind.

“The idea is that the brain is set up in ways to help us survive,” he explained earlier in the week. Religion “offers the reassurance that there is purpose and causal effect in this pretty scary world.” Thus, “religious and spiritual experiences are right in line with what the brain is trying to do for us” by helping us to function and make sense of life here on the third rock from the sun.

D’Aquili is a veteran anthropologist of religion and busy clinical
therapist. Newberg specializes in brain scans, using radioactive dyes to study which parts of the brain are engaged in the performance of different mental or physical tasks.

The team has measured brain function and cerebral blood flow during Tibetan Buddhist meditation in eight subjects during the last two years.

"It's pretty exciting," said Newberg, who grew up in Glenside and Bryn Mawr and graduated from Haverford College before entering the University of Pennsylvania Medical School.

Particulars of their meditation scan study will be published this summer in Zygon, a professional journal devoted to the study of science and religion. But Newberg said last week that the research supports their earlier work in the neurology of "unitary" mental states induced by religious ritual and meditation.

They propose that the brain's amygdala, which translates sensory impressions into emotions, "generates a sense of religious awe attached to behaviorally 'marked' ritual gestures such as bows or signs of the cross."

This, they say, builds on research tying hallucinations, out-of-body sensations, and deja vu to activity, or suppression of activity, in parts of the brain.

What intrigues d'Aquili and Newberg is how religious rituals and practices stimulate the two major subsystems of the autonomic systems.

One of these subsystems, the ergotropic system, is the body's fight-or-flight nervous system. In moments of stress, it raises the heart rate, blood pressure and respiration, hastens endocrine to the muscles, etc.

The other system, the trophotropic, can be understood as the system of calm. It decreases the heart rate, slows respiration, and regulates cell growth, digestion, relaxation and sleep.

D' Aquili and Newberg propose that certain religious practices can so stimulate the body's calm system or its flight system that activity in the related brain circuit starts to "reverberate," while simultaneously shutting down ever more of the other system. Depending on whether the ritual is fast (as in the spinning dance of Sufi whirling dervishes) or slow, as in Zen meditation, different parts of the brain are activated, perceived by the mind as a higher state of consciousness.

In states of very high activity around one circuit, they say, there can be a "spillover" such that the dormant system activates and goes "on line" simultaneously with the other. Although rare, this dual state can lead to a sense of "tremendous release of energy" that may feel like "oceanic bliss" or absorption into the object of contemplation.

And in extreme cases there can occur a "maximal discharge" of both systems, inducing brain activities perceived by the mind as the "Absolute Unity of Being," or AUB, which they describe as "the abolition of any discrete boundaries between beings, by the absence of a sense of time-flow, and by the elimination of the self-other dichotomy."

They even propose that a mystic in the AUB state will experience either a divine being, such as God, or the cosmic void of Nirvana, depending on whether
there has been a predominantly ergotropic or trophotropic involvement.

So, are the great mystic illuminations exalted throughout the ages authentic glimpses into true being and the ultimate reality?

Or are the revelations of enlightenment and beatific vision nothing more than brain's perceiving its own activity?

D'Aquili and Newberg say there is no way of knowing for sure, but they insist in all their published papers that it would be foolish to suppose that religious awe, numinous vision or mystical experience "is reducible to neurochemical flux."

"What's really real? It's a big issue," Newberg concedes last week. He said they hope to address some of these weighty epistemological questions in a book, tentatively titled *Neurotheology*, to be published later this year by Fortress Press.

While their data can be interpreted to mean that certain mental states are the result of specific brain activity, that assignment of causality can be "flipped" entirely: Is it not plausible that the changes in brain function are the result (not cause) of changes in consciousness?

And because mystics throughout history have been so emphatic that the reality they perceived in their illuminated state was "primary" (that is, more real than ordinary earthly existence), "we have to be careful what we claim," he said.

"Western science says matter is primary, but if you flip it around and look at what the mystics report, you could say that it's ultimately consciousness and awareness that are primary."

And so perhaps science will someday discover what Emily Dickinson asserted more than a century ago.

"The Brain," she wrote, "is just the weight of God."
HAVANA — From the sumptuous blue and gold interior of the Church of Mercy, Cuba feels like heaven.

Under a domed altar flanked by marble steps, a statue of Our Lady of Mercy, dressed in white taffeta and lace, gazes out on the worshipers who have come to pray.

Other gilded statues of saints stand beneath high, vaulted ceilings covered with frescoes. Virtually every inch of this house of worship, built in 1755, is decorated with scrollwork or a painting or a mosaic - an ornate testament to the power and the glory of the Roman Catholic Church.

But outside, at the intersection of Mercy and Cuba Streets and beyond, Cuba seems a nation of broken concrete and dashed hopes.

Much of Havana is crumbling, its once-grand colonial-era buildings as well as its modest apartment houses propped up by wobbly two-by-fours or collapsed into rubble. Cubans survive on meager rations - a pound of red beans a month, a pound of chicken every three months. With most workers earning less than $20 a month, everyone needs a job on the side: It is not uncommon to find a doctor selling books, or a physicist driving a taxi.

The contrast between the Church of Mercy and the city around it shows one very compelling reason for Fidel Castro, who suppressed religion for decades, to welcome Pope John Paul II to Cuba this week.

Cuba, fiercely nationalistic and desperately poor, needs to be rescued from freefall into economic chaos.

And John Paul's church is rich, concerned and independent enough to help.

"The Pope’s visit is very important for the Cuban people," said a man who gave his name only as Gaonzalo, 38, as he stood waiting in line for his daily ration of state-supplied bread. "We hope that after his visit, life will be better."

"All the people are waiting, Catholic and non-Catholic," said Jose Pando, a retired sugarcane cutter who is now a sexton at the 360-year-old Church of the Holy Spirit, built in 1638. "I think it means a benefit for the whole country."

That Cuba is a nation on the verge of something seems almost palpable these days. There is a sense in the streets and coffeehouses that Marxism has failed in Cuba, that Castro’s revolution is all but over.

Now the 71-year-old Castro must ask himself what will survive of a government that, for all its failings, at least gave its people universal education and health care. In the Pope, he seems to see an ally, or at least a prop, in saving his desperate nation.

"Look at the situation: The Church is the only other institution besides
the government that is powerful and viable inside the island,'" said Sylvia Wilhelm, executive director of the Miami-based Cuban Committee for Democracy, who is in Havana this week. "And the Church has always been a supporter of the social advances of the revolution - that is, its medical care and education. I think that the Church could also be a guardian of human rights for the Cuban people."

For whatever reason, Castro is not simply tolerating John Paul's visit; he is embracing it, at least publicly, with enthusiasm. He is urging everyone - Catholics and non-Catholics, Communist Party leaders and atheists - to come out in person to greet El Papa.

SCORES OF BUSES

He is providing scores of buses to bring thousands of people from the countryside into the four cities where John Paul will say Mass. He is assuring workers who attend that their pay won't be docked.

Yesterday, road crews could be seen all around Havana laying fresh asphalt over the boulevards where John Paul and his pilgrims will travel. In the capital's Plaza de la Revolucion, dedicated to the heroes who fought against the Spanish in 1898 and for Marxism in 1959, an altar is under construction.

"The world will see how we receive the Pope," Castro told the nation in a televised speech that, in classic Castro style, began Friday evening and lasted until 2 a.m. Saturday. "We have to demonstrate that the revolution is able to respect the believer and nonbeliever."

John Paul is famous for his outspoken opposition to communism, and his trip here has been compared to his 1979 visit to his native Poland, credited for inspiring the strikes and demonstrations that brought a Solidarity government to power.

But Cuba is not Poland, and capitalism has not turned out to be all good in Eastern Europe. John Paul is now reputed to have been shocked by some of the economic consequences of the collapse of communism; privatization and the loss of state support have left millions of people jobless and impoverished.

Castro is aware of that. In addition, he seems to see the modern Catholic Church as profoundly different from the institution in which he was once an altar boy.

Prior to 1959, the Church in Cuba was a church of the elite, Spanish-blooded, light-skinned, middle and upper class. It was close to the government, and saw the poor as deserving of charity but not equality or power.

The Church in Cuba was perceived as an extension of Spain's former colonial rule - as foreign to Cuba, in a sense, as Havana's glittering pleasure palaces built by U.S. mobsters and filled with rich yanqui tourists.

So when Castro seized power from the corrupt dictator Fulgencio Batista in 1959, one of his first tasks was to evict the "foreign" Catholic Church. In 1961, the government deported 131 priests, most of them Spanish-born, and launched an ideological assault on the Church so harsh that many other foreign-born priests and brothers and nuns were clamoring to leave.
By 1965 more than 90 percent of the nuns and two-thirds of the priests who had been working here in 1960 were gone, and the prelates were barred from speaking in public.

But over time the Catholic Church began to "Cubanize" itself. By the late 1970s the bishops, cardinal and nearly all the clergy - few though they were - were Cuban-born, and the people in the pews were black, white, Hispanic, Indian, Creole: a far more representative cross-section of the 11 million Cuban people.

Castro meanwhile was encountering priests and bishops in Latin America who, like him, were opposed to the right-wing dictatorships there. Cuban bishops were denouncing the U.S. embargo of Cuba as immoral. And John Paul was trotting the globe denouncing not only communism, but the inequities and materialist values of capitalism.

In the late 1980s and early '90s, Castro began loosening some restrictions on religion. He allowed Mother Teresa to set up a mission in Cuba; he applauded the Church's care of the aged. Christian groups were permitted to circulate Bibles. In 1992, he went so far as to declare that Cuba was no longer "atheist" - merely "secular."

Meanwhile, with strong support from the Vatican, Catholic clergy and lay people were continuing to build grassroots support. In 1996, the Church reported that it had baptized an astonishing 75,000 Cubans.

And now, as John Paul prepares to leave for Havana, blue and white posters everywhere announce the imminent arrival of el mensajero del amor y la esperanza, the messenger of love and hope.

For the Catholic Church to serve as an effective champion of the poor, it will need more priests and clergy - and John Paul wants Castro to reopen the Catholic schools and allow more non-Cuban religious into the country.

And, in exchange for directing Catholic Charities and related relief organizations to divert more food and medicine to Cuba, John Paul may be able to demand that Castro allow the Catholic clergy and prelates to speak out in state newspapers and on state TV and radio.

Judging by his past visits to other nations, it is unlikely that John Paul will level any direct criticism at Castro this week. But he will almost certainly use his pulpits in Havana, Santa Clara, Camaguey and Santiago de Cuba to assert the worth of every human being and the duty of government to protect human rights.

He may also condemn abortion and prostitution, both of which are tolerated by Castro.

And if Castro winces at these rebukes, he may also gloat if John Paul repeats, as he is expected to, his assertion that politically motivated trade embargoes, such as the one Washington has imposed against Cuba for 36 years, are immoral.

Such remarks, reinforced by the U.S. Catholic Bishops Conference, would put some pressure on the Clinton administration to ease the embargo, and Castro clearly sees the Pope's visit here as a pivotal moment in U.S.-Cuban relations.
As for the people of Cuba, they seem to be open to the idea of the Catholic Church as an agent of much-needed change.

At the Church of the Holy Spirit on Sunday, 24-year-old Daniel Ferrer made a sign of the cross and bowed his head as he entered.

"Yes, I am Catholic. It is the identity of the Cuban people," he said.

Does he support Castro's revolution?

"Many of the generals and the leaders of the revolution were Catholic," he said evasively. "But as a youth, I was a normal boy with no ideology, no ideals for the future. In 1992, I entered the church for the first time.

"Now, it gives me a sense of identity."
Off the phone at last, Pete Seeger springs from a back bedroom and calls out a greeting. "Who's that guy with the gray hair?" he wants to know. I laugh; it's been 17 years since last we saw each other. I point out the white in his beard and what's left of his hair, and he laughs, too.

"Hey, is it warm enough in here?" he wonders, glancing around the kitchen of his converted barn in Beacon, N.Y. I start to say it's fine, but he doesn't wait for an answer. "Think I'll put another log on," he says, and disappears.

His wife, Toshi, who has lived with his inexhaustible energy for 54 years, shakes her head. We follow Pete into the bedroom-office, assuring him the house is warm enough, but he is already crouching before the woodstove with a split oak log in his hand. "Too long," he decides, and as he reaches toward the woodpile for another, the log bumps against the stove. Bonk.

"Hey!" he exclaims, turning round to us. "Hear that? Why, it's a musical log!"

He taps it again, producing another resonant bonk. Pete grins. "E-flat. I'm gonna save this one. Think I'll put it with my instruments," he announces.

Toshi and I look at each other. Who else but Pete Seeger would make a log sing?

His delight in that log makes me smile. As I watch him scurry through his house in early April, at 78 still eager and skinny as a schoolboy, I am struck once again by the near-mystical intensity that has propelled him to modern legend. Part Johnny Appleseed, part Thomas Paine, part Walt Whitman, Seeger for six decades has used words and music to challenge and celebrate what it means to be a principled citizen.

It is he who popularized "We Shall Overcome," turning it into the anthem of the civil rights movement. It is he who wrote what is perhaps the finest antiwar song of this or any other century, "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" And from his pen comes the reflective, hymn-like "Turn, Turn, Turn," from the Book of Ecclesiastes, with its gentle reminder that there is "a time to be born, a time to die. . . . a time for every purpose under heaven."

Without him, the world would not know "Guantanamera" or "Wimoweh" or "If I Had a Hammer," and hundreds more Seeger songs and melodies and discoveries that send souls stirring, toes tapping, minds thinking, and whole concert halls singing.

But to me, he is something else again: a man who helped me make sense of the world and showed me a way to live at a time, and in ways, my own father could not.
After 60 years of singing on picket lines and in hobo jungles and at peace marches and summer camps, his famous tenor voice no longer has the strength to rouse concert halls with such trademark tunes as Woody Guthrie's "This Land Is Your Land," or the traditional "John Henry" or his version of "Bells of Rhymney."

"Now I just call out the words and the audience sings along," he says with a shrug of resignation.

Across the kitchen table, though, his voice is still clear and resonant. Ask him a question or tell him a story and he nods eagerly, cocks his head, and launches into a reply that might skip from the population explosion to his back-to-nature experiments as a boy, to a verse of gospel music, to Einstein, to a discourse on the Bruderhof, a modern-day Christian commune on the upper Hudson River that supports itself making wooden toys.

"I think the biggest revolution the human race has ever seen is going to be a moral revolution, where we realize that our fate depends on each other," he says between sips of miso soup and bites of corn bread. It is the social gospel he has preached for six decades.

"Someday there's gonna be tens of millions of small organizations, and we'll disagree about so many things it'll be hilarious: 'Save this! Stop that!' But we'll agree on a few basic things like: 'Better to talk than shoot, right?' And when words fail, we won't give up. We'll try other things: arts, numbers, melodies, boats, you name it."

It's an earful. Yet it all coheres somehow around a vision of humankind in harmony with itself and the natural order.

Like many Americans, I first met Pete Seeger without knowing it. As a child I sang, "This Old Man," one of the countless folk tunes he discovered and introduced to a national audience. I delivered newspapers after school with "Kisses Sweeter than Wine" playing from my transistor radio, and sang "If I Had a Hammer" and "Michael, Row the Boat Ashore" at Boy Scout camp in the early 1960s.

Then, at the end of that same anguished decade, I was among the half-million Vietnam War protesters marching on Washington as Seeger sang his own "Last Train to Nuremberg" from the steps of the U.S. Capitol.

I didn't know then I was looking for a father-hero, of course. But as I entered my 20s, America seemed scary, unstable. I'd played by the rules as a youngster: I'd been an altar boy, a paper carrier and the senior patrol leader of my Scout troop.

Then came John Kennedy's assassination, and Alabama sheriffs turning dogs on voting-rights demonstrators, napalm, the My Lai massacre, the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy and four peace demonstrators at Kent State University, and Richard Nixon's corrosive dishonesty. My country seemed to be going mad.

My own father didn't have answers. A product of the Great Depression who grew up in modest circumstance - his father had died on his sixth birthday - he went to college on a scholarship, edited his college newspaper, wrote radio
plays, captained a B-26 bomber in World War II, and traded whatever writerly-journalistic ambitions he had for a life as a New York corporate public relations director.

Often sullen and inexplicably angry, Dad was not a guy who heard music in the bonk of a fire log. His politics were moderate-Democrat of the Adlai Stevenson variety, and he modeled for his three sons honesty, fidelity in marriage, hard work and a love of writing. But as I entered adulthood I wanted a new model, a new paradigm, a new way to live. And in 1971 I found one aboard Clearwater, a 106-foot replica of the great single-masted sailboats that plied the Hudson River in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Clearwater had sprung from Seeger's lyrical imagination just a few years before; after reading a book about the bygone Hudson River sloops, he hit upon the idea of building one - "something to rally people around a cleanup of the Hudson," he proposed to a neighbor. His idea inspired a broad-based fund-raising effort, and in 1969, Clearwater's 65 tons splashed down the ways of a Maine shipyard and sailed south for the Hudson Valley.

The plan for Clearwater was impossibly naive: The sloop, with its 108-foot mast and huge, gaff-rigged mainsail, would sail into towns along the Hudson with a crew of folksingers. They would put on concerts at the water's edge and, between songs, talk about river pollution and urge people to get involved.

Visitors could come out for a sail, too, and members of the Clearwater organization could volunteer to crew for a week, living aboard and helping the permanent crew hoist sails, coil lines, steer, cook and wash decks. The only cost then was $10, for food.

"Nothing in America works that way," I thought when I heard of this. But I joined, and quit my miserable job answering mail for Moneysworth magazine so I could crew - I figured I'd find another job when I got back. On Oct. 15, 1971, I met the Clearwater at South Street Seaport in Manhattan.

As I caught my first whiff of its tar and wood smoke, I supposed I was merely stepping onto a quaint, old-fashioned sailboat, but in truth I was stepping into the moral universe of Pete Seeger: a rustic, collective, optimistic, egalitarian, not-for-profit universe more reminiscent of the utopian Shaker and Hutterite and Oneida religious communities than of anything envisioned by Marx and Lenin.

I spent that week on Clearwater sailing twice a day out of Yonkers, N.Y. We taught river ecology to schoolchildren with seine nets and microscopes, showing them the life that teems in the Hudson, and I sensed I had found a home. Life aboard that grand, creaking sloop, with its wood cookstove and block-ice refrigerator, its stained-glass windows and laughter and homemade music - all in the name of cleaning up the Hudson - satisfied my hunger for community and worthy purpose.

Then one evening, toward the end of that week, Seeger himself came by as some college-age visitors were on deck, strumming guitars. He sat down to listen, and after a while one young man led the group in "Everybody Get
Together" by the Youngbloods: "C'mon people now, smile on your brother, everybody get together, try to love one another right now." We all sang along, and when we were done, Pete said: "I do believe that that's the nicest version I've ever heard of that song."

The short-haired young man who led it was stunned. "Gosh, thank you," he stammered. "That was the first time I've ever sung in front of anyone!"

"So this is Pete Seeger," I thought.

That winter and through much of 1972 I visited the sloop on weekends, sanding or varnishing or scraping decks for a meal and a chance to sail, but in all that time, I never said more than a few words to Seeger. At summer's end, I moved from New York to Connecticut, where I did odd jobs and occasional assembly-line work. Then, on a freezing November afternoon, as I was hitchhiking the interstate through Danbury, a green Ford Pinto pulled over. I ran up to it, pulled open the door, and there he was behind the wheel.

"Hop in," he said. It was apparent he didn't know me - he just picked up hitchhikers. But we talked about Clearwater, and I learned that as a young man Seeger had thumbed and ridden the rails across the country with his banjo over his shoulder, learning new tunes, helping organize unions, singing for a sandwich and a glass of beer. "I remember what it's like to be on the side of the road with my thumb out," he said.

He loved to talk. As I sat listening to him in April in his farmhouse overlooking the Hudson, with Clearwater sailing toward Newburgh across the way, I heard the same stream of ideas that had poured out of him that day, and later, when we were driving to concerts or washing dishes in the wood smoke of Clearwater's galley.

"Let the billionaires go their corrupting and disastrous course; the only thing that can save this world is small business. Of course, big companies make cheap paper and cheap computers and big airplanes, so we can travel, and that's good. But there needs to be all sorts of little things: small businesses, small scientific and social and educational organizations..."

I joined the permanent crew on May 3, 1973, and lived aboard Clearwater for most of that year. In the decade that followed, I served as a member of Clearwater's board of directors and, for a while, its president. Seeger visited the boat every few weeks, and though he rarely stayed overnight, he always helped with chores, washing or drying dishes, coiling lines, or chopping wood - a favorite task of his. I can see him on the dock at Ossining, swinging an ax to an old prison tune: "Take this hmmm-ER!..." Whap! "Take this hmmm-ER!" Whap!

But he was essentially a private man who kept his distance behind a wall of words, someone who gave off more light than warmth. I understood this: A lot of people asked a lot of Pete. But I admired him for the same reason his unauthorized biographer, David King Dunaway, did - because, as Dunaway told me the other day, "I found no inconsistencies in the man Pete Seeger and the public persona." He lived by the simple values he preached. I remember the afternoon in 1973 when a concert promoter sent a big, black limousine to the sloop to take Pete to a performance in New York. He was horrified when the
uniformed chauffeur explained that the Cadillac was for him: He literally clutched his head and groaned. When he learned none of the crew had a plain old Dodge or VW bus he could borrow, he beseeched us to ride with him in the limo. With three or four scruffy sailors along, he figured, a limo might not look so pretentious.

I used to joke that communism would have worked in this country if we had been a nation of Pete Seegers; he was always pitching in for some cause or other - whether it was building a log canoe for the children of Beacon (it sank), or putting on a benefit concert for a tiny local library.

In 1974 I hit him up: I had written a booklet for Clearwater explaining how new environmental laws were cleaning up the Hudson and celebrating the renaissance of the commercial shad fishery. Who better than Pete to write a preface?

"Would you do it?" I asked one day. He winced. "I think I'm destined to go down in history as a writer of prefaces," he said with a brave smile. I discovered I had added one more chore to his already overburdened writing schedule: He devoted a day each week to answering his mail, which sometimes arrived in cartons. (It still does.) But he spent an hour at a typewriter and wrote me a preface.

Several weeks later, Toshi and I were in the Manhattan offices of Pete's manager, printing and collating 500 copies of The Shad Book - "With an Introduction by Pete Seeger" - on a clunky old silk-screen printer. (Everything about Clearwater is pretty rustic.) We finished around midnight, too late for my train back to Connecticut, so Toshi invited me to come home with her "if you don't mind sleeping in a barn."

Around 1 a.m., we drove up their long, rutted dirt drive. The night was black as could be. Just then we saw a man come out of the house. It was Pete, barefoot in pale-blue pajamas, unaware he had a visitor; he'd come out to open the car door for his wife.

Perhaps people in China hear the name "Pete Seeger" and think of his version of "We Shall Overcome," which pro-democracy students sang in Tiananmen Square as they lay down before the tanks. Maybe union organizers know him as the arranger and popularizer of "Which Side Are You On?" and "Union Maid."

And if the peace lasts in Ireland, perhaps Seeger will be remembered there for the achingly beautiful new recording of "Where Have All the Flowers Gone," sung in alternating verses by a Protestant from the North and a Catholic from the South.

But my memory of Pete will always include his coming out to greet his wife at 1 a.m.; for me that small kindness, when he thought there was no one but his wife to see it, lent authenticity and heart to the face on the album cover.

Seeger's Father, Charles Seeger, was one of the nation's first scholars of ethnic music. A Harvard-educated aristocrat who wore ascots and smoking jackets, Charles was nonetheless a member of the "Wobblies": the radical, leftist Industrial Workers of the World.
"Their idea," Pete recalled in April, "was: 'Sign up everybody in one organization, and then we'll just call a big general strike, and the next day the world will be run by the workers.'" Their scheme sounds "infantile" to Seeger now, but Charles' concern for the poor and for workers, and his belief in the transformative power of music, shaped his third son profoundly.

I met Charles in 1978, at his home in Bridgewater, Conn. - a town I happened to cover as a reporter at my first daily newspaper. Bearded, white-haired, with a squeaky voice and gold-rimmed glasses, he sat by the fire in a wing chair and for hours hours took me on a galloping horseback tour of Western civilization, beginning with socialism and moving somehow from 12-tone music to Greek architecture, Venetian sea battles, astronomy, Franklin Roosevelt, Charles Ives, farming, cubism. I hardly got a word in.

What made it all the more charming was seeing so much of Pete in the tilt of Charlie's head, his crooked teeth, that bony forefinger wagging skyward, punctuating an endless fugue of ideas.

When Pete was 16, Charles took him to a folk music festival in Asheville, N.C. There, he heard some rustic, homemade country songs with "a hard, honest edge" that felt truer than the Tin Pan Alley pop tunes of the day. He fell in love with folk music, and with the five-string banjo, which became his trademark.

At about this age Pete also read Thoreau's Walden and announced to some chums that he was going to be a hermit when he grew up: It was the only way to live without moral compromise, he said.

"What kind of morality is that?" one boy replied. "Be pure and let the rest of the world go to hell?"

"I've never forgotten that argument," Seeger says. "I decided they were right. I had to get involved."

At 18, Seeger entered Harvard, got bored, and quit after two years to work as a union organizer. Around 1939, he met legendary Oklahoma folk singer Woody Guthrie: a hard-drinking, two-fisted ex-farmer bankrupted by the Depression, as rough-hewn and Midwestern as Seeger was polite, intellectual and Eastern.

But they were kindred spirits, angry with the suffering of the Depression and the social inequities of capitalism. Together they rode freight cars with little more than their instruments on their backs, singing at lumberjack camps and on picket and bread lines.

In 1941 Seeger and Guthrie put together a group called the Almanac Singers. Their first big performance, in May of that year, was for 20,000 striking Transport Union Workers at Madison Square Garden. Seeger sang the opener, "Talking Union":

If you want higher wages let me tell you what to do;  
You got to talk to the workers in the shop with you;  
You got to build you a union, got to make it strong;  
But if you all stick together, boys, it won't be long. . . .

The crowd roared for more.

But anyone preaching a society where workers had more economic muscle than owners sounded subversive to the FBI, which began a file on Seeger. Though he

...
served as private in World War II, he was deemed "suspicious," and his file
grew fatter with every workers' rally he sang for.

On Aug. 18, 1955, he was ordered before the Un-American Activities
Committee of the House of Representatives (HUAC) and asked if he had ever sung
for Communist causes.

"I am not going to answer any questions as to my association, my
philosophical or religious beliefs, or how I voted in any election or any of
these private affairs," he replied. "I think these are very improper questions
for any American to be asked, especially under such compulsion as this. . . ."

His refusal, citing the First Amendment rights of free speech and assembly,
was the career equivalent of Socrates' drinking hemlock: heroic death. He was
charged with contempt of Congress and sentenced to 10 years in prison, tarred
as a Communist, and blacklisted by TV and radio - even by some of the unions
he had championed for so long.

Jailed briefly, he was freed on appeal. He went underground, singing
instead for college audiences and summer camps and in rented halls for as
little as $25.

Life on the road took him from Toshi and their two (later three) children
for weeks at a time. "We ate a lot of beans in those days," she recalls. But
it was a creative time, too; he wrote the original, short version of "Where
Have All the Flowers Gone" in the summer of 1956.

And around 1960 his modified version of the old Methodist hymn, "I'll
Overcome Some Day" - written by the Rev. Charles Tindley of Philadelphia in
1903 - emerged as "We Shall Overcome," the great civil rights chant that would
become an international song of liberation. Not until 1968, when the Smothers
Brothers invited him to sing "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy" - his devastating
allegory of America's descent into the Vietnam War - did the networks
reluctantly lift their ban. Seeger began to emerge from exile as a kind of
mythic figure to many of my generation.

Seeger's enemies had long memories, however. Twice in 1973, someone cut our
dock lines while we were tied up overnight at a little town across the river
from West Point. And somewhere I still have the red-printed leaflet that a
member of the John Birch Society thrust into my hand at a concert, denouncing
him as "Stalin's songbird."

The 1990s have been kind to "Stalin's songbird," however, canonizing him in ways
once unthinkable: Harvard honored him; he won a Grammy Award; was
inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame; and in 1994, was awarded both a
National Medal of Arts and a Kennedy Center Honor for lifetime achievements.

Watching the broadcast from the Kennedy Center, I shook my head in wonder,
amused at seeing Pete in his late father's 1922 tuxedo, and cheered by Arlo
Guthrie's stomping tribute to Seeger, "This Land Is Your Land."

Then, when Guthrie and Joan Baez and Paul Winter and Garrison Keillor and a
dozen other artists held hands on stage and began to sing "We Shall Overcome,"
I lifted my 5-year-old son, Christopher, into my lap. It was way past his
bedtime, but I wanted to connect him somehow with that music, that man, that time in my life.

"Why are you crying, Daddy?" he wanted to know. It was hard to explain.

This spring, Appleseed Recordings, based in West Chester, Pa., released a two-CD anthology of 39 Pete Seeger songs recorded by some 50 musical luminaries including Bruce Springsteen, Bonnie Raitt, Jackson Browne, Odetta and Judy Collins.

"My reason for making this CD is just that his songs have gone around the world and empowered so many people," producer Jim Musselman, a public interest lawyer, explained several weeks ago in an interview at his home office. It's a sunny room cluttered with musical instruments and Seeger memorabilia, including every record he's ever made.

"His songs are his children, and he's not going to be touring the world again. So I wanted to take his children around the world - and also to the next generation.

"Exposure to Pete changed my life," says Musselman, 40, who tells of having a "kind of religious experience" at law school in 1978, when he read Seeger's testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee.

"I was shocked. I'd never learned about the McCarthy era. And I sort of sat up and said, 'Wait. This guy was doing something important as an American, standing up for constitutional rights.'"

Within a year Musselman had "decided to work for social justice," and joined forces with consumer rights activist Ralph Nader. He spent much of the 1980s doing community organizing around the country, helping to beat back a threat by General Motors to relocate its plants to Mexico. Later, he spearheaded the long, successful campaign for federally mandated airbags in passenger cars.

"If not for Pete, I would have been a corporate lawyer and not led half the fulfilled life I've had, working for social justice," Musselman says. "So I like to say we have Pete Seeger to thank for airbags, and I'm serious. I think his life is testimony to how one rock in a pond can create a lot of ripples."

Seeger - who'd rather sing his songs than listen to them - is gratified by Musselman's effort. "I'm a very lucky songwriter to have other people singing my songs," he says. "And who knows? Some of them may be heard in the future." If there is one. He's not so sure.

"I think - I hope - we have another 100 years, but the entire world will have to realize the danger we're in."

Just as a younger generation of Germans once demanded to know if their parents had done anything to thwart the Holocaust, he said, future generations will demand to know what we of the late 20th century did to halt the disastrous depletion of the world's natural resources.

"The question that's gonna be asked of CEO after CEO after CEO," he said - smacking the kitchen table on each CEO - is: "'When do you stop being a CEO and start being a grandparent? What are your grandchildren gonna say about what you are doing?"
It was a rare flash of fierceness.  
"Do you ever get discouraged?" I wondered.  
He laughed softly.  
"Every night around 9, I say the hell with it, and go to bed," he replied.  
"But the next morning I jump up with a million ideas for projects I can’t complete."

How did Pete Seeger change me? He confirmed my sense that there is much more to life than making money. And through Clearwater I got a glimpse of the interconnectedness of all living things. I lived communally for several years, became a journalist, and nowadays write mostly about religion, with its ideas of morality, duty and community. Organized religion doesn’t always have the right answers, I’ve noticed. But, like Seeger, it asks the right questions.

And with my wife and son and daughter, I live by the Delaware River; my sailboat is moored nearby.

But I’m my own father’s son, too. My politics are more Adlai Stevenson than Karl Marx. I have a white clapboard house in the suburbs and commute to work in a necktie. Like him, I’m a writer, and I hope that some day my children will say that I modeled the virtues of hard work, faithfulness and honesty.

In the last years of my father’s life the cloud of depression that had hung over him for so many decades lifted, thanks to antidepressant medicine, and we discovered him to be a man filled with joy and sunlight. So did he. He loved to tell of the time he was resting in bed, recovering from one of his heart surgeries, when my Christopher, then 3, crept upstairs to his bedside without our knowing it and said, "I love you, Papa."

When Dad died unexpectedly in May 1995, the hardest moment for me was telling Chris the news as I walked him home from kindergarten: I can still see him pausing at my words, then looking into my face, and then bending over in tears.

My brother, charged with making the funeral arrangements, decided Dad would be buried in the little churchyard down the road from my parents’ farm in Hunterdon County. It wouldn’t have been my choice - my wife, Birnie, and I were married in that church, and it was always a joy for us to see it on the way to visiting Mom and Dad.

After the final graveside prayers, the family and friends walked back toward the farm, just as they had done on my wedding day. "Do you think I could ring the church bell, Dad?" Chris whispered. I supposed yes, that no one would mind.

As Birnie and our baby daughter, Claire, walked on, Chris and I slipped inside the empty church. I found myself in the same dark basement hall where I had stood so nervously in June 1984.

Up in the choir loft, Chris and I found a rope dangling from the ceiling. He pulled: clang. Pulled again: clang. And again and again, and despite the solemn occasion, we laughed at how the rope lifted him off the floor on each upswing.

Downstairs, Chris came with me as I walked up the aisle and gazed for the
first time in 11 years at the spot where Birnie and I had said our wedding vows. I was trying hard to feel the joy of our wedding so Dad’s burial here would not eclipse the memory of that day.

Then I noticed the Bible on the altar, and wondered what it was open to. I stepped up and saw in large letters: Ecclesiastes.

Could it be? I scanned the page and saw, down to the right, the words Pete had set to music.

"For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven:

"A time to be born, and a time to die. . . .

"A time to love, and a time to hate. . . ."

In that moment I felt my father had at last met Pete, and that they, and Chris and I, were being held together in something larger than ourselves.

I took Chris by the hand, and we started for the farm.
If the Jews of each century could add their own chapter to Scripture, the 20th century’s would surely be called The Book of Shoah: The Book of the Holocaust.

Brimming with rage and lamentation, it would tell of how the pagan German Reichsführer, Adolf Hitler, exterminated nearly 6 million European Jews during World War II.

It would surely tell, too, of the courageous gentiles who rescued innocent Jews from deportation and death.

But if written today, how might this hypothetical Book of Shoah depict Pope Pius XII, head of the Roman Catholic Church during the Holocaust?

For decades, Pius’ public silence during the Holocaust has been one of the most controversial debates in modern Catholic-Jewish relations.

Last week that debate raged once again.

On Monday - a day that was supposed to be one of reconciliation - the Vatican solemnly repented for the failure of Roman Catholics to deter the mass killing of Europe’s Jews during the war.

Despite its expression of “deep sorrow for the failures of her sons and daughters of every age” toward the Jews, the long-awaited document, titled “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah,” failed in the eyes of some Jews and historians to address the crucial question of whether Pius turned his back on the Jews during the Holocaust.

Critics assert Pius might have saved untold lives if he had publicly denounced the genocide or pronounced excommunication on any Catholic who cooperated in the murder of innocent Jews; but he was silent and failed to do so.

Pius’ defenders assert, however, that he worked behind the scenes to save thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of Jews.

But the 12 pages of “We Remember” contain no mention of Pius, much to the frustration of some Jewish organizations. Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, called the omission “bizarre.”

“This document rings hollow,” he declared Monday. “It’s mostly an apologia, a rationalization for Pope Pius and the church during the Shoah.”

Although Rabbi James Rudin, director of interreligious affairs for the American Jewish Committee, called the statement “strong,” Phil Bauman, executive director of the American Jewish Congress, lamented the Vatican’s reluctance to “impose moral culpability on some leading church authorities over persecution of Jews.”

Israel’s chief rabbi, Meir Lau, a Holocaust survivor, even demanded an “explicit apology for the shameful attitude of the Pope at the time.”

But no one outside the Vatican knows what Pius did or didn’t do during World War II, according to Father John F. Morley, associate professor of
history at Seton Hall University.

The long-standing policy of the Vatican Library is to wait 75 years after a Pope's death before making the records of his papacy public. If the Vatican abides by that policy with Pius, who ascended to the papacy in 1938 and died in 1958, historians won't know until 2033 if his diplomatic record exonerates or indict him.

Although the Vatican in the 1970s allowed a team of four priest historians to review and publish a selection of diplomatic documents, some Jewish organizations called for the Vatican to again open its files.

Pius' defenders insist Pius avoided a confrontation with Hitler out of fear that a public denunciation could provoke Hitler to begin even worse attacks on Jews. They cite a 1967 book by Israeli journalist Pinchas Lapide, who claimed Pius' behind-the-scenes efforts saved 860,000 Jews from extermination.

"But Lapide provides no footnotes to document his sources," according to Father Morley, author of Vatican Diplomacy and the Jews During the Holocaust, 1939-1943.

Peter Black, senior historian at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial and Museum in Washington, D.C., said last week that "no one seems to be able to corroborate that [860,000] figure."

Black said, however, that there is evidence that the papal nuncio, or ambassador, to Hungary in 1944 did entreat the government not to deport Hungarian Jews to Nazi death camps, and that those efforts appear to be among the factors contributing to the survival of some 200,000 of Hungary's 900,000 wartime Jewish population.

"There could have been other interventions on the part of papal nuncios," said Black. "But we won't know it until the Vatican opens its archives."

Until that day arrives, a harsh view of Pius will likely persist. That view holds that, as evidence of Hitler's genocidal campaign became known in 1942, Pius shied away from a public confrontation with Hitler out of fear of an invasion of the Vatican or even a wholesale deportation of all Catholic prelates and clergy in German-occupied territory.

Faced with a choice between the survival of the Jews and survival of the Catholic Church, his critics allege, Pius opted for the latter.

Thus, he remained publicly neutral, helped Jews in small ways (he is credited with secreting about 7,000 Roman Jews in monasteries and even the Vatican during the roundups) and prayed for an Allied victory that would ensure the future of his church.

"Pius realizes [around 1942] that what the Nazis are doing is abhorrent to Christian thinking, but his primary job description is to protect the Catholic Church," said Jack Fischel, chairman of the history department at Millersville University and a historian of the Holocaust.

"So where he can, he offers support for the Jews and resistance, but he's afraid to take an open position because this will endanger Catholics."

Pius' apparent timidity was not lost on some of his contemporaries. In 1942, when Pius' Christmas message lamented the cruelties of war without ever mentioning the Nazis, Wladyslaw Raczkiewicz, president of the Polish
government-in-exile, wrote to Pius.

"My people... implore that a voice be raised to show clearly and
plainly where the evil lies," his letter said. "Today... the Apostolic See
must break silence."

Pius did not.

"On the matter of 'war crimes,' it would appear that the Vatican accepted
the gassings of Jews as merely another kind of inhumanity of which all
belligerents in a war are guilty," the late Philadelphia historian Nora Levin

Pius' latter-day image - as a man called to be a conscience of the world
but too calculating or frightened to rise to the century's greatest crisis -
was not always the case, however.

The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights last week issued a
vigorous defense of its efforts in World War II, recalling how the New York
Times, in its Christmas editorials of 1941 and 1942, hailed Pius as a "lonely
voice crying out of the silence of a continent."

The League also noted that Albert Einstein in 1940 had asserted that "only
the Church stood squarely across the path of Hitler's campaign for suppressing truth."

And the League urged the world to recall Emilio Zolli, chief rabbi of Rome
during the German occupation, who declared after the war that "no hero in all
of history was more militant... than Pius XII... on behalf of all the
suffering children of God." Zolli not only converted to Catholicism in 1945
but took the name "Eugenio" after Pius, who was born Eugenio Pacelli.

Moreover, in 1958, Israel's foreign minister Golda Meir eulogized Pius at
the United Nations. "When fearful martyrdom came to our people in the decade
of the Nazi terror, the voice of the Pope was raised for the victims," Meir declared.

Pius' decline in popular esteem fell precipitously in 1963, however, when
German playwright Rolf Hochhuth staged his acclaimed but controversial play,
*The Deputy*, in which Pius' public silence was portrayed as timidity, even
indifference, to the fate of the Jews. The New York Times called *The Deputy*
"a remorseless, furious j'accuse," when the play appeared on Broadway in 1967.

"Quite possibly the most important Christian document to develop from the
abysmal tragedy of World War II," said the Los Angeles Times.

In another decade *The Deputy* might not have inflamed public opinion the way
it did, but it arrived in a world anguishing over the morality of the Vietnam
War. In the United States, meanwhile, religious leaders - notably the Rev. Dr.
Martin Luther King Jr. - were lashing the national conscience on matters of
racial injustice.

Deservedly or not, Pius became a lightning rod for the explosive moral
issues of another generation, and until the Vatican Library opens all of its
records on his papacy his reputation will likely continue to suffer.

"I'm no fan of Pius, but I definitely think we're projecting our own
contemporary standards onto the past and our notions of how the Pope should
have responded," Father Morley said last week.

"We can criticize him," he added, "but we should leave it to God to
judge him."