

The Family vs Capitalism

By Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, January 1936, 4.

Summary: Explains that the basic unit of society for Catholic sociology is the family, and when the family falls so does Catholicism. This is the reason for hostility to Communism and the same should be true for capitalism, since it creates a class that makes it difficult to sustain a family. Encourages family supportive programs. (DDLW #142).

The papers have been telling us recently of the new trend in Soviet Russia to glorify the woman who raises a family rather than the woman in the factory or driving a tractor. Even there, it seems, the experimentation in social relations has confirmed what Catholic sociology has always taught, that.

There are so many things needed for the reconstruction of social order out of chaos today that we scarcely know where to begin. Catholic trade unions? Co-operatives? Farming communes? Schools and colleges? Personal responsibility? All of these, of course—but personal responsibility on the part of the individual alone does not perpetuate a new mode of life; schools and colleges are directed by those brought up in the old ways; communities of individuals die out or change their character; Catholic co-operatives and trade unions cannot begin to exist until we have Catholics *living* their faith and creating a truly Catholic culture and tradition.

So it is to the re-creation of the Catholic family, that microcosm of society and type of the Mystical Body, that we must look now if we expect later generations in this country to see Catholicism, instead of Marxism, a vital force in the nation, if we hope to maintain “the freedom of the children of God” against the diabolic forces of fascism. if we wish our posterity to enjoy the peace which is their heritage from Christ instead of the strife of wars and hatreds between nations and classes.

Marxist Communism has been condemned by Catholics for its destruction of family life. What then of capitalism, which creates an ever-growing proletariat ground down to such a level of insecurity and misery that decent family life is almost impossible? Probably we have all wondered about the dismal future of young people finishing school these days, with years of sterile learning behind them and no prospects of a job ahead. There are countless thousands of them well on in their twenties today who have never had a job and whose chances decrease as the years pass. Capitalism bars them from living by the fruits of the labor they would willingly give, and marriage is out of the question. Even if they have jobs, Catholic young people dare not assume the responsibilities of marriage because they “can’t afford a baby.”

Economists tell us that in days of prosperity children are an economic asset. We assert that in these days of revolution, when we Catholics must arm ourselves with the Holy Spirit to “renew the face of the earth,” in this struggle, too, children are an asset and family life the most powerful and enduring form of propaganda.

We cannot understand, then, the shortsightedness of Catholics who contribute generously for Catholic schools and neglect to aid the Catholic family life from which the schools must draw their students. Long-range action is needed here; but there is also an immediate and urgent need, in the New York Diocese especially. We have often commented, in THE CATHOLIC WORKER, on the high cost of maternity care here and the lack of facilities for such care under Catholic auspices. Chicago has its large Catholic maternity hospital, where, in the short time it has existed, over ten thousand mothers have been cared for, many without charge. Other dioceses have established maternity guilds on a parish or diocesan basis. But in New York, where last year Misericordia Hospital—the only Catholic hospital in the city which accepts free maternity cases—cared for *nearly 1,000 free maternity patients*, there is no diocesan provision whatsoever for the poor who are trying to observe the teachings of the Church against birth control and raise families despite their economic circumstances!

We would suggest that as a first, even though inadequate, step toward realizing out ideals of family life our Catholic lay-people and clergy show the sincerity of their conviction by raising their voices in loud agitation for Catholic provision of such care.

“We offer up to Thee, O Lord, a victim of ransom, humbly entreating that, through the intercession of the Virgin Mother of God and blessed Joseph, Thou wouldst strongly establish our families in Thy peace and Thy grace.” (Secret, Feast of the Holy Family.)