

All the Way to Heaven is Heaven

Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, June 1948, 1, 2, 7.

Summary: First of a series of articles on distributism (see DOC #160 & DOC #161). Against the backdrop of harsh city life she points to life on the land as a way to find zest in life. Distributism is a third point of view, neither Communism or capitalism. "The aim of distributism is family ownership of land, workshops, stores, transport, trades, professions, and so on." Recommends reading Belloc and Chesterton as an introduction to it. (DDLW #159).

About a month ago, Douglas Hyde, one of the editors of the London Daily Worker, became a Catholic. In an article in the Catholic Herald of England, he wrote:

"In 1943, I libeled, in the course of my work on The Daily Worker, a Catholic paper, the Weekly Review, and a number of its contributors. In preparation for an anticipated court case, which in fact, was never heard, I read through the paper's files for the preceding year and studied each issue as it appeared.

"I had accused it of providing a platform for Fascists at a moment when Fascist bombs were raining down on Britain. I came in time to realize that not only had I libeled it in law but also in fact.

"For years my cultural interests had been in the middle ages. My favorite music was also pre-Purcell, in architecture my interest was in Norman and Gothic, in literature my favorites were Chaucer and Langland. We had a family joke which we made each year when holidays were discussed."Let's go on a trip to the thirteenth century."

"And these were the interests of the people behind the Weekly Review. I came to look forward to the days when it appeared on my desk. A natural development was that I became increasingly interested in the writings of Chesterton and Belloc....

"A good Communist must never permit himself to think outside his Communism. I had done so and the consequences were bound to be fatal to my Communism.

"That, as it were, is the mechanics of my introduction to Catholicism."

Not long ago at a mass meeting of the workers in a Finnish factory when the question was asked which they would prefer, Communism or Capitalism, they shouted, "Neither."

Fr. Parsons in his letter in our anniversary issue said that he loved us best when we were fighting for something, so let us begin this new series of articles, similar to THE CHURCH AND WORK. We will probably slash out now and again in the fray of battle, at Fr. Higgins, for instance, who makes fun of the Distributists, and at the ACTU, the members of which are our very good friends. (We are just trying to improve their vision.) And at those who say that it is too late for anything but love, and on the one hand, just read St. John of the Cross and seek for perfection; or on the other hand just make your Easter duty and be ordinary good Catholics. The Pope and the Bishops say that secularism is the curse of our time. We cannot separate soul and body. We cannot separate the week from Sunday. A man's work, whereby he eats, is important.

In other words, it is never too late to begin. It is never too late to turn over a new leaf. In spite of the atom bomb, the jet plane, the conflict with Russia, ten just men may still save the city.

Maybe if we keep on writing and talking, there will be other conversions like Mr. Hyde's. It was reading an article that got Fr. Damien his leper at Molokai. It was reading that converted St. Augustine. So we will keep on writing.

And talking, too. They always said in England that the Distributists did nothing but talk. But one needs to talk to convey ideas. St. Paul talked so much and so long that in the crowded room one young lad, sitting on the window sill, fell out of the window and was killed, like a woman down the street from us, last week. Only she was not listening to the word of God, but washing windows on a Sunday morning. And it was sad that there was no St. Paul to bring her to life. Her life finished there. But we are still alive, though we live in a city of ten million and one can scarcely call it life, and the papers every day carry news of new weapons of death.

However, we are still here. We are still marrying and having children, and having to feed them and house them and clothe them. We don't want them to grow up and say, "This city is such hell, that perhaps war will be preferable. This working in a laundry, a brass factory, the kitchen of a restaurant, is hell on earth. At least, war will teach me new trades, which the public school system has failed to do. This coming home at night to a four-room, or a two room tenement flat and a wife and three children with whooping cough (there are usually not more than three children in the city) is also hell. And what can be done about it? We are taught to suffer, to embrace the cross. On the other hand, St. Catherine said, "All the way to heaven is heaven, because He said I am the Way." And He was a carpenter and wandered the roadsides of Palestine and lived in the fields and plucked the grain to eat on a Sunday as he wandered with His disciples.

This morning as I went to Mass my eyes stung from the fumes of the cars on Canal street. I crossed a vacant lot, a parking lot filled with cinders and broken glass and longed for an ailanthus tree to break the prison-gray walls and ground all around. Last night all of us from Mott street were at a meeting at Friendship House to hear Leslie Green, Distributist, and the talk was good and stimulating so that in spite of the noise, the fumes, the apathy which the city brings, I was impelled this morning to begin this series. My son-in-law, David Hennessy, of Berkeley Springs, West Virginia, who has a toehold on the land, has also been deluging me with pamphlets. He has one of the best libraries in the country on the subject, and deals with the books and pamphlets which discuss Distributism. He will help with this series, and send literature to those who ask for it. The address is given in an ad in this issue.

He has one of many toeholds on the land. We could list perhaps fifty among our friends and if we went through our files, we could find many more. These toeholds have meant, however, that the young, married couples had a little stake to start with. They had, or could borrow a bit of money to make a down payment on a farm. Their families could give them a start if it was only a few hundred dollars. (There was an ad in the New York Times yesterday of a farm for sale for \$1,200, three hundred down and \$25 a month.) Even with the bit of money, however, faith, vision, some knowledge of farming or a craft, are needed. People need to prepare themselves. Parents need to prepare their children.

On the one hand there are already some toeholds on the land; there are those farmers already there who have the right philosophy; there is still time, since we have not yet a socialist government or nationalization of the land. We have some government control, but not much yet. Not compared to what there may be soon

On the other hand, there are such stories as that in the last issue of *Commonweal* about the de Gorgio strike in the long central valley of California, of 58,000 acres owned by one family, of 2,000 employees, of horrible living conditions, poor wages, forced idleness "times of repose" between crops, when machines are cared for but not men, women and children. "The Grapes of Wrath" pattern is here, is becoming an accepted pattern. Assembly line production in the factory, and mass production on the land are part of a social order accepted by the great mass of our Catholics, priests and people. Even when they admit it is bad, they say, "What can we do?" And the result is palliatives, taking care of the wrecks of the social order, rather than changing it so that there would not be quite so many broken homes, orphaned children, delinquents, industrial accidents, so much destitution in general.

Palliatives, when what we need is a revolution, beginning now. Each one of us can help start it. It is no use talking about how bored we are with the word. Let us not be escapists but admit that it is upon us. We are going to have it imposed upon us, or we are going to make our own.

If we don't do something about it, the world may well say, "Why bring children into the world, the world being what it is?" We bring them into it and start giving them a vision of an integrated life so that they too can start fighting.

This fighting for a cause is part of the zest of life. Fr. Damasus said once at one of our retreats, that people seemed to have lost that zest for life, that appreciation of the value of life, the gift of life. It is a fundamental thing. Helene Isvolsky in a lecture on Dostoevsky at the Catholic Worker house, last month, said that he was marked by that love for life. He had almost been shot once. He had been lined up with other prisoners and all but lost his life. From then on he had such a love for life that it glowed forth in all his writings. It is what marks the writings of Thomas Wolfe, whose life was torrential, whose writing was a Niagara.

But how can one have a zest for life under such conditions as those we live in at 115 Mott street? How can that laundry worker down the street, working in his steamy hell of a basement all day, wake each morning to a zest for life?

In the city very often one lives in one's writing. Writing is not an overflow of life, a result of living intensely. To live in Newburgh, on the farm, to be arranging retreats, to be making bread and butter, taking care of and feeding some children there, washing and carding wool, gathering herbs and salads and flowers—all these things are so good and beautiful that one does not want to take time to write except that one has to share them, and not just the knowledge of them, but how to start to achieve them.

The whole retreat movement is to teach people to "meditate in their hearts," to start to think of these things, to make a beginning, to go out and start to love God in all the little things of every day, to so make one's life and one's children's life a sample of heaven, a beginning of heaven

The retreats are to build up a desire, a knowledge of what to desire. "Make me desire to walk in the way of Thy commandments." Daniel was a man of "desires." Our Lord is called "the desire of the everlasting hills."

Yes, we must write of these things, of the love of God and the love of His creatures, man and beast, and plant and stone.

"You make it sound too nice," my daughter once said to me, "when I was writing of life on the land, and voluntary and involuntary poverty which means in specific instances the doing without water, heat, washing machines, cars, electricity and many other things, even for a time the company of our fellows, in order to make a start.

And others have said the same thing, who are making a start on the land. And I know well what they mean. One must keep on trying to do it oneself, and one must keep on trying to help others to get these ideas respected.

At Grailville, Ohio, there is not only the big school where there is electricity, modern plumbing, a certain amount of machinery that makes the work go easier and gives time for studies; but there is also a sample farm, twelve acres, with no electricity, no modern plumbing, no hot water, where the washing is done outside over tubs and an open fire, and yet there, too, the life is most beautiful, and a foretaste of heaven. There one can see how all things show forth the glory of God, and how “All the way to heaven is heaven,”

Artists and writers, as I have often said, go in for voluntary poverty in order to “live their own lives and do the work they want to do.” I know many a Hollywood writer who thought they were going out there to earn enough to leave to buy a little farm and settle down and do some really good writing. But the fleshpots of Egypt held them. And I knew many a Communist who had his little place in the country, private ownership too, and not just a rented place, a vacation place.

Property is proper to man. Man is born to work by the sweat of his brow, and he needs the tools, the land to work with.

This article is but an introduction to a series of articles on what has been written and thought about Distributism.

The principles of Distributism have been more or less implicit in much that we have written for a long time. We have advised our readers to begin with four books, Chesterton’s *What’s Wrong With the World*, *The Outline of Sanity*, and Belloc’s *The Servile State* and *The Restoration of Property*.

These are the books which Douglas Hyde must have read which gave him the third point of view, neither industrial capitalist or communist.

In a brief pamphlet by S. Sagar, made up of a collection of articles which ran in the Weekly Review, distributism is described as follows:

To live, man needs land (on which to have shelter, to cultivate food, to have a shop for his tools) and capital, which may be those tools, or seeds, or materials.

“Further, he must have some arrangement about the control of these two things. Some arrangement there must obviously be, and to make such an arrangement is one of the reasons why man forms communities.” – Men being what they are, every society must make laws to govern the control of land and capital.

The principle from which the law can start is “that *all* its subjects should exercise control of Land and Capital by means of direct family ownership of these things. This, of course, is the principle from which, until yesterday, our own law started. It was the theory of capitalism under which all were free to own, none compelled by law to labor.” (Popular magazines like *Time* and the *Saturday Evening Post* are filled with illustrations of these principles, which all men admit are good, but unfortunately the stories told are not true. It is the reason why great trusts like the Standard Oil and General Motors have public relations men, why there is a propaganda machine for big business, to convert the public to the belief that capitalism really is based on good principles, distributists’ principles, really

is working out for the benefit of all, so that men have homes and farms and tools and pride in the job.) "Unfortunately, in practice, under capitalism the many had not opportunity of obtaining land and capital in any useful amount and were compelled by physical necessity to labor for the fortunate few who possessed these things. But the theory was all right. Distributists want to save the theory by bringing the practice in conformity with it. . . .

"Distributists want to distribute control as widely as possible by means of a direct family ownership of Land and Capital. This, of course, means cooperation among these personal owners and involves modifications, complexities and compromises which will be taken up later.

"THE AIM OF DISTRIBUTISM IS FAMILY OWNERSHIP OF LAND, WORKSHOPS, STORES, TRANSPORT, TRADES, PROFESSIONS, AND SO ON.

"Family ownership in the means of production so widely distributed as to be the mark of the economic life of the community—this is the Distributist's desire. It is also the world's desire. . . . The vast majority of men who argue against Distributism do so not on the grounds that it is undesirable but on the grounds that it is impossible. We say that it must be attempted, and we must continue to emphasize the results of not attempting it."

In the next issue of the paper we will continue with a number of articles dealing with these problems.