

Poverty and Pacifism

Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, December 1944, 1, 7.

Summary: Elaborates on the vision of voluntary poverty and what it implies for the kind of work we do, what we eat and drink, how we entertain ourselves. Recommends decentralized living and numerous books. Says "We need saints. God, give us saints." (DDLW #223).

For the last month I have meditated on the use of spiritual weapons. In Father John J. Hugo's pamphlet, "Weapons of the Spirit," he advocates as weapons, devotion to the Sacred Heart and the Rosary. The love of the humanity of our Lord is the love of our brother. The only way we have to show our love for God is by the love we have for our brother. "Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, you have done it unto Me." "You love God as much as the one you love the least."

Love of brother means voluntary poverty, stripping one's self, putting off the old man, denying one's self, etc. It also means non-participation in those comforts and luxuries which have been manufactured by the exploitation of others. While our brothers suffer, we must compassionate them, suffer with them. While our brothers suffer from lack of necessities, we will refuse to enjoy comforts. These resolutions, no matter how hard they are to live up to, no matter how often we fall and have to begin over again, are part of the vision and the long-range view which Peter Maurin has been trying to give us these past ten years. These ideas are expressed in the writings of Eric Gill, in the Dominican monthly, *Blackfriars*. And we must keep this vision in mind, recognize the truth of it, the necessity for it, even though we do not, can not, live up to it. Like perfection. We are ordered to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect, and we aim at it, in our intention, though in our execution we may fall short of the mark over and over. St. Paul says, it is by little and by little that we proceed.

Jobs and Work

Poverty will result from our examining our conscience as to jobs. (Since beginning this article I have read Carol Jackson's article in *The Living Parish*, which also takes up that question of voluntary poverty, manual labor, and jobs. A beautiful presentation.)

If these jobs do not contribute to the common good, we pray God for the grace to give them up. Have they to do with shelter, food, clothing? Have they to do with the works of mercy? Fr. Tompkins says that everyone should be able to place his job in the category of the works of mercy.

This would exclude jobs in advertising, which only increases people's useless desires. In insurance companies and banks, which are known to exploit the poor of the country and of others. Banks and insurance companies have taken over land, built up farms, ranches, plantations, of 30,000, 100,000 acres, and have dispossessed the poor. Loan and finance companies have further defrauded him. Movies, radio have further enslaved him. So that he has no time nor thought to give to his life, either of soul or body. Whatever has contributed to his misery and degradation may be considered a bad job.

Manual Labor

If we examine our conscience in this way we would soon be driven into manual labor, into humble work, and so would become more like our Lord and our Blessed Mother.

Poverty means non-participation. It means what Peter calls regional living. This means fasting from tea, coffee, cocoa, grapefruit, pineapple, etc., from things not grown in the region where one lives. One day last winter we bought broccoli which had the label on it of a corporation farm in Arizona or Texas, where we had seen men, women and children working at two o'clock in the morning with miners' lamps on their foreheads, in order to avoid the terrible heat of the day, which often reached 125 degrees. These were homeless migrants, of which there are some million in the United States. Carey McWilliam's "Factories in the Fields," which you can get at any library, tells of the conditions of these workers. For these there is no room at the inn.

We ought not to eat food produced under such conditions. We ought not to smoke, not only because it is a useless habit, but also because tobacco impoverishes the soul and pauperizes the farmer, and means women and children working in the fields. Poverty means having a bare minimum in the way of clothes, and seeing to it that these are made under decent working conditions, proper wages and hours, etc. The union label tries to guarantee this. Considering the conditions in woolen mills, it would be better to raise one's own sheep and angora goats and rabbits, and spin and weave and make one's own blankets and stockings and suits. Many groups are trying to do these things throughout the country, both as a remedy for unemployment and for more abundant living. The School of Living at Suffern, N.Y., the Catholic Rural Life Conference at Des Moines, Iowa, both have publications discussing these ideas.

As for the dislocation in employment, if everyone started to give up their jobs. Well, decentralized living would take care of such a situation. And when we look at the dirty streets and lots in our slums, the unpainted buildings, the necessity

of a nationwide housing project, the tearing down that needs to be done if we do not in the future wish to have it done in the hard way and have them bombed down, then we can see that there is plenty of employment for all in the line of providing food, clothing and shelter for our own country and for the world. We should read A.J. Penty on the machine and Fr. Vincent McNabb, the greatest apostle of all. Their books are in all libraries.

Poverty means not riding on rubber while horrible working conditions prevail in the rubber industry. (Read Vicki Baum's "Bleeding Wood," and Andre Gide's "Congo Journey." And what a strange conglomeration of authors I am handing out!) Poverty means not riding on rails while bad conditions exist in the coal mines and steel mills. Poverty means not accepting that courteous bribe from the railroads, the clergy rate. Railroads have been built on robbery and exploitation. There are stagecoaches, of course, and we are only about a century past them. But pilgrims used to walk, and so did the saints. They walked from one end of Europe and Russia to the other. We need saints.

Fr. Meus, the Belgian who is a Chinese citizen, since his missionary life began in China, has walked thousands of miles. He said he would dearly love to walk from one end of the United States to the other. Of course, we are not all given the grace to do such things. This article is to call to mind the *vision*. It is true, indeed, that until we begin to develop a few apostles along these lines, we will have no mass conversions, no social justice, no peace. We need saints. God, give us saints.

How far we all are from it! We do not even see our infirmities. Common sense tells us, "Why live in a slum? It is cheaper to live in a model housing project, have heat and hot water, a mauve or pink bath and toilet [ending missing]."