On Poverty

Dorothy Day

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Introduction

"The most significant thing about *The Catholic Worker* is poverty, some say." (DDLW #867)

"We must talk about poverty because people love sight of it, can scarcely believe that it exists." (DDLW #633)

"It is hard to write about poverty." (DDLW #633)

Dorothy Day's teachings on poverty are ubiquitous in her writings, were on display in how she lived, and continue to inspire countless people.

Poverty is not a simple notion for Dorothy but encompasses a certain taxonomy or outline:

- Poverty is distinguished from destitution
- There is involuntary and voluntary poverty
- Voluntary poverty may be a natural virtue or may be Holy Poverty

The causes of poverty are numerous, some individual or personal, others rooted in the structures of society and the economic order.

Responsibility for alleviating poverty may fall to the State, the Church, or to me. Concretely, the works of mercy to which all are called.

Dorothy's views on poverty did not go unchallenged, they were judged to be both unrealistic and self-serving, Jansenist and communist.

The articles selected here are a sample of her views. At times she will clearly express her convictions, other times she will simply describe a concrete situation of squalor or grim destitution by telling a story. Dorothy always invited the reader draw the conclusions applicable to their life.

All of Dorothy's writing was meant to be an encouragement to action on behalf of the poor: What needs to be done? What can I do?

Chapter 2

Poverty and Precarity

The Catholic Worker, May 1952, 2, 6.

Summary: An essay on the mystery and complexity of poverty, real and voluntary kinds. Enumerates the many forms of poverty, the irony of "poverty" in "rich" religious orders, and finally poverty as a means of helping the poor. (DDLW #633).

Poverty is a very mysterious thing. We need to be always writing and thinking about it. It would seem strange that we must strive to be poor, to remain poor. "Just give me a chance" I can hear people say, "Just let me get my debts paid. Just let me get a few of the things I need and then I'll begin to think of poverty and its pleasures. Meanwhile, I've had nothing but."

This last month I have talked to a man who lives in a four room apartment with a wife and four children and relatives besides. He may have a regular job and enough food to go around, but he is poor in light and air and space. Down at the Peter Maurin farm each of the corners of the woman's dormitory are occupied, and when an extra visitor comes she must live in the middle of the room. During a visit to Georgia and South Carolina I have seen the shacks Negroes are living in, and the trailer camps around Augusta, Georgia, where the Hydrogen Bomb plant is under construction. They may have trailers but they are also poor, physically speaking, in the things that are necessary for a good life. Trailers cost money, so do cars, and food is high and no matter how high wages go, a sudden illness, and accumulation of doctor and hospital bills may mean a sudden plunge into destitution. Everybody talks about security and everybody shudders at the idea of poverty. And in fear and anguish people succumb, mentally and physically, until our hospitals, especially our mental hospitals, are crowded all over the country.

I am convinced that if we had an understanding and a love of poverty we would begin to be as free and joyous as St. Francis, who had a passion for Lady Poverty and lives on with us in joyous poverty through all the centuries since his death.

It is hard to write about poverty. We live in a slum neighborhood that is becoming ever more crowded with Puerto Ricans who are doubling up in unspeakably filthy, dark, crowded tenements on the lower east side and in Harlem, who have the lowest wages in the city, who do the hardest work, who are little and undernourished from generations of privation and

exploitation by us. We used to have a hard time getting rid of all the small sized clothes which came in to us. Ladies who could eat steak and salads and keep their slim figures, contributed good clothes, small sized shoes, and I can remember Julia Porcelli saying once, "Why are the poor always fat. We never get enough clothes to fit them." The American poor may be fat with the starches they eat, but the Puerto Rican poor are lean. The stock in the clothes room at Chrystie street moves quickly now.

It is hard to write about poverty when a visitor tells you of how he and his family all lived in a basement room and did sweat shop work at night to make ends meet, and how the landlord came in and belabored them for not paying his exorbitant rent.

It is hard to write about poverty when the back yard at Chrystie street still has the stock of furniture piled to one side that was put out on the street in an eviction in a next door tenement.

How can we say to these people, "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven," when we are living comfortably in a warm house, sitting down to a good table, and are clothed decently. Maybe not so decently. I had occasion to visit the City Shelter last month where families are cared for, and I sat there for a couple of hours, contemplating poverty and destitution, a family of these same Puerto Ricans with two of the children asleep in the parents' arms, and four others sprawling against them; a young couple, the mother pregnant; and elderly Negro who had a job she said but wasn't to go on it till next night. I made myself known to a young man in charge (I did not want to appear to be spying on them when all I wanted to know was the latest in the apartment-finding situation for homeless families) and he apologized for making me wait saying that he had thought I was one of the clients.

We must talk about poverty because people lose sight of it, can scarcely believe that it exists. So many decent people come in to visit us and tell us how their families were brought up in poverty and how, through hard work and decent habits and cooperation, they managed to educate all the children and raise up priests and nuns to the Church. They concede that health and good habits, a good family, take them out of the poverty class, no matter how mean the slum they may have been forced to inhabit. No, they don't know about the poor. Their conception of poverty is something neat and well ordered as a nun's cell.

And maybe no one can be told, maybe they will have to experience it. Or maybe it is a grace which they must pray for. We usually get what we pray for, and maybe we are afraid to pray for it. And yet I am convinced that it is the grace we most need in this age of crisis, at this time when expenditures reach into the billions to defend "our American way of life." Maybe it is this defense which will bring down upon us this poverty which we do not pray for.

I can remember our first efforts nineteen years ago. (With this issue we start our twentieth year.) We had no office, no equipment but a typewriter which was pawned the first month. We wrote the paper on park benches and at the kitchen table. In an effort to achieve a little of the destitution of our neighbors we gave away even our furniture and sat on boxes. But as fast as we gave things away people brought more. We gave away blankets to needy families, started our first house of hospitality and people gathered together what blankets we needed. We gave away food and more food came in. I can remember a haunch of venison from the

Canadian Northwest, a can of oysters from Maryland, a container of honey from Illinois. Even now it comes in, a salmon from Seattle, flown across the continent; nothing is too good for the poor. There is no one working with **The Catholic Worker** getting a salary, so no one is bothered with income tax, and since all of the leaders of the work give up job and salary, others of our readers feel called upon to give, and help us keep the work going. And then we experience a poverty of another kind, a poverty of interior goods of reputation. It is said often and with some scorn, "Why don't they get jobs and help the poor that way? Why are they living off others, begging?" Just this last month a long letter came in along these lines, and another group in St. Louis emphasized that they didn't live by begging.

It would complicate things rather, I can only explain, to give Roger a salary for his work of fourteen hours a day in the kitchen, clothes room and house; to pay Jane a salary for running the woman's house, and Beth and Annabelle for giving out clothes; for making stencils all day and helping with the sick and the poor; and Bob and Tom for their work–and then have them all turn the money right back in to support the work. Or to make it more complicated, they might all go out and get jobs, and bring the money home to pay their board and room and the salaries of others to run the house. It is simpler just to be poor. It is simpler to beg. The thing to do is not to hold out on to anything. That might smack of the Ananias and Saphira act.

But the tragedy is that we do, we all do. We hold on to our books, our tools, such as typewriters, our clothes, and instead of rejoicing when they are taken from us we lament. We protest at people taking time or privacy. We are holding on to these goods. It is a good thing to remember.

Occasionally, as we start thinking of poverty, usually after reading the life of such a saint as Benedict Joseph Labre, we dream of going out on our solitary own, living with the destitute, sleeping on park benches or in the Shelter, living in the Churches, sitting before the blessed Sacrament as we see so many doing, from the Municipal lodging house around the corner. And when these thoughts come on warm spring days when the children are playing in the park, and it is good to be out on the city streets, we know that this too is luxury and we are deceiving ourselves, and that it is the warm sun we want, and rest, and time to think and read, and freedom from the people that press in on us from early morning until late at night. No it is not simple, this business of poverty.

"True poverty is rare," a saintly priest writes to us from Martinique. "Nowadays communities are good, I am sure, but they are mistaken about poverty. They accept, admit on principle, poverty, but everything must be good and strong, buildings must be fireproof, **Precarity** is rejected everywhere, and precarity is an essential element of poverty. That has been forgotten. Here we want precarity in everything except the church. These last days our refectory was near collapsing.

We have put several supplemental poles and thus it will last, maybe two or three years more. Some day it will fall on our heads and that will be funny. Precarity enables us to help very much the poor. When a community is always building, and enlarging, and embellishing, which is good in itself, there is nothing left over for the poor. We have no right to do this as long as there are slums and breadlines somewhere."

Over and over again in the history of the church the saints have emphasized poverty. Every community which has been started, has begun in poverty and in incredible hardships by the rank and file priest and brother and monk and nun who gave their youth and energy to good works. And the result has always been that the orders thrived, the foundations grew, property was extended till holdings and buildings were accumulated and although there was still individual poverty, there was corporate wealth. It is hard to keep poor.

One way to keep poor of course is not to accept money which is the result of defrauding the poor. Here is a story of St. Ignatius of Sardinia, a Capuchin just canonized last October. Ignatius used to go out from his monastery with a sack to beg from the people of the town but he would never go to a merchant who had built up his fortune by defrauding the poor. Franchino, the rich man, fumed every time he passed his door, at being so neglected, though this perhaps seems even more unbelievable than the climax of the story. His concern, however, was not the loss of the opportunity to give an alms, but he fear of public opinion. He complained at the friary, whereupon the Father Guardian ordered St. Ignatius to beg from the merchant the next time he went out

"Very well," said Ignatius obediently. "If you wish it, Father, I will go, but I would not have the Capuchins dine on the blood of the poor.

The merchant received Ignatius with great flattery and gave him generous alms, asking him to come again in the future. But hardly had Ignatius left the house with his sack on his shoulder than drops of blood began oozing from the sack. They trickled down on Franchino's doorstep and down through the street to the monastery. Everywhere Ignatius went a trickle of blood followed him. When he arrived at the friary he laid the sack at the Father Guardian's feet. "What is this?" gasped the Guardian. "This," St. Ignatius said, "is the blood of the poor."

This story was contained in the last column written by a great Catholic Layman, a worker for social justice, F.P. Kenkel, editor of the Central Verein in St. Louis, and always a friend of Peter Maurin, founder of The Catholic Worker.

Mr. Kenkel's last comment was, that the universal crisis in the world today was because of love of money. "The present Egyptian crisis is but one scene in the great oriental drama that has been unfolding for the past years," he wrote. "The Far East and the Near East" (and he might have said all Africa also), "together constitute a great sack from which blood is oozing. The flow will not stop as long as our interests in those people are dominated largely by financial and economic considerations."

"Voluntary poverty," Peter Maurin would say, "Is the answer. Through voluntary poverty others will be induced to help his brothers. We cannot see our brother in need without stripping ourselves. It is the only way we have of showing our love."

Chapter 3

Reflections During Advent-Part Two, The Meaning of Poverty

Ave Maria, December 3, 1966, pp.21-22, 29.

Summary: Gives examples of false voluntary poverty and refutes the notion that real poverty doesn't exist. Challenges everyone to a personal response, not a government one, to poverty and to ask ourselves "What shall we do?" Gives examples and concludes that all can do something and that whatever work of mercy we perform we "do it for love of Jesus, in His humanity, for love of our brother, for love of our enemy." Points to the scandal of the wealth of the Church and thanks God for the sacraments and the Word in the Scriptures–our light and our food. (DDLW #560).

THERE IS A STORY of Tolstoi's called "How Much Land Does A Man Need?" It is the story, as I remember it, of a peasant who left his good land and home to go to the South, where he had heard there were thousands of fertile acres for the asking. He made his way to the nomad tribe and asked for some of their land. The chieftain told him he could claim as his own the amount of land he could encompass on foot, from sunup to sundown. When he had rested from his journey he set out running at a pace he felt he could sustain, for he had great confidence in his own strength and endurance, and began to stake out his land. But his greed was greater than his endurance, so his strength began giving out towards the close of the day. By the time he had run the immense boundaries he had chosen for himself, he fell dead at the feet of the Cossack chieftain. He ended in a six-foot grave dug merrily by his scornful hosts, who sensed that the earth was the Lord's and the fullness thereof.

We had a man living with us once who claimed that all illness was a punishment for some fault. When Sunday visitors came in happily with bunches of poison ivy, picked because of their bright colors or pretty berries, he labeled the visitors as "acquisitive." It was the fault he most despised, perhaps because it was the one he was most guilty of himself. He wanted to be poor, yet he looked upon all things around him as his own and gathered them to himself.

At the same time, he did not like to work, to be exploited, he called it, in our present acquisitive, competitive society, so he preferred to gather furniture and even slightly spoiled food from off the city dump near the farm, and felt he was exemplifying voluntary poverty.

Another family moving in with us, on one of our Catholic Worker farms, felt that the beautifying which had made the farmhouse and its surroundings a charming spot was not consistent with a profession of poverty. They broke up the rustic benches and fence, built by one of the men from the Bowery who had stayed with us, and used them for firewood. The garden surrounding the statue of the Blessed Virgin, where we used to say the rosary, was trampled down and made into a woodyard filled with chips and scraps left from the axe which chopped the family wood. It was the same with the house: the curtains were taken down, the floor remained bare, there were no pictures–the place became a scene of stark poverty, and a visiting bishop was appalled at the "poverty." It had looked quite comfortable before, and one did not think of the crowded bedrooms or the outhouse down the hill, or the outdoor cistern and well where water had to be pumped and put on the wood stove in the kitchen to heat. Not all *these* hardships were evident.

On another farm we owned–a larger place where we could accommodate more children in summer, more families, more men from off the road–there was the same lack of plumbing arrangements and the same need to heat the place with wood fires Even the nearby city helped us out by bringing logs from trees which had fallen in storms and blocked the highways, to increase our store of fuel. The place was old and beautiful, and had a carefully tended flower garden with peonies, iris, forsythia, perennials and annuals that delighted the eye and kept our chapel furnished with color and fragrance. Here one of our prosperous visitors looked around with a censorious eye and commented, "You call this voluntary poverty? I could not afford a country home like this."

She did not see the three sets of outhouses set back in the trees and bushes which had to be used winter and summer (the temperature often dropped to 10 below zero); nor did she see our bare dormitories with their double-decker beds crowded together, nor the living quarters of a family over the carriage shed that was heated only by an old stove in the middle of the barnlike structure, nor the wayfarers' dormitory down below where men came in from off the road at any hour of the night or day (and sometimes with a bottle to keep themselves warm!). No doors were ever locked in that farm by the road.

It is not right to justify oneself, but we tried to point out how ungrateful we would be to God and to our benefactors if we did not, by hard work and care, improve what we had received in the way of land and house. The very men who had come to get help had stayed to give help and had made the place what it was by constant hard labor.

But the poor, it seems, have no right to beauty, to order. Poverty must be squalor, filth, ugliness, to be esteemed as poverty. But this is destitution, and it was usually from such destitution that our family had come "up in the world." Our visitors did not recognize true poverty–voluntary poverty now-offered up by these men for the sake of their fellows . . . a poverty on the part of students and volunteers as well as men from the Bowery, which meant no money to jingle in the pocket, no wages, having to ask for tobacco, to wear the clothes which "came in"and to have no privacy, which is the greatest desire, the greatest need of all.

Right now on our farm at Tivoli, New York, there are five hermits in the woods who have rebuilt old campsites so that, winter and summer, they can live alone.

During the 33 years that the *Catholic Worker* has been published and the Houses of Hos-

pitality and farms have grown up around the United States, there has always been this misunderstanding of poverty.

For a long while, poverty was denied–we just did not have any, according to popular belief, in our affluent society. Many a time I was queried by students, "where is poverty? We do not have any around this prosperous Middle West, for instance." I was asked this question at Notre Dame, when I spoke there, and to show that there *was* poverty Julian Pleasants and Norrie Merdzinski, both Notre Dame students, started a House of Hospitality in the off-bounds section of South Bend. With the help of Fr. Putz and Fr. Mathis they kept it going during their student years, to care for unemployed and unemployable men off the road. The same question was asked me in Green Bay, Wisconsin, and I could only point out that where there was a Good Shepherd home for delinquent girls, and an Indian reservation, and a prison and a public ward in the hospital, there was poverty. You could always find poverty at the public dump, or in the prison or hospital. All founders of religious orders and societies searched out poverty.

IT WAS Michael Harrington's book *The Other America,* and Dwight McDonald's long review and analysis of that book in the *New Yorker,* that made the problem explode in this country, to use an expression of Abbe Pierre, who himself works with the destitute and homeless. This book of Mike's, which came as a result of his two-year stay with us as one of the editors of the *Catholic Worker,* started the War on Poverty program.

But it is not to discuss solutions proffered by government or city agencies that I wish to write, though this long introduction was necessary to clarify the subject. War, and the poverty of peoples which leads to war, are the great problems of the day and the fundamental solution is the personal response which each of us makes to the message of Jesus Christ. It is the solution which works from the bottom up rather than from the top down, and makes for readiness to join in larger regional solutions like the organizing of farm workers with Cesar Chavez, community solutions of Saul Alinsky, village solutions like Vinoba Bhave's in India, etc.

The wonderful thing is that each one of us can do something about the problem, each one of us can give his response and can go as far as the grace of God leads him; and God "ordereth all things sweetly," and there is no need to be afraid as to where such a response will lead US.

"Ask and you shall receive," Jesus told us, and this asking may be just that question "What shall we do?" Samuel asked it, St. Paul asked it–"Lord, what will you have me do?" and they seemed to get direct answers. Paul was struck blind, literally and to everything else around him except that one great fact, "whatever ye do to the least of these My brethren, ye do to Me." If you feed them, clothe them, shelter them, visit them in prison (or go to prison and so are with them!), serve the sick, in general perform the works of mercy, you are serving Christ and alleviating poverty by direct action. If you are persecuting them, killing them, throwing them in prison, you are doing it to Christ. He said so.

When the crowd was moved by John the Baptist and asked, "What shall we do?" he said to them, "He who has two coats give to him who has none." He also said, "Do injury to no man. Be content with your pay." Or with no pay at all. If you are voluntarily giving away what you have, giving your coat, don't expect thanks or the reform of the recipient. We don't do

it for that motive, with the expectation of reward. We must do it for love of Jesus, in His humanity, for love of our brother, for love of our enemy.

Charles Peguy in one of his poems, *God Speaks,* tells the story of the prodigal son and comments, "That's the kind of a Father we have, who loves even to folly, who forgives seventy times seven, who rushes out to embrace and feast the prodigal son." This is the kind of love we must have for the poor. The kind of love which will give away cloak also if coat is demanded of you.

Nobody is too poor to help another. The stories in the New Testament are of the widow's mite, of the little boy's loaves and fishes, of the cloak, of the time given when one is asked to walk a second mile.

Another Russian story which profoundly moved me was *The Honest Thief,* by Dostoievsky of the hardworking tailor who lived in a corner of a room, and yet who took in one of the destitute he encountered. The guest begged and drank and the tailor suspected him of stealing his one treasure, an old army coat. He spoke to him harshly, but when the thief ran away, the tailor searched him out and brought him back to his corner to nurse him in his illness. "Love is the measure by which we shall be judged." And by not judging we too shall not be judged.

I am thinking of how many leave the Church because of the scandal of the wealth of the Church, the luxury of the Church which began in the very earliest day, even perhaps when the Apostles debated on which should be highest in the kingdom and when the poor began quarreling as to who were receiving the most from the common table, the Greek Jews or the Jerusalem Jews. St. Paul commented on the lack of esteem for the poor, and the kowtowing to the rich, and St. John in the Apocalypse spoke of the scandal of the churches "where charity had grown cold."

It has always been this way in the Church. On the one hand the struggle for detachment, to grow in the supernatural life which seems so unnatural at times, when the vision is dim.

Thank God for the sacraments, the food of life which we can receive to strengthen us. Thank God for the Word made flesh and for the Word in the Scriptures. Thank God for the Gospel which St. Therese pinned close to her heart, and which the murderer Raskolnikoff listened to from the lips of a prostitute and took with him into the Siberian prison. The Word is our light and our understanding, and it is also our food.

Chapter 4

On Pilgrimage

December

Summary: Meditation on the spiritual weapons of voluntary poverty and manual labor. Lists work to be avoided and personal practices of nonparticipation while exploitation in labor continues. Calls for decentralized living. Recommends growing in acceptance of God's providence and seeing good in others. Reflects on silence during Advent, a time of waiting and a time to examine one's conscience, a time "to see only what is loveable." (DDLW #486).

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 nonparticipation 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 fail 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 years. These ideas are expressed in the writings of Eric Gill. And we must keep this vision in mind, recognize the truth of it, the necessity for it, even though we do not, cannot, 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.

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? Father Tompkins of Nova Scotia 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 this country and of others. Banks and insurance companies have taken over land and built huge collective farms, ranches, plantations, of 30,000, 100,000 acres, and have dispossessed the poor man. Loan and finance companies have further defrauded him. Movies [and] 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 and not to be worked at.

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 nonparticipation. It means what Peter calls regional living. This means fasting from tea, coffee, cocoa, grapefruit, pineapple, etc., from things not grown in the region in which 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 McWilliams' *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 soil 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.

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 Eric Gill, A. J. Penty, and Father Vincent McNabb on the machine.

Poverty means not riding on rubber while horrible working conditions prevail in the rubber industry. Read Vicki Baum's *Weeping Wood* and André Gide's *Congo Journey.* 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.

Father 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. But it is good 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 actually cheaper to live in a model housing project, have heat and hot water, a mauve or pink bath and toilet, etc. We can manage better; we have more time to pray, to meditate, study. We would have more money to give to the poor." Yes, this is true according to the candlelight of common sense, but not according to the flaming heat of the Sun of justice. Yes, we will have more time with modern conveniences, but we will not have more love. "The natural man does not perceive the things of the spirit." We need to be fools for Christ. What if we do have to buy coal by the bucket instead of by the ton? Let us squander money, be as lavish as God is with His graces, as He is with His fruits of the earth.

Let us rejoice in poverty, because Christ was poor. Let us love to live with the poor, because they are specially loved by Christ. Even the lowest, most depraved – we must see Christ in them and love them to folly. When we suffer from dirt, lack of privacy, heat and cold, coarse food, let us rejoice.

When we are weary of manual labor and think, "What foolishness to shovel out ashes, build fires, when we can have steam heat! Why sew when it can be better done on a machine? Why laboriously bake bread when we can buy so cheaply?" Such thoughts have deprived us of good manual labor in our city slums and have substituted shoddy store-bought goods, clothes, and bread.

Poverty and manual labor – they go together. They are weapons of the spirit, and very practical ones, too. What would one think of a woman who refused to wash her clothes because she had no washing machine, or clean her house because she had no vacuum, or sew because she had no machine? In spite of the usefulness of the machine, and we are not denying it, there is still much to be done by hand. So much, one might say, that it is useless to multiply our tasks, go in for work for work's sake.

But we must believe in it for Christ's sake. We must believe in poverty and manual labor for love of Christ and for love of the poor. It is not true love if we do not know them, and we can only know them by living with them, and if we love with knowledge we will love with faith, hope, and charity.

On the one hand, there is the sadness of the world – and on the other hand, when I went to church today and the place was flooded with sunshine, and it was a clear, cold day outside, . . . suddenly my heart was so flooded with joy and thankfulness and so overwhelmed at the beauty and the glory and the majesty of our God that I could only think of St. Dionysius, "Concerning the Godhead":

It is the Cause and Origin and Being and Life of all creation. And It is to them that fall away from It a Voice that doth recall them and a Power by which they rise; and to them that have stumbled into a corruption of the Divine Image within them, It is a Power of Renewal

and Reform; and a Sacred Grounding to them that feel the shock of unholy assault, and a Security to them which stand; an upward Guidance to them that are being drawn unto It, and a Principle of Illumination to them that are being enlightened; a Principle of Perfection to them that are being perfected; a Principle of Deity to them that are being deified; and of Simplicity to them that are being brought into simplicity; and of Unity to them that are being brought into unity.

The immanence of God in all things! "In Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). "He is not far from every one of us" (Acts 17:27).

Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength.

And these words which I command thee this day shall be in thy heart. And thou shalt tell them to thy children. And thou shalt meditate upon them sitting in thy house, and walking on thy journey, sleeping and rising. And thou shalt bind them as a sign on thy hand; and they shall be and move [as frontlets] between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them in the entry, and on the doors of thy house. (Deut. 6:4-9)

THE WINTER before Tamar was born, we lived in a little apartment on West Street looking out over the Hudson River docks which was as sun-filled as the chapel in which I meditated. And on the doors of that little apartment, down the street from St. Christopher's Church, in an apartment over a tavern, there were those holy words enclosed and tacked upon the doorpost inside that house. I was strangely moved when it was explained to me by a Russian Jew, a Communist, what it meant. I understand one can find many an apartment in New York, and doubtless in many of our cities with their large Jewish populations, with such small metal containers, hanging unnoticed by the door frame. I feel like going to one of the Hebrew stores on the East Side and purchasing one so that hereafter, always, it may hang on the door of my house. We need these reminders.

When the world is too much with us, how wonderful to think on these things, to let the mind rest on these things, to rejoice in these words: God is Light, Infinite Beauty, Goodness, "for there is no good save only God."

One very dreary, dark morning a year ago, when the dark, cold mist hung like a slime over the streets and tenements around Mott Street, I had been at Mass down at Transfiguration Church, where there was a mission going on. The priest gave a very good homily on the commandment "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." Each day he was talking on the commandments, one by one.

In his talk he said that any murmuring against God could be included in the violation of this commandment. He talked of "acceptance" of the will of God in whatever the day brought forth. His talk emphasized the virtue of abandonment to Divine Providence. He even brought in the weather.

And yet as I left the church and stopped to exchange some words with a neighbor, my first words were "Miserable weather, isn't it?" I was immediately conscious of my lapse and laughed at myself as I went down the street.

But it is true that most of our complaining can be construed as thoughtless complaining

against God and His Providence. I remember reading once in Romain Rolland that we Western people have lost the beautiful quality of acceptance. Many writers on the East have talked of the philosophical calm and "acceptance" of the Eastern, the Oriental, in the face of heat and cold, disaster and suffering.

Cynically, our Westerner may say that is why they do nothing about poverty and filth and disease. Many of our soldiers were disgusted rather than pitiful at the poverty they saw everywhere, as though it came of choice and sloth. I have heard them express themselves so in regard to our own South. Certainly we Westerners have poverty, filth, and disease side by side with our wealth and comfort. I do not think much of that wealth and comfort, that shining civilization of gadgets and electric lights and skyscrapers, radio and movies. There was the ancient city of Ur out of which Abraham came. I like to turn my thoughts back to Memphis, that great city of Egypt, and Babylon, whose walls extended for forty miles in circumference. And there the Jews sat and wept when they remembered Zion, Jerusalem the golden, so many times razed to the ground.

"Praise the Lord, O my soul. Let all that is within me praise His holy name."

No matter what happens, it is possible to praise, and it is impossible to praise God without that swelling of joy within the breast.

And people! What about people – the evil that men do? I think of Sister Peter Claver and her saying that women's job is to love.

One summer Sister Peter Claver was rebuilding an old farmhouse over in Jersey which was going to be used as a retreat house for Negroes. The place was a wreck – it had not been used for years – and there was work to do in roofing it, painting it, [and] repairing it, and Sister had no money. She came to the Catholic Worker [house] and asked if anyone wanted to work for God. She had to beg for every scrap of paint, shingle, and lumber she put into it, getting what she needed week by week.

Two of our men volunteered. Both of them were men who drank, one steadily, the other periodically. John, who drank steadily, went out to Jersey for the summer and never touched a drop for the months he was there. Hugh went out and worked hard, but again and again was tempted and fell. In addition to his other work, he carved a huge beam which separated the sanctuary from the pews in the room they made into a chapel, and he made a crucifix. He had learned these crafts at the Catholic Worker house.

Sister never became discouraged in her loving charity. She loved these men and brought out the best in them. I've been inclined to attribute that loving warmth of Sister Peter Claver to the fact that she is half-Jewish and half-Irish. It is in her nature to be warm and loving, to see the good in others, I argue to myself. But true it is, she forgives seventy times seven, she sees always the good in the other, she sees a man as made in the image and likeness of God, a temple of the Holy Ghost, the brother of Christ.

Oh, the joy there is in that warmth and love. Bernanos wrote, "Every particle of Christ's divine charity is today more precious for your security – for your security, I say – than all the specie in the vaults of the American government."

ADVENT IS a time of waiting, of expectation, of silence. Waiting for our Lord to be born.

A pregnant woman is so happy, so content. She lives in such a garment of silence, and it is as though she were listening to hear the stir of life within her. One always hears that stirring compared to the rustling of a bird in the hand. But the intentness with which one awaits such stirring is like nothing so much as a blanket of silence.

Be still. Did I hear something?

Be still and see that I am God.

Zundel, in *Our Lady of Wisdom,* has some beautiful passages on silence:

Do we understand at last that action must be born in silence, and abide in silence, and issue in silence, and that its power must be an emanation and the radiation of silence, since its sole aim is to make men capable of hearing the Word that silently reverberates in their souls?

All speech and reasoning, all eloquence and science, all methods and all psychologies, all slogans and suggestions are not worth a minute of silence in which the soul, completely open, yields itself to the embrace of the Spirit.

In solitude Christ speaks to the heart, as a modest lover who embraces not His beloved before all the world.

In silence we hear so much that is beautiful. The other day I saw a young mother who said, "The happiest hour of the day is that early morning hour when I lie and listen to the baby practicing sounds and words. She has such a gentle little voice."

St. James says, "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man." And how much more women need this gift of silence. It is something to be prayed for. Our Lady certainly had it. How little of her there is in the Gospel, and yet all generations have called her blessed. [James says,]

Behold, how small a fire, how great a forest it kindles. And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity. The tongue is placed among our members, defiling the whole body, and setting on fire the course of our life, being itself set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird and serpent and the rest is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But the tongue no man can tame – it is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

With it we bless God the Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made after the likeness of God. [James 3:5-9]

To love with understanding and without understanding. To love blindly, and to folly. To see only what is lovable. To think only on these things. To see the best in everyone around, their virtues rather than their faults. To see Christ in them.

Many people think an examination of conscience is a morbid affair. Péguy has some verses which Donald Gallagher read to me once in the St. Louis House of Hospitality. (He and Cy Echele opened the house there.) They were about examination of conscience. There is a place for it, he said, at the beginning of the Mass. "I have sinned in thought, word, and deed, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault." But after you get done with it, don't go on brooding about it; don't keep thinking of it. You wipe your feet at the door of the church as you go in, and you do not keep contemplating your dirty feet.

Here is my examination at the beginning of Advent, at the beginning of a new year. Lack of charity, criticism of superiors, of neighbors, of friends and enemies. Idle talk, impatience, lack of self-control and mortification towards self, and of love towards others. Pride and presumption. (It is good to have visitors – one's faults stand out in the company of others.) Self-will, desire not to be corrected, to have one's own way. The desire in turn to correct others, impatience in thought and speech.

The remedy is recollection and silence. Meanness about giving time to others and wasting it myself. Constant desire for comfort. First impulse is always to make myself comfortable. If cold, to put on warmth; if hot, to become cool; if hungry, to eat; and what one likes – always the first thought is of one's own comfort. It is hard for a woman to be indifferent about little material things. She is a homemaker, a cook; she likes to do material things. So let her do them *for others,* always. Woman's job is to love. Enlarge Thou my heart, Lord, that Thou mayest enter in.

And now, with all this talk of silence, I finish this long account of the year. I send the book out with diffidence. It is the work of a journalist who writes because it is her talent; it has been her means of livelihood. And it is sent out with the hopes that it will *sell* so that the printing bill will be paid, and enough [will be] left over to bring out another book next year – perhaps the book about Peter Maurin as well as a book by another of the Catholic Worker editors. We write also to help support the work which we are doing, because we have a very big family, ranging in age from the infant twins at 115 Mott Street to an eighty-four-year-old woman who wandered in from the streets. It is written most personally because I am a woman who can write no other way. If it is preaching and didactic in parts, it is because I am preaching and teaching and encouraging myself on this narrow road we are treading.

"Life," said St. Teresa, "is but a night spent in an uncomfortable inn, crowded together with other wayfarers."

There are bills to pay at an inn, of course, and they are one of the reasons which led me to send this manuscript forth in the care of St. Joseph, patron of all families. May God bless it, and you who read it.

Chapter 5

More About Holy Poverty. Which Is Voluntary Poverty.

The Catholic Worker, February 1945, 1-2.

Summary: "Am I my brothers keeper?" Argues that increased state intervention limits personal freedom and responsibility. Sees the social security legislation and other state programs as taking responsibility from the community, parish, family and person. Voluntary poverty on the other hand promotes responsibility, since it comes directly from the person. (DDLW #150).

CLARIFICATION of thought is the first plank in the Catholic Worker Program.

There can be no revolution without a theory of revolution, Peter Maurin quotes Lenin as saying. Action must be preceded by thought: There is such a thing as the heresy of good works, "these accursed occupations," as St. Bernard calls them, which keep people from thinking. To feed the hungry, clothe the naked and shelter the harborless without also trying to change the social order so that people can feed, clothe and shelter themselves, is just to apply palliatives. It is to show a lack of faith in ones fellows, their responsibilities as children of God, heirs of heaven

Of course, "the poor we will always have with us." That has been flung in our teeth again and again, usually with the comment, "so why change things which our Lord said would always be?" But surely He did not intend that there would be quite so many of them We also have to repeat that line now that war is on and there Is plentiful occupation.

"Surely, these men on your breadline, these men living in your house, could get work If they really wanted to?" And again and again we must say, "The poor ye have always with you." These are the lame, the halt, the blind, those injured in industrial accidents and those who have been driven to drink by our industrial order and the refugees and veterans from class, race and international war. There are those, too, who refuse to cooperate in this social order, who prefer to work here with us without salary. We could not do without them.

The great message which Peter Maurin has for the world today is the message of voluntary poverty, a message which he has preached by word and example. He Is the most truly poor one among us. And because he has chosen to be poor, he has remained free; he has had time

to think. He has lived a rich and abundant life because of' that very poverty. "I think your most vital message is the praise of' poverty," John Cort writes this month. But it is the most misunderstood message.

"Poverty and Pacifism" was misunderstood, and quite a few letters came in about it, but they were without rancor. On the other hand, "Cake and Circuses, which I wrote for the October issue just before the election, called forth many protests."That you personally could have had part in it or sanctioned it, I cannot believe," one reader writes. "That the CATHOLIC WORKER should have been the instrumentality of its dissemination troubles me-how deep you will divine from the fact that I write you now and in so profoundly disturbed a mood, even after the passing of so many months." (This letter came in February.)

To answer this letter I shall have to reprint most of' it, and then, of course, my answer will not satisfy.

"That mothers of six children can 'go on a binge of department store buying, movies and cigarettes, candies and radio, an even sometimes a car,' all on one hundred and eighty dollars month, strikes me as ridiculous, certainly the six children and their mother will not live very long 'If they just do without the necessities,' and the limits of 'running up debts' are not very remote, surely. From the former heads of the A.M.A. (does he mean the American Manufacturers' Association?) such matter would not seem strange, but it is almost unthinkable coming from a group concerned with the welfare of the poor and disadvantaged. But I find equal cause for concern, the nature of, the CATHOLIC WORKER considered, in the fact that this editorial should have been published on the very eve of the presidential election and that in it the CATHOLIC WORKER should have written that Mr. Roosevelt would be elected by the votes of 'millions who are bought and paid for.'

"Frankly, I cannot conceive that the bitterest partisanship could have stooped much lower. To print such an editorial under the caption of 'Comments on the news in the light of faith,' is to be guilty of sacrilege to write of it as done in the light of the 'folly of the cross' is blasphemy."

This is a comparatively mild letter compared to another received from a priest whose mother raised a large family and who is now receiving money from the three sons who are away at war.

First of all, let me apologize for the brevity of the editorial, which surely should have been clarified and treated at much greater length. It is no wonder that people misunderstand, and it is no wonder that such brevity, such shortness, sounds arrogant, and uncharitable. We owe it to our kind and charitable readers to try to explain at greater length what in our stupidity, and presumption we wrote so briefly.

In the first place, it shocks US that so many do not understand those basic principles of personalism, personal responsibility and voluntary poverty which have for the past twelve years been emphasized monthly in the CATHOLIC WORKER, and in the lives of those who have worked in our thirty-two houses and ten farms. (Now there are ten houses and ten farms.)

I will try to explain. Samuel Johnson said that a pensioner was a slave of the state. That is his definition in his famous dictionary. Of coarse, he himself was glad of his pension, human nature being what it is, and poverty being hard as it is.

We believe that social security legislation, now balled as a great victory for the poor and for the worker, is a great defeat for Christianity. It is an acceptance of the idea of force and compulsion. It is an acceptance of Cain's statement, on the part of the employer. "Am I my brother's keeper?" Since the employer can never be trusted to give a family wage, nor take care of the worker as he takes care of his machine when it is idle, the state must enter in and compel help on his part. Of course, economists say that business cannot afford to act on Christian principles. It is impractical, uneconomic. But it is generally coming to be accepted that such a degree of centralization as ours is impractical, and that there must be decentralization. In other words, business has made a mess of things, and the state has had to enter in to rescue the worker from starvation.

Of course, Pope Pius XI said that, when such a crisis came about, in unemployment, fire, flood, earthquake, etc., the state had to enter in and help.

But we in our generation have more and more come to consider the state as bountiful Uncle Sam. "Uncle Sam will take care of it all. The race question, the labor question, the unemployment question." We will all be registered and tabulated and employed or put on a dole, and shunted from clinic to birth control clinic. "What right have people who have no work to have a baby?" How many poor Catholic mothers heard that during those grim years before the war!

Of course, it is the very circumstances of our lives that lead us to write as we do. We see these ideas worked out all around us. We see the result of this way of thinking on all sides. We live with the poor, we are of the poor. We know their virtues and their vices. We know their generosities and their extravagances. Their very generosity makes them extravagant and improvident.

Please do not think we are blaming the poor when we talk so frankly about their failings, which they, too, will acknowledge. They do not want people to be sentimental about them. They do not want people to idealize them. I think they realize pretty well that they are but dust, and one of our jobs, too, is to make them realize that they are also a little less than the angels.

We are not being uncharitable to them when we talk about a binge or department store buying. Did I say that? What I meant was installment-plan buying. Who do we blame for such installment-plan buying, for the movies, cigarettes, radio, magazines, or all the trash, the worthless trash with which they try to comfort their poor hard lives. We do not blame them, God knows. We blame the advertising men, the household loan companies, the cheap stores, the radio, the movies.

The people are seduced, robbed, stupefied, drugged and demoralized daily. They are robbed just as surely as though those flat pocketbooks of those shabby mothers were pilfered of the pennies, dimes and nickels by sneak thieves.

The people say proudly, "We got it coming to us. We pay taxes, this ain't charity. It's justice." And they hug their sweets, their liquor, their movies, their radio, their dissipations to them, in a vain endeavor to find forgetfulness of the cold and ugliness, the leaking plumbing, the cold water, the lack of coal, the ugly housing, the hideous job, or if they are housewives who stay at home, from the wet diapers, the smelly clothes and beds, the shoddy mattresses and

blankets and furniture that the children break to pieces, the crowded quarters where the poor mothers' heads reverberate with the din of the not too healthy children.

Yes, they pay taxes, and It is the city and the state and the federal government that is robbing them and pilfering them, too, They are taxed for every bite they eat, every shoddy rag they put on. They are taxed on their jobs, there are deductions for this and that, there are the war bonds, eighteen dollars for a twenty-five dollar war bond, paid on the installment plan. And they are not only being taxed, but they are being seduced. Their virtue is being drained from them. They are made into war profiteers, they are forced into the position of usurers. The whole nation, every man woman and child, is forced to become a profiteer-hideous word-in this war.

Some of our readers wrote indignantly, "Do you think $180 is exorbitant for the government to pay? They should be paying much more. I do not see how they can live on that, prices being what they are."

What I tried to say was that that puny, insignificant $180 which looms tremendous in the minds of the poor, was not enough for essentials. Could they rent a decent house to live in? Or could they buy a house? Pope Pius said that as many of the workers as possible should become owners. Is there any chance to become an owner on a hundred and eighty dollars a month?

Peter Maurin likes to talk about the treason of the intellectuals. With the expose of waste and inefficiency on the part of government, of graft and the spoils system ("You take this job in return for the help you gave me in getting elected") I should say that not only advertising men, not only the manufacturer robs and cheats the poor, but also the government. How quickly graft and scandals are forgotten! In Russia graft, corruption and waste in government circles are considered treason, and men have paid for it with their lives. And our Catholic employers and politicians speak at Communion breakfasts, and as long as they prosper they are held in honor; as long as they are in power they are respected. They go to Communion, they go to Mass. You must not judge them. If you speak ill of them, you are being uncharitable.

Yes, the poor have been robbed of the good material things of life, and when they asked for bread, they have been given a stone. They have been robbed of a philosophy of labor. They have been betrayed by their teachers and their political leaders. They have been robbed of their skills and made tenders of the machine. They cannot cook; they have been given the can. They cannot spin or weave or sew-they are urged to go to Klein's and get a dress for four ninety-eight.

Bought and paid for? Yes, bought and paid for by their own most generous feelings of gratitude. Of course, they feel grateful. In spite of their talk about taxes and justice, they are grateful to the good, kind government that takes care of them. St. Teresa said that she was of so grateful a temperament she could be bought with a sardine. St. Ignites said that love is an exchange of gifts. The government gives its paternal care and the people give their support to that particular governing body. Naturally they do not want change.

But who is to take care of them if the government does not7 That is a question in a day when all are turning to the state, and when people are asking, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Certainly we all should know that it is not the province of the government to practice the

works of mercy, or go in for insurance. Smaller bodies, decentralized groups, should be caring for all such needs.

The first unit of society is the family. The family should look after its own and, in addition, as the early fathers said, "every home should have a Christ room in it, so that hospitality may be practiced." "The coat that hangs in your closet belongs to the poor." "If your brother is hungry, it is your responsibility."

"When did we see Thee hungry, when did we see Thee naked?" People either plead ignorance or they say "It is none of my responsibility." But we are all members one of another, so we are obliged in conscience to help each other. The parish is the next unit, and there are local councils of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Then there is the city, and the larger body of charitable groups. And there are the unions, where mutual aid and fraternal charity is also practiced. For those who are not Catholics there are lodges fraternal organizations, where there is a long tradition of charity. But now there is a dependence on the state. Hospitals once Catholic are subsidized by the state. Orphanages once supported by Catholic charity receive their aid from community chests. And when it is not the state it is bingo parties!

THE poor mother of six cannot reject the one hundred and eighty dollars. She cannot say, "Keep your miserable, puny, insufficient $180 which you give men in exchange for my husband." She has poverty, involuntary poverty.

But we must reject it. We must keep on talking about voluntary poverty, and holy poverty, because it is only it we can consent to strip ourselves that we can put on Christ. It is only if we love poverty that we are going to have the means to help others. It we love poverty we will be free to give up a job, to speak when we feel it would be wrong to be silent. We can only talk about voluntary poverty because we believe Christians must be fools for Christ. We can only embrace voluntary poverty in the light of faith.

Chapter 6

Without Poverty We Are Powerless

The Catholic Worker, May 1948, 2, 7.

Summary: Asserts the importance of voluntary poverty even if it means we are fools for Christ. Then gives a loving appreciation of Peter Maurin's holy poverty, blending light-hearted stories and a graphic description of his dementia and silent suffering. Quotes from Fr. Faber on death in anticipation of Peter's death within a year. (DDLW #468).

All our talk about peace and the weapons of the spirit is meaningless unless we try in every way to embrace **voluntary poverty** and not work in any position, any job, that contributes to war, not to take any job whose pay comes from the fear of war, of the atom bomb. We must give up our place in this world, sacrifice children, family, wife, mother, and embrace poverty, reputation, and then we will be laying down life itself.

And we will be considered **fools for Christ**. Our folly will be esteemed madness and we will be lucky if we escape finally the psychopathic ward. We know, we have seen it, in ourselves and in others. The well-dressed man comes into the office and he is given respect. The ragged, ill clad, homeless one, is the hobo, the bum. "Get in line there. Coffee line forms at six- thirty. Nothing to eat until four. No clothes today."

Peter Maurin visiting the Buffalo house one time showed his face inside the door and was so greeted. "Come back at five and have soup with the rest of the stiffs." And then the comment, "one of those New York bums came in this afternoon. Said he was from the New York house."

One of the friends of the work in laughing at the incident that evening said, "Where did you go Peter?" "I went to see 'Grapes of Wrath'." Peter was always meek, obedient to all. His speech with everyone when he was not indoctrinating was always yea, yea, nay, nay. Another story told of him was that when he went to see a professor's wife at Columbia, the wife thought he was the plumber and ushered him into the cellar. He followed her confusedly, wondering why she was entertaining in the cellar. If he knew or thought of such things as rumpus rooms or basement bars, he might have thought he was being ushered into one of them.

Another tale told is of his going to speak at a Midwest college where the door brother was known for his great charity. At the very sight of Peter, the brother ushered him down into

the kitchen and sat him down before a good meal which Peter gracefully ate. As the time for the lecture drew near, the harassed fathers were telephoning and hunting all over the college, finally finding him in the cook's domain, having a discussion there.

Another case I know of, of my own knowledge, is a time he went up to Rye, or New Rochelle, or some Westchester town to make a morning address to a woman's club. He always went where he was asked. An hour or so later we received frantic calls. "Where is Peter?" People always called him Peter. Sometimes they were even more familiar and called him "Pete." Since I had put him on the train myself, I told them that he had left on the train designated, that he must be in the station.

"There is only an old tramp sitting on one of the benches asleep," was the reply. We knew it was Peter, and it turned out to be so.

We have seen many an occasion when he was shut up at a meeting by a cautious chairman before he had even gotten under way. More courteous chairmen allowed him so many minutes to "make his point" and without listening sat him down or called him to order. I have seen Fr. La Farge come to his rescue and explain what it was he was trying to say.

Bishop Boyle likes to speak of the time he had an all day discussion with Peter after one of these encounters in the lecture hall. "I had to get up and tell them what he was trying to say," the Bishop beamed. And it was not just the case of an accent, for Peter even after forty years in this country has an accent. If the accent goes with the well-groomed appearance, people make an attempt to understand it. Coming from a ragged old apostle, people make no attempt to listen.

"People will not listen," Peter used to say sadly. Or else, more directly he would rebuke, "You are listening with one ear, making your answers before you have heard what I have said. You do not want to learn, you want to teach, you want to tell me." He knew he was a man with a message.

And now Peter is more than ever in absolute poverty. He has achieved the ultimate in poverty. This last chapter is necessary for a complete picture of Peter as he is today. It is hard to make our readers understand it. They read, or half read the articles that we run month after month, and no matter how many times we explain that they are reprinted from much earlier issues, and that Peter has not written for four years, they write enthusiastically and tell us how they profited by his last thoughts, "his mind is as keen as ever," they say enthusiastically.

But something has happened to his mind. We must say it again because it is of tremendous significance. It reveals more than anything else his utter selflessness, his giving of himself. He has given everything, even his mind. He has nothing left, he is in utter and absolute poverty. The one thing he really enjoyed, exulted in, was his ability to think. When he said sadly "I cannot think," it was because that had been taken from him, literally. His mind would no longer work. He sits on the porch, a huge old hulk. His shoulders were always broad and bowed. He looks gnomelike, as thought he came from under the earth. He shambles about, one-sidedly as though he had had a stroke. His head hangs wearily as though he could not hold it up. His mouth, often twisted as though with pain, hangs open in an effort to understand what is going on around him. Most of the time he is in a lethargy, he does not try to listen, or to understand. Doctors say that it is a hardening of the arteries of the brain.

Some call it senile dementia. Some talk of cardiac asthma, to explain his racking cough. He has a rupture which gives him pain. Sometimes he has headaches. We only know when we ask him and he says yes or no.

"I have never asked anything for myself," he said, and he made every conscious effort to give all he had, to give the best he had, all of himself, to the cause of his brother. The only thing he had left in his utter poverty which made Skid Row his home and the horse market his eating places and the old clothes room his haberdasher was his brilliant mind. Father McSorley considered him a genius. Fr. Parsons said that he was the best read man he ever met. Now he remembers nothing. "I cannot remember, I cannot think."

One time we acted charades before him at the retreat house at Easton. Irene Naughton arranged three scenes in which the men acted out the three essays, "When the Irish were Irish a Thousand years ago," "When a Greek met a Greek," "When a Jew met a Jew." The contrast was that of the teachings of the fathers of Israel and the Fathers of the Church with the present. The men dressed in sheets and Angora goats' hair to give them venerable appearance and did a delightful job of it. Afterwards we asked Peter what were the essays which the charades exemplified. He did not know. We read aloud his essays to him, and [text missing in the origninal] message we had for the world today was poverty.

All the world admired and talks of the poor man of Assisi. Christ is honored even by the unbeliever, the hater of churches, as the poor man who washed the feet of his disciples and had no place to lay His head. Poverty is praised and sung of in song and story. But its reality is little known.

It is a garden enclosed, a secret beauty. It is to be learned by faith, not by reason or by sense. It is not just *simplicity*, which can be a very expensive proposition indeed.

One time we were cleaning a poor woman's house for her when she was in the hospital having her sixth child. The house was filled with rages, with junk. Some of those helping wished to throw the stuff out, clear up the place, both for the sake of the room, and of order. But to the poor, one of those who was acquainted with poverty remarked, all those things, although they look like rags are necessary. The ragged shirts, diapers, snow suits; things washed (there was little time to mend) and shapeless and grey with age, used time after time for one child after another. Poverty is disorderly, crowded, noisy, smelly, ugly and offensive to the senses. But God is a Spirit and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. In the eyes of faith poverty can be discerned for the beauty that it is.

Peter's poverty might have been thought to be that of an old peasant who was used to nothing better. "After all he never had anything, he was one of twenty-three children, they lived like animals, their manure pile was their greatest possession." I have heard just such remarks as these.

And of course there is truth in the fact that he was not used to soft garments nor the homes of comfort. He was always in good trim to practice the life of poverty.

One of Newman's Lenten sermons talks of our endeavors to multiply the comforts and get rid of daily inconveniences and distresses of life.

"Cold and hunger and hard lodging, humble offices and mean appearance, are considered

serious evils," he writes. "All things harsh and austere are carefully put aside. We shrink from the rude lap of earth and embrace of the elements and we build ourselves houses in which the flesh may enjoy its lust and the eye its pride."

Cold and hunger and hard lodging and all things that affront the senses were well known to Peter. But what of the interior senses, the memory and the understanding and the will? These last years we have seen all these mortified in him. His memory and his understanding are gone, and his will is fixed on God. When we wake him in the morning all we have to say is "Mass, Peter," and he is struggling and puffing and panting to get out of bed. At night it is the same for compline and rosary unless we forbid him to get up and make him lie still.

There is a dear priest who used to talk to us about being victims. I could write a book about him, so great was his love of God and of souls, but this is about Peter. He too became a victim. What he loved most, after his spiritual work, was to do active work for souls, build houses, work his electric saw, make things for the chapel, travel about to talk of the things of God. He was known for his activity. Then at the age of 57, paralysis and loss of memory set in, incontinent and bedridden, he began his last days or years away from all those he loved, far from the activities he craved. I asked him if he had offered himself as a victim, and he said wryly, "One doesn't realize what one is saying often. We offer God so much, and maybe we think we mean it. And then God takes us at our word!"

Peter gave himself, he offered himself to a life of poverty, and he has been able to prove his poverty. It is not just something he was used to, or was attracted to in a superficial way. His poverty, his self-abnegation was complete.

And now he is dying (if not already dead to the things of the world). "His life is hid with Christ in God." He is not even appreciated for the saint he is (and understand that I use this term as one uses it for one not passed upon formally by the Church. A rector of a seminary once said to his students, "I want you all to be saints, but not canonized ones. It costs too much.")

Father Faber describes what Peter's actual death will be like, in one of his spiritual conferences on Death, entitled, **Precious in the Sight of the Lord**.

"Let us speak of one more death, and then close our list. Let it be the death of saintly indifference. This is a death so obscurely veiled in its own simplicity that we can hardly discern its beauty. We must take it upon faith. It is the death of those who for long have been reposing in sublimest solitude of soul in the will of God. All complications have disappeared from their inward life. There is a bare unity about it, which to our unseeing eyes is barren as well as bare. All devotions are molten in one. All wishes have disappeared, so that men look cold, and hard, and senseless. There is no glow about them when they die. They die in colorless light. They make no demonstration when they go. There is no pathos in their end, but a look–it is only a look–of stoical hardness. They generally speak but little, and then it is not edifying, but rather on commonplace subjects, such as the details of the sick room, or news about relatives; and they speak of these things as if they were neither interested in them nor trying to take an interest. Their death, from the very excess of its spirituality, looks almost animal. They lie down to die like beasts, such is the appearance of it. Independently as if they needed none of us to help them, and uncomplainingly, as if fatalism put them

above complaining. They often die alone when none are by, when the nurses are gone away for a while. They seem almost as if they watched the opportunity to die alone. As they have lived like eagles, they mostly die high up, without witnesses, and in the night. This death is too beautiful for us to see its beauty. It rather scares us by something about it which seems inhuman. More of human will would make it more lovely to us; for what is there to be seen when the will of the saint has been absorbed long since in the will of God. Like the overflow of desert wells, the waters of life sink into the sand, without a tinkling sound to soothe the ear, without a marge of green to rest the eye." *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.*

Chapter 7

Poverty Without Tears

The Catholic Worker, April 1950, 1, 3, 6.

Summary: Reviews several books on voluntary poverty, especially ***Poverty*** *by Fr. Regamey. Elaborates on the joy of, objections to, and purpose of voluntary poverty. Rejects capitalist and communist solutions to real poverty, pointing to decentralization and distributism as the answer. (DDLW #230).*

Poverty is the name of a book issued this spring by Sheed and Ward. It is written by a French Dominican and translated by Rosemary Sheed. It costs $2.50 but it would be no violation of voluntary poverty to buy it because it can be considered a tool, a means, to work out your salvation.

The Rich and Poor in Christian Tradition, the writings of many centuries, chosen, translated and introduced by Walter Shewring, and published by Burnes Oates and Washbourne in England, in remembrance of Eric Gill who also wrote on **Poverty**, is another book which also belongs on every lay apostle's shelf. Wherever you turn in this book there are writings that make you groan to think how little is written today concerning the needy and the poor. This book should be a constant companion like the Bible, the missal, for in it are the writings of the Fathers of the Church. In it is the secret of sanctity.

The Poor and Ourselves by Daniel Rops, is another book which should be mentioned here, although it is out of print and hard to find. But in it he talks of the destitute and that wall that exists between the rich, the poor, and the destitute that can only be bridged by love and bread and not by any words.

The Shewring book is one to be quoted from at length and reprinted bit by bit, to make our readers familiar with the writings of the Church, but the Father Regamey book is now being reviewed, because there is that in it which especially needs to be stressed, a sense of the need for **joy in poverty.** And this is hard to write about.

The subtitle of **Poverty,** is **An essential element in the Christian life**. Without it we are lost. The book is dedicated to Pol Dives, whoever he is, "the apostle to glorious poverty." We wish the author had spoken more, in his foreword, about this man. "I am bold enough," he writes, "to offer these pages to him with the hope that he will use them from his place in

heaven to say to the heartbroken without number, the words he said to some of them during his mortal life: 'Do let us stop talking about bleak poverty; accepted poverty is glorious.' He had every right to say so. I do not say that he had touched bottom for with misery there is no bottom. But he had gone so far that his stomach had shrunk and could only take in a very small amount of food. Whenever he saw a man looking sad, he at once asked his name and address: 'I must get him to accept his distress.' I only wish I could find one or two of those he comforted now. But after all he can only have repeated to them the sublime commonplaces of the gospel. The thing was to make them come alive, and he was one man who really did, for to him they had become life. I am certain that he was born only to connect those two words, 'poverty' and 'Glorious'."

But there is not much chance that this book will find its way into the hands of the kind of people we meet up with, who are the destitute and the poor. So let us hope that it will reach and convert a tremendous number of lay apostles who themselves will espouse poverty and live it gloriously and bring a sense of joy to those who are poor. That joy will bring them the energy and power to praise God and begin to **take what they need** of His creatures instead of allowing themselves to be poisoned and perverted and deadened by the non essentials of our industrial America.

This is really a call to a general strike, a revolution, an expropriation of land and tools. It could be dynamite, this book, but it won't be, because the argument will go on as to what is poverty and what destitution, and how can you stop making bombs and tanks and airplane parts and television sets and pepsi-cola and brassieres and chewing gum and ash trays, and wouldn't it throw people out of work, and how can you stop buying all these things too, since that too would throw people out of work? The interminable idiocy of the talk about poverty! As soon as you begin talking of stripping yourself of cigarettes, (and ash trays) chewing gum and pepsi-cola, and (if you can afford it) television sets–then you are called a Jansenist or a Manichaen, negative in your approach, a deviationist heretic of an opponent of the working class as well as of the Church. If you cry aloud for land and home and tools and the good natural life for the poor without which a good supernatural life is impossible, then you are either an escapist and an inhabitant of an ivory tower, or you are a Communist in disguise trying to do away with **property.**

And you are a communist also if you cry out for peace and against increased armaments–against the making of the hydrogen and atom bombs and the paying of federal taxes for the making of those bombs. We know, who picketed March 15 before the tax offices up on 45th street, because we heard these jibes as we walked to and fro with our signs.

Yes, it is hard to talk of the glory of poverty and the joy of poverty without offending all. "You make things sound too easy, too pleasant," is the accusation leveled at us by our own friends and readers when we talk of the pleasant aspects of living in the slums of the city, or in poverty on the land. Or–"What do you want –that people should stay in this condition?"

We can only reply with Eric Gill, that the aim of the Church is to make the rich poor and the poor holy. "There is always enough for one more," as a Spanish friend said, "Everyone just take a little less." "If everyone would try to be better, then everyone would be better off," Peter Maurin said. "No one would be poor if everyone tried to be the poorest."

It is almost a rule of life, those words of Peter's.

Another accusation is lodged at us–and that is that we see the misery of our life too clearly. We are always looking out of back doors. We see the rats that swarm the tenements, the vermin that crawl on the wall, the stench in the hallways of the poor, the garbage filled gutters, the greasy moisture oozing from the walls of the cold tenements, the dirt and degradation of the human beings who throng every day, rain or shine, in long lines outside our door for soup and bread.

Any statement on our part that we love this life, that we would not be happy elsewhere, that we rejoice in such wretchedness, would lay us open to the charge of perverseness, of masochism, or most damning of all, of sentimentality.

And yet we do dare to say that this rejoicing is a measure of our love. To love is to be happy, and yet to love is also to suffer. To love the poor, one must be one with them. There is always the yearning for union, for the close embrace, even if it leads to depths unutterable. We must show our love for Christ by our love for the poor, so how can there help but be a rejoicing at the chance to show this love.

Fr. Regamey well knows the wretchedness of poverty, the fear of the poor. The Hebrew language, he says is rich in words which express poverty, and one word especially gives the idea of growing weak and wavering, another means to be black, to be in affliction. And yet even in this affliction, cannot there also be joy. "Tho he may smite me yet I will trust in him." "In peace is my bitterness most bitter."

Yet without God, without love,– of course there is nothing worse than this poverty and destitution. Only God gives it meaning.

Fr. Regamey says we do not give enough thought of the poverty of the country and times in which Christ lived. She was an occupied country and her conquerors were harsh. He did not lead a resistance movement but "he talked of the blessedness of poverty, and of tears, of gentleness and peace." That is the tone of the gospel.

And yet Christ ate in homes of the rich and He loved the household at Bethany. Fr. Regamey interprets the words, "One thing is necessary," when our Lord chided Martha for her bustle, as "One dish is enough." Christian families looking towards healthy asceticism know well the one-dish meal. Nevertheless, Christ spoke in harsh tones of the rich and St. James almost rages, Fr. Regamey points out. He is careful to say, however, "wealth is not an evil in itself. The very fact that it is so formidable attests to its value: only what is good can awaken desire. It is only because possession of any kind is a reality that voluntary poverty and poverty in spirit are great and glorious things."

"Would the earth," asks Clement of Alexandria, "produce such riches if they brought death? . . . Their nature is not to command, but to serve us."

But Fr. Regamey does not quote St. Gertrude's dictum in regard to property, "Property, the more common it becomes, the more holy it becomes." And this too needs amplifying when we consider the great holdings of the Church held in common. The voluntary communism of the Church has been the greatest success, so much so that it has meant persecution after persecution to detach her from her belongings on this earth. Persecution has a two-fold aspect,

it is deserved as well as undeserved. She would not be pruned except that she is always bearing fruit, and it is to bear more fruit that God allows the pruning that is going on now in Poland, Czechoslovakia and other Communist-dominated countries. Oh, if the Catholic press would only carry the rejoicing that should go with this stripping and martyrdom how it would confound the world. Rejoicing such as that of St. Ignatius who forbade his flock to rescue him, he exulted as did all the martyrs at being found worthy to suffer. "When people do not see my body any more, then I shall be a real disciple of Christ, share in the sufferings of Christ," Fr. Regamey quotes him as saying.

If we were truly poor we would be in a good position to share this rejoicing. But I don't wonder that here in America you don't hear much of it. (How many visiting priests in New York stay at the Waldorf-Astoria? How many accept subsidies from the railroads who have robbed the poor? Maybe they do get special rates, but it is a scandal, in the face of the poverty in the world.) Naturally they are not in a position to cheer on the poor martyrs in Europe and China.

When I spoke recently at Notre Dame a rich young man asked me if many gave up their wealth to the poor and went to live with the poor. I could only reply that I knew of none, and that they would be condemned as fools by the very poor for whom they sacrificed their goods. (Our faith in this way is exercised, to see Christ in His poor, and such exercise should make it strong and with it our love.) We did know one young man who tried to, whose confessor told him to keep his money and administer it for the poor. But Fr. Regamey has this to say:

"Is it more perfect to give up once and for all everything one has, or to keep one's wealth and put it to a charitable use? Tradition has constantly taught that **in itself** the first sacrifice is better. Needless to say, a given soul may merit far more by the second than the first. It all depends on charity, and on our individual vocation."

One could write volumes on this subject of poverty, it is so rich, and you learn so by doing. St. Francis says that you do not know what you have not practiced. I know that I can write far more on the subject than I could seventeen years ago when the Catholic Worker started. Of course I learned by my mistakes. For instance, I learned about vocations to poverty, about presumption and pride in poverty, about the extremists who went to the depths in practicing poverty, (if one can reach them) and after a few years left work and settled down to bourgeois and individualistic comfort. It is good to accept one's limitations, not to race ahead farther than God wants us to go, not to put on sackcloth and stand on the street corners. I do not know who said it, but it was a wise priest–"Do not do any penance that you do not want to do." In other words, pray for the desire, and even **desire to have the desire** for poverty. Most people do not see the sense of it, it is nonsense to them, because it goes against the senses, exterior and interior.

I cannot think of anything better than this book of Father Regamey's to build up that desire. It is jammed full of sentence after sentence, paragraph after paragraph which could be quoted. It is condensed, only 180 pages, but you are carried away on page after page so that it could be used for a meditation book for the coming year.

Once or twice I started to be critical but I found I could not be. Once when Fr. Regamey seemed to be accepting too uncritically Bossuet's opulence. "He came to feel that if he limited

his style of living, he would lose more than half his genius." We must admit the possibility of detachment in the midst of obvious luxury of house and equipage and table, but just the same, what we need today in the face of materialist America and Russia, is the glorious poverty of St. Francis, of St. John Marie Vianney, of Charles de Foucauld, of St. Benedict Joseph Labre – whose poverty was the destitution of our skid rows and boweries.

Pere Regamey issues a call to change the world, "the world of capitalism and communism" which he equally condemns. "The Christian who is obedient to the spirit of Christ wonders which he hates most, capitalism or communism, so hostile to each other, so fundamentally alike. He holds the same grievance against both, that they have taken from the poor the spirit of poverty, and so cast them into despair. This crime shows most clearly in capitalism; but communism and all other materialist systems which promise paradise to these little ones produce the same results, for to give rise to a hope placed in the things of earth, and a false hope at that, is to give rise to almost a double despair. We certainly have a job to do of restoring earthly justice to the disinherited; the Church has been calling us to it through the mouths of recent Popes; but she keeps her scale of values constant, she always holds the Godward life of the soul highest of all."

On my last visit to the west coast I saw plenty of poverty and destitution. After Mass one Sunday there was a communion breakfast in a parish hall (coffee and sweet rolls) and I talked to all the women in the parish of the works of mercy, and I pointed out that we were all poor, having need of each other, and that some could give time, or strength to each other, in addition to the more palpable things like food and clothing and lodging. Doing a week's wash for a sick mother is no small work of mercy! I knew that most of my listeners were poor, but I did not realize how poor until Fr. Dugan took me around afterwards to visit some of them in their homes, those same women I had been talking to. The parish was down by the railroad tracks and is made up of two-story frame tenements like those of New England mill towns. I was horrified at the condition of neglect of the houses, and when I saw inside, I found them worse than New York tenements. Families of seven and ten and twelve children were in two rooms, with no heat, no hot water, one bath in the hall for all, and every one or two room suite rented out to families for fifty dollars a month.

Men built double decker beds for their children but still they have to sleep three or four in a bed. There are 30,000 heads of families unemployed in Oakland. It was real January weather when I was there, cold enough for one's heaviest clothes, as cold as New York. There are many migrant workers settled in Oakland, Stockton, Sacramento and Fresno, glad of anything in the way of shelter to be out of the cold and rain. I visited one family in a tent in Mountain View, one of the children sick with pneumonia, others with colds, and the mother trying to cook and wash clothes on the wood-burning kitchen stove set up in the tent. There are literally tens of thousands of families living this way in one room, and in tents.

Only the other day the New York Times had a front page story of the condition of the migrant farm workers in California, but it is a pattern which is carried out all over the country, in every state, and which goes with and is a necessary part of our collective industrialized pattern of life. De-centralization, Distributism, Christian communal villages, self governing–these are disregarded in a general acceptance of "life as it is." Meanwhile, the storehouses are bulging with powdered eggs, milk, grain, stores of all kinds, and for the poor there is not even the

bread of sorrow; there is neither work nor bread.

On the one hand there are the government plans for subsidies for the farmers, price controls, etc. The dairymen talk of a surplus of milk while the children sicken and die. Farm journals talk of the subsidy. They write of three choices open to them, selling the surplus to a condensary, reducing their herds, or dumping. They ask for a drop in price from 3 to 5 cents; a greater differential between store and home delivered milk; an inconsequential price difference between a quart of milk and a 1 1/2 oz. can of evaporated milk and not the present ten cents; and finally penny milk for school children. They say that a movement towards a control of the industry as a public utility is inevitable. But with the present government control, taxation is up and prices are down and the dairymen complain that they cannot get more than 12 cents a pound for cull cows from the butcher.

It is the same with all crops, raisins, apricots, peaches, poultry, cotton, apples, citrus fruits and wool of that rich state of California. It is the same with water, electric power, with the very soil itself–how to own it, how to control it, how to legislate about it, how to change the pattern as it now is.

There are politicians and lawyers studying all these things, and most of them are working towards bigger and better organization. And in the face of **their** solutions, the Christian solution, the solution proposed in this book, and in the Gospels, is that of **voluntary poverty**and the **works of mercy.** It is **the little way.**It is within the power of all. Everybody can begin here and now even if it means only girding themselves, stripping themselves, and even the doing of it means the battle has begun, the fight is on, and victory is assured.

We have the greatest weapons in the world, greater than any hydrogen or atom bomb, and they are the weapons of poverty and prayer, fasting and alms, the reckless spending of ourselves in God's service and for His poor. Without poverty we will not have learned love, and love, at the end, is the measure by which we shall be judged.

Chapter 8

Poverty is the Face of Christ

The Catholic Worker, December 1952, 3, 6.

Summary: Describes the struggle in establishing farming communes as Peter Maurin taught. Poverty, toil, and suffering are bore by the young families trying to live on the land. She writes to comfort these fellow workers who live day by day. (DDLW #641).

Martin Paul, head of the Holy Family Farm at Rhineland, Missouri, wrote an article a few months ago for **The Living Parish**, in which he deals with Farming Communes. Martie traveled around with Peter Maurin quite a bit, up and down the west coast, and he was head of the House of Hospitality in Minneapolis, and of St. Isadore' Farming Commune at Aitken, Minn., until he went into the army. He was one of the Catholic Workers who was not a conscientious objector.

When he came out of the army and married he was as anxious as ever to work out the "kind of society where it was easy for man to be good," and that meant to him, houses of hospitality to take care of immediate needs, where the works of mercy could be performed at a voluntary sacrifice, by embracing voluntary poverty, and farming communes, where groups of families could begin setting up a life where communal property and private property were in nice balance.

He recognized the fact that houses of hospitality had to be financed by appeals (not demands as Peter used to say) and certainly not by state grants or subsidies. We did this work from a sense of personal responsibility, we lived in poverty, ("I have never asked anything for myself" Peter used to say.) We gave our work, mental and manual labor, and we tried to strip ourselves to put on Christ. A vocation for this work, and it was definitely a vocation, was something else again than a vocation for marriage. When a man got married, then it was up to him to be on his own, support his own wife and children, and go on performing the works of mercy, according to his ability, with a Christ room in the house, the meal set out for the needy guest, the clothes passed on. Julian Pleasants of Notre Dame, who used to be one of the heads of the House of Hospitality in South Bend before he got married and started a community of his own (the community of the family) wrote an article about **The Catholic Worker** for Fr. Leo Ward's book, **The American Apostolate**, which is called Personal Responsibility, and is one of the best articles on the Catholic Worker movement

which has been written. Personal responsibility for practice of the works of mercy goes on, whether you are married or single. You just have to list them over to see what you can do.

It was with GI money, contributed by Martie and by John Boylston, and the money saved by Larrie Heaney from some years of work, that the Holy Family Farm in Rhineland, Missouri, was gotten under way.

Sowing in Tears

This little article does not propose to give a history of that farm, the sowing of tears (let us hope there will be much reaping in joy). The story of Larry Heaney's life and death were given in the June, 1949, issue of **The Catholic Worker**. This article has to do with certain basic principles which need clarifying, discussing and writing about. There is a great deal of study needed in trying to build a new society within the shell of the old. One needs to study the basic quarrel between Karl Marx and Proudhon that went down thru the years in the ranks of the radicals between the communists and communist anarchists, between the ideas of Marx and Kropotkin. There is a great deal of the struggle in **Three Who Made a Revolution**; there is a great deal of history in Martin Buber's **Paths in Utopia**.

Peter Maurin was interested, too, in the history of the collective and communal farms in Palestine and if he had been alive when Claire Bishop's **"All Things Common"** had been published, he would have been enthusiastic about that.

Life for the Family

He was interested in this way of life for the family and for the laity because he was interested in the Benedictine community and the entire tradition of communal living. God knows it has been prosperous enough from the worldly standpoint, this type of religious communism. Men withdrew from the world, and the world followed them, not only to join them in their lives of voluntary poverty and hard work, but also to cast the world at their feet. Huge properties grew up. Vast tracts of land, tremendous monasteries, seats of learning and the arts. It remains so to the present day, except in those countries where the land and buildings have been taken from them.

Why should not such communities, but for families, grow up throughout the land, not only as emergency measures, but also as a new institution, "a rebuilding of society within the shell of the old, with a philosophy so old that it looks like new," as Peter used to say. There has been a history of such communities (Protestant and Secular) within the United States and there are remnants of them all over the country. I have just been hearing about them in Iowa (they are still a success) and I will pass them in the Dakotas. They are an answer to the problem of the machine and unemployment, an answer to the depression which will come about once we stop this mad race for armaments, once men begin to lay down their arms and refuse to kill, once young men refuse to be inducted, once older men refuse to build up their prosperity on the blood of their brothers.

The history of our own attempts that have been made at Easton, Pa.; at Upton, Mass.; at Newburg, N.Y.; at Pleasant Plains, L.I.; at Cape May, N.J.; at Avon, Ohio; at South Lyons, Mich.; at Rhineland, Mo.; and at various other parts of the country (and some have folded up and some go on and many have left them to acquire farms of their own), is yet to be written. One thing is common to them all. That is poverty. There is a constant, grim struggle against poverty.

Grim Fight

The criticism which descends upon the luckless heads of those who continue to be faithful to the dream, who are the forerunners, who are ploughing the ground and sowing in tears, who are dunging it with their sufferings, is part of the suffering itself. Their failure is laid to lack of knowledge, lack of hard work. Sometimes indeed these criticisms are just and we would be the last to deny them. But the grim fight of working with insufficient tools and broken down equipment; the interruptions occasioned by sickness and births and deaths; even the interruptions and dislocations caused by many visitors (and the needy); and not least; the prunings and cuttings of human affections, the grating of one human instrument on another, the whittling down, the paring, the chiseling, all these cruel sufferings that go with family and communal life have been part of the picture.

Blood of the Poor

"Money is the blood of the poor," Leon Bloy said. And he went on to write that poverty is a heaven for those who chose her, a cross for those who do not desire her, but absolute poverty is hell. Destitution isolates men. "Poverty is the face of Christ, the Face that was spat upon, that put to flight the Prince of this world." He spoke bitterly of that type of poverty, "that scandalous, revolting type of poverty that had to be helped, that was connected with no hope of glory and which has nothing to give in return."

And this is the type of poverty which we have on a Catholic Worker farm. It is not self-sustaining, it has to be helped. And this is the bitterness which eats into the souls of those Catholic Workers who are married, who are raising families, who are trying to live, either on a wage or on the land.

In their suffering they reject the idea of almsgiving. And to protest this, is the point of this entire article.

Leon Bloy said, in a letter to Barbey D'Aurevilly, "I have become convinced that suffering is the only supernatural element here below, all else is human."

Safety of the Rich

This does not mean that those who have are absolved from almsgiving because suffering and poverty are meritorious. "We must not deprive them of it," say the rich. The safety of the rich lies in almsgiving. The story in the 25th Chapter of St. Matthew is that we will be judged by our works of mercy. We will not achieve beatitude without it. We must give until we become the blessed. Blessed, happy, are the poor, those that mourn, those who are maligned as fools. Christ came to make the rich poor, and poor holy, Eric Gill wrote. When St. John the Baptist began to preach, that voice of one crying in the wilderness, and the Sadduccees and Pharisees asked him, "What must we do?" he said.

"Let him who has two coats give to him who has none, and with food likewise." Unquestioning sharing, unquestioning love.

We Must Beg

I write this article for our comforting, to console the hearts, to strengthen the weak knees of those who are undertaking the tremendous job of cleansing the Augean stables, of rebuilding the world. We must have almsgiving, we must receive. We must be humble and ask, and then we shall receive. We must be like little children, and expect to receive, and not see the affronts, the scorn, the contempt. (On the one hand we must see it as sharing in the scorn meted out to Christ, and on the other hand we must so see Christ in others that we do not recognize an affront. Peter Maurin used to act this way, and it was a great lesson to us all.)

Rendering to Caesar

Our young men do not mind receiving from the government, although they are warned by our Lord that what they receive from Caesar they must render to Caesar. They would account a Guggenheim fellowship honorable. They would be delighted and honored to receive prizes and subsidies and honors. That would not be charity. But we are here to restore love, charity to the world, to overcome hatred with love, and "love in practice is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams." It reaches down and like the sword of the spirit it reaches to the very marrow of our bones. But to receive charity and to give it is to practice loving. We are accounted worthy to suffer for Christ, in this dread struggle to learn love.

People Say

People say: Why do they marry then, those young people, and attempt to continue in this work? Why don't they get a job and support their families? Do you think any job will support a family these days without help, without a foot on the land?

People say: Why do they have so many children then. Catholic people: Why aren't they content? If a man "knows" his wife once a year she may still have one child a year.

We must change the social order so that a man may raise his family. And it is necessary that there be among us in the Catholic Worker movement those suffering families, to exemplify, to share in the poverty of the family today. There are 2 million migrants traveling the country, harvesting the crops. Only 6% of our Catholic people are on the land. The city is the home of the proletariat, the propertyless. Man must own his home, his work, to be responsible, to be a co-creator, to function as a human being, made in the image and likeness of God, his creator. "A man needs a certain amount of goods to lead a good life," St. Thomas wrote.

So our Catholic Worker families are living in poverty and suffering, in the practice of their faith, not in a dream or an illusion.

I write to comfort our fellow workers whose lot is indeed harder than those who are in houses of hospitality throughout the country. There single people are on the job of dispensing the charity which our generous brothers put into our hands to give. For ourselves we take as little as we can, and we are constantly, most visibly passing on, to the breadline, those who come for clothes, and shelter and loving kindness. Our work has its own suffering. It has its own poverty and deprivation. This last month the furnace was out of order and the house was cold, and all suffered. The bills are still high, and we still need to fret over grocery bills. We are on the giving end, as well as on the receiving. There is a sense of mutual aid, of exchange, of cooperation. And yet here too, how we try to escape, even by the use of these words, from our poverty. "Deliver us from our necessities, O Lord."

Rebellion

I write to comfort these our fellow workers, because that is all the help they are going to have. They will not be subsidized, their necessities will not be relieved, although they should be. People consider it honorable to give to the monasteries, and appeals are made for guest houses and other buildings to the tune of a quarter of a million dollars. There is little of poverty and precarity in the life of the religious, and for that reason the poor of the world are rising up in rebellion against religion.

We take comfort in the monasteries like that of Dom Crenier in Martinique, in the hermitage of the two Benedictines in India who have stated a monastery in a mud hut by a river; in the Pius 10th monastery at Grey Summit, Mo, in their log cabins (God keep them in their poverty); in the others which have sprung up in our time in China, in Mexico, and where emphasis is laid, as it is among the worker priests in France, on sharing the sufferings of the poor. . . .

The houses of hospitality cannot support the work on the land except in New York where a retreat house and a resthouse are maintained. The houses of hospitality have long known the companionship of the wolf, who is not at the door, but in our midst. We are stripped bare. There is nothing in the bank to give. We live from day to day, and by the little miracles God performs in his bounty. "If we ask our father for bread, will he give is a stone?"

But ours is happiness, ours is joy, for Christ comes to us each day, not only at Christmas, but each time we look into the face of our brother who is poor.

Chapter 9

Poverty Is to Care And Not to Care

The Catholic Worker, April 1953, 1, 5.

Summary: Reflects on the struggle to achieve voluntary poverty in small steps and for a lifetime. Notes that even honorable work involves taxes used for war. Condemns advertising for increasing desires often leading people to poverty. (DDLW #647).

Last May I wrote an article on Poverty and Precarity, using the latter word of Fr. Crenier who spoke of the need of religious orders to embrace precarity. That article was translated and reprinted in Giordani's La Via in Italy. We could write for the next twenty years, as we have been writing for the past twenty, of poverty and its joys and sorrows, and still not clarify all that is meant by it. St. Francis was the little poor man and none was more joyful than he. But he began with fear and trembling, with tears, hiding out in a cave from his irate father, expropriating some of his goods (which he considered his inheritance) in order to repair a church and rectory where he meant to live. It was only later, that he came to love Lady Poverty. He took it little by little; it seemed to grow on him. Perhaps kissing the leper was one great step that freed him from attachment to worldly goods, to his fastidiousness, or fear of disease.

Sometimes it takes but one step. We would like to think so. And yet the older I get the more I see that life is made up of many steps, and they are very small affairs, not giant strides. They may loom large in our consciousness, they may look big, but they are but boulders on the way that we have overcome. I suddenly remembered last month that I had kissed a leper, not once but twice, consciously, and I cannot say I am much the better for it. My progress has been no swifter. Once it was on the steps of Precious Blood church early one morning. A woman with cancer of the face was begging (beggars are only allowed in slums) and when I gave her money (no sacrifice on my part but merely an alms which someone had given me) she tried to kiss my hand. The only thing I could do was kiss her dirty old face with the gaping hole in it where an eye and a nose had been. It sounds like something but it was not. One gets used to ugliness so quickly. What one averts one's eyes from one day, can easily be borne the next.

Another time I was putting out a drunken prostitute with a huge toothless rouged mouth, a nightmare of a mouth. She had been raising a disturbance in the house. I had been

remembering how St. Therese, whose feast is also this month, said that when you had to say no, when you had to refuse anyone anything, you could at least do it so that they went away a bit happier. I had to deny her a bed but when that woman asked me to kiss her, I did, and it was a loathsome thing, the way she did it. It was scarcely a human normal mark of affection.

One suffers these things and forgets them.

But the daily, hourly, minutely, giving up of one's own will and possessions, which means poverty, is a hard, hard thing, and I don't think it ever gets any easier.

You, can strip your self, and you can be stripped, as Koestler wrote in his story of a French concentration camp, but still you are going to reach out like and octopus and seek your own. Your comfort, your ease, your refreshment, and it may mean books, and music, the interior senses being gratified, or it may mean food and drink. One giving up is no easier than the other. Cups of coffee, cigarets, jealousy of time etc.

Personal Affair

These are the things we all know about, or should know about. It is a personal affair, such poverty, for the celibate, willing or unwilling.

How does property fit in, people ask. It was Eric Gill who said that property is proper to man. And St. Thomas Aquinas said that a certain amount of goods is necessary to lead a good life. The recent popes wrote at length about justice rather than charity, that should be sought for the worker. Unions are still fighting for wages and hours, and it is a futile fight with the price of living going up steadily. They are fighting for partial gains and every strike means sacrifice to make them, and still the situation in the long run is not bettered. There may be talk of better standards of living, every worker with his car, and owning his own home, but still this comfort depends on a wage, a boss, on war. Our whole modern economy is based on preparation for war and that is one of the great modern arguments for poverty. If the comfort one has gained has resulted in the death of thousands in Korea and other parts of the world, then that comfort will have to be atoned for. the argument now is that there is no civilian population, that all are involved in the war (misnamed defense) effort. If you work in a textile mill making cloth, or in a factory making dungarees or blankets, it is still tied up with war. If one raises food or irrigates to raise food, one may be feeding troops or liberating others to serve as troops. If you ride a bus you are paying taxes. Whatever you buy is taxed so you are supporting the state in the war which is "the health of the state."

Renting

When the catholic Worker started back in 1933, it was possible to rent all the apartments one wanted. One could always have a home in the old law tenements which after all had water and toilets and could be heated very satisfactorily with gas or pot bellied stoves. Such

heat was more satisfactory very often than the steam heat which went off in the night, and which stayed on during warm spring of fall days. Housing reform has meant that thousands of such buildings have been closed down, not repaired and refitted for occupancy, and all the new housing has not sufficed to take care of the people. It is not only that our municipal lodging houses are full of families, as well as single men, unemployable and migrant workers; other old law tenements are overcrowded as they never were before with a tremendous influx of Puerto Ricans and all the other poor who have not been able to pay the new rents charged. There is no knowing how many stay in these old tenements, in one apartment. There is not the strict supervision of one's company and relatives that there is in the housing projects.

The Enslaved

We had no trouble renting even with five children in the family. Now it is quite another story. It is all but impossible, and then only with the help of the law, to rent an apartment or house for a family with children. Most of the young families in the Catholic Worker movement have had to buy, seeking a down payment from loans, from the G.I. bill of rights, from family friends, from relatives, or in some cases, saving it with grim self denial, cutting out every superfluity until a necessary down payment has been saved. Steady work is presupposed of course, a city job, civil service, the kind of a job that will make a bank feel sure of the home owner. The fact is, we are not a nation of home owners. We are a nation of people owning debts and mortgages, and so enslaved by this installment buying that we do indeed live in poverty and precarity.

The only way to live in any security is to live so close to the bottom that when you fall you do not have far to drop, you do not have much to lose.

Honorable Occupation

The argument may go this way, but we still can choose what seems to us the most honorable occupations, which have to do with human needs. We can choose the kind of work most necessary to do, and if possible where there is no withholding tax for war. Ammon Hennacy in working by the day, at hard farm labor, has not paid income tax for years One can so cut down one's standard of living that no income tax is required; families with many children pay no income tax. One can protest in many ways this contribution to the atom and hydrogen bomb. If one owns property the government then can take a lien on it. If one has money in the bank, the government can confiscate it. So truly such protest as this calls for the most profound poverty and a voluntary doing without property.

Voluntary Poverty

All this is by way of saying that poverty is no longer voluntary, no longer a counsel, but something which is laid upon us by necessity. Even in the natural order, it is more profitable

to be poor, to deny oneself, to do without the luxuries in order to have the necessities of food, clothing and shelter. The merchant, counting his profit in pennies, the millionaire with his efficiency experts, have learned how to amass wealth. Following their example, and profiting by the war boom, there is no necessity for anyone, so they say, nowadays, to be poor. Given health of mind and body, of course.

But the fact remains that every house of hospitality we have is full. There is the breadline standing outside 223 Chrystie St. every day twice a day, two or three hundred strong. Families write us pitifully for help. This is not poverty, this is destitution.

In front of me as I write is Fritz Eichenberg's picture of St. Vincent de Paul. He has a chubby child in his arms and a thin pale child is clinging to him. Yes, the poor we are always going to have with us, our Lord told us that, and there will always be a need for our sharing, for stripping ourselves to help others. It always will be a life-time job.

So-Many-Poor

But I am sure that God did not intend that there be so many poor. The class structure is of our making and our consent, not His. It is the way we have arranged it, and it is up to us to change it. So we are urging revolutionary change.

How much land does a man need? Some of us only need the six feet to hold us when we die. Some of us need half and acre and would have a hard time tilling that. Some need 3 acres and a cow. We need shelter and we need work and our days are spent in earning them. It should not be so grim a proposition to raise the funds to help them. Every other type of building is going on in the country and the family still lacks land and home. Peter Grace once said to us, "If you paid the peons in South America more than seventy-five cents a day, they'd only work a couple of days a week, only for enough to live on." I have heard this statement many times from other employers, whether they too were employed by a corporation, or whether they were responsible as employers.

Deadly Sin

There have been many sins against the poor which cry out to high heaven for vengeance. The one listed as one of the seven deadly sins, is depriving the laborer of his hire. There is another one, that is , instilling in him the paltry desires to satisfy that for which he must sell his liberty and his honor. Not that we are not all guilty of concupiscence but newspapers, radios, television, and battalions of advertising men (woe to that generation) deliberately stimulate his desires, the satisfaction of which means the degradation of the family.

Providence

Because of these factors of modern life, the only way we can write about poverty is in terms of ourselves, our own personal responsibility. The message we have been given is the Cross, Christ and Him crucified. "The apostle must bring faith in providence back into the world," Fr. Regamy writes. "He must show what Christianity asks of us. . . I would betray Christianity if I did not repeat his law. . . trying to get to the depths of men's hearts, to its most secret place where the most depraved man is as innocent as a child." We believe this but on the other hand we have seen the depths of the faithlessness and stubbornness of the human soul, we are surrounded by sin and failure, and it is a mark of our Faith in Christ and our brother to believe this. We must continue to write, to appeal and to beg for help for our work and for an increase in a love of poverty which goes with love of our brothers.

Chapter 10

On Pilgrimage - February 1964

The Catholic Worker, February 1964, 1, 2, 6.

Summary: Reflects on voluntary poverty against the backdrop of stories of theft and being taken advantage of by guests. Asks if we are ready to be robbed of our goods, relinquish what we have, and share with the poor. "Do we really welcome poverty as liberating?" (DDLW #812).

"He shall bring them down that dwell on high.
The high city shall lay low.
He shall bring it down even to the ground.
He shall put it down even to the dust.
The foot shall trend it down,
The feet of the poor, the steps of the needy."
Isaiah 26

Non-violence, the feet of the poor, not the clenched fist. Anderson's **Marching Men**. That was the name of a book of Sherwood Anderson's that I reviewed many years ago when it first came out. The Freedom Walks, the Quebec to Guantanamo walk this past month have made me think of these things. They walk in poverty, this group; stripped of all comfort; imprisoned and tortured, fearful and yet determined, they have shared the suffering of their brothers in the South.

Tom Cornell has written of them in this issue of the paper.

Looking back on what has happened this month since we went to press January 8. Martin Corbin visited the farm for a few days ... A still-born child was born to a girl on the farm ... The local hospital which is so hospitable to our family of the poor sent us a woman recovering from pneumonia... One of the women I met at Spode House in England has come to join us, to help us... We had a tremendous bill from a plumber in mid-January when our oil burning furnace stopped, pipes froze, and left thirteen men in cold rooms for two night and a day... It was five above zero those days. We have other troubles, legal and financial which I will write about later... Al Learnard came to join the farm community... Jean Walsh is still away but is expected to return in a few weeks. Charles Butterworth is taking a sabbatical, as it were, for prayer and study.

I speak at Trinity forum in downtown Manhattan February 5, probably to Wall street workers on voluntary poverty! On February 8 at a public school in Greenwich Village on the Woman's House of Detention which for Deane and I, was home briefly once a year for five years. Other speakers that day will be Jane Jacobs, City planner, and Fr. Egan, of Graymoor who has done so much for released prisoners who have been addicts. This meeting is sponsored by the Village Independent Democrats.

Thursday and Friday, Feb. 13 and 14, I speak at Winthrop Hall, Harvard, or rather have discussions with the students there. On Saturday, I will speak at New England Mutual Hall, Copley Square in Boston, at a Catholic Book Fair, I believe, together with other authors; and in the evening at Ed Sweny's Holy Spirit Book Shop. Then on Monday, Feb. 17 in Oneonta, New York, at the University. On the 25th I speak at a Fellowship meeting at the Presbyterian church in Princeton, New Jersey.

The month will fly by, and although there are blizzards in March, there is also the first day of spring.

Dear Soul

Arthur J. Lacey, one of the most useful members of the Catholic Worker group, whom some of us call "dear soul" to tease him for the tender solicitude he shows those who come to him – "and what is your problem, dear soul," – spent a week's vacation in Detroit last month as the guest of Dan Shay, former young Christian Worker who is aspiring to start a hostel in downtown Detroit to be called St. Thomas More house. He visited St. Francis House and was much impressed by how well it was kept and run. He visited the Murphys in St. Martha House and the Little Brothers of Charles de Foucauld, attended a Cursilla Mass on Saturday at Fr. Kern's parish, visited the families at the farm at South Lyons, the Meltons, the Johnsons, the Martuses, and the Catholic Worker farm where the Murphys stay in summer and which some of the men from St. Francis House keep going in winter.

Speaking of Poverty

On a number of occasions when I have been speaking at schools where the nuns have been troubled at the idea of living in luxury and deeply desired poverty, I talked of the readiness we ought to have to be despoiled of our goods, to be robbed, taken advantage of by those we trusted. As Fr. Roy used to say, "God takes us at our word." We had an experience last month which shocked us all profoundly. Indeed so much so, that Deane has been quite unable to write her usual column, she has been so saddened by the tragedy of the loss of a friend.

A man who has been staying with us for six months, who was gifted, amiable, generous, helpful, doing all kinds of menial chores, shopping, running errands, taking the fellow workers at Peter Maurin Farm to the hospital – Larry to the asthma clinic, Barbara to maternity, Shorty to that for Parkinson's disease; bringing Albert last week to St. Rose's Hospital in New York; bringing Peggy to the city with one of her cats (the latter stalked and pursued

around the bare wisteria, forsythia and privet hedge and then packaged in a carton, tied up and carried), listening to the woes of young and old (he had worked for five years in a home for deliquent boys) – this man suddenly packed his things, all obtained from the CW clothes room, got into the one good car and took off. With him also went two hundred and eighty-five dollars of our money and four blank checks, already signed, which he could probably cash along the road with some school or rectory where the CW is known.

No one knew he was gone until Sunday morning when John, Jim, Hans, Andy, Larry, George, Slim, John B., Joe D., Joe C., Deane, Clare, Barbara, Alice, Paul, Shorty, etc. etc. were ready for eight o'clock Mass. We make two trips back and forth, and not all listed above go, but I name them to indicate the numbers involved on a Sunday morning who depend on the car to get to confession and Mass, since confessions are heard before Mass in our little country chapel. Those who could walk, who were not too old or too crippled, walked that morning to a later Mass.

Charles Butterworth was on retreat at the Trappists in Winchester. I was in New York at the time, attending a Third Hour meeting at Claire Bishop's.

The consternation over our misfortune was immense. No one ever did such a thing before! But only a few nights before the car was missing one of the kids in the neighborhood was caught siphoning all the gasoline out of the tank and when detected fled, leaving his five-gallon can and tube. And what about a few weeks ago when fifteen pounds of pork roast, all the Sunday meat for our large community and Sunday company, disappeared out of a clear sky, and we were forced to eat scrambled powdered eggs instead. And what about the man from Sing Sing sent to us by a Prisoner's Society who left with the best clothes in the dormitory and everyone's pockets carefully picked. And that young fellow, so handsome and so disturbed, sent to us by a priest, who took a visitor's purse. Martie Corbin, one of our editors, lost his overcoat last week. One should not leave it on a bench in the hall, because that is where our charitable visitors leave clothes for the poor. He should have put it in his room.

I try to think of other cases in the past. There was the wayfarer for instance who stole the Thanksgiving turkey out of the refrigerator at Mott street years ago and was there a hullabaloo over that! I think it was then that I thought of St. John Cantius who ran after the thief who was making off with his wallet to tell him that there was still a gold piece tied up in his cloak, whereupon the thief fell on his knees in repentance and gave back what he had taken.

I did not have too much faith in this story, however. I remembered how Peter Maurin had been robbed in Morningside Park one summer evening and returned home with a black eye and when we indignantly asked him how anyone had dared to strike him, he replied that he only had been trying to tell the thief that he had money in the other pocket! Just the same I told the story of St. John Cantius to the household and told Slim, who had been sort of night clerk at that time of our hospice on Mott street, that he should have run after the thief with the celery and cranberries too! My remedy was treated scornfully by the house, whose mouth had been watering for that turkey.

Just the same the story had a happy ending. Ten years later, when we had moved to Chrystie street, that same thief came in one day and gave whoever sat at the desk a ten dollar bill,

saying it was restitution for a turkey he had walked off with years before.

I remember too the story James Brazel told about how he first came to the Catholic Worker. He had run into a man on the Bowery, an old crony, who noticed that Jim had no coat.

"Go over to the Catholic Worker," he told him. "I got three coats there this winter," meaning no doubt that he had sold them when the weather warmed up and got another when the thermometer went down. So Jimmy came to get a coat.

"I got five coats here that winter," he boasted. It may or may not have been true. All I know was that Jimmy stayed with us for seven years and served the poor faithfully. He was an all around handy man and could take care of crises in the plumbing and electric works around the place, besides carpentry and other work. He is working now as a stationary engineer on a job he obtained during the war and at which he was so dependable that he has been kept on ever since.

Undoubtedly there are many more such little incidents I could tell, and all our houses around the country could tell similar stories. Sometimes the guilty ones were strangers, and sometimes they were very much part of the family folks we had grown to love and to consider as "beloveds," as St. Paul called them.

And how are we able to react after the instinctive motions of righteous wrath are under control? Our only guide is first of all our common sense, which tells us to put a lock on our gas tank for instance, and to keep the check book locked away safely, and not to put occasions of sin in the path of the weak. And then we are to go by the light of faith and the Old as well as the New Testament is our guide.

In the book of Osee, the forgiveness of God is shown for a faithless people, in the action of the prophet who forgave his erring wife over and over, even supported her and her lovers! In the New Testament in the words of Jesus who told us to forgive seventy times seven when our brother offended against us. And if anyone took our coat we were to give our cloak also, and if any one forced us to walk a mile with him we were to walk two miles, and if he struck us we were to run the other cheek. There is also the commentary on the story of the prodigal son Peguy tells again in "God Speaks."

Over and over again we are given the chance to re-examine our position – are we ready to relinquish what we have, not just to the poor to share with them what we have but to the poor who rise in revolution to take what they have been deprived of for so long? Are we ready too, to have the drunken poor, the insane poor and what more horrible deprivation than this, to have one's interior senses, the memory, the understanding and the will, impoverished to the extent that one is no longer rational – are we ready to be robbed in this way? Do we really welcome poverty as liberating?

"Let nothing disturb thee, nothing affright thee," St. Teresa said, "all things are passing. God alone never changes."

Every day we have evidence of His warm loving care for us. Since He has given us His Son – will He not give us also every good thing? All else that we need? We are rich indeed.

And even if we did not struggle to atain a supernatural point of view about these crises, peace and calm, and yes, even the sureness that all will work out to the good, comes with the

fact that we are too busy to think, to remember. Work is there to be done, city and country, crowds press in upon us from every side.

Our only grief is the suffering we must feel for the absconding one, fleeing, hiding, friendless, tormented. We ask your prayers for him.

Chapter 11

Poverty and Destitution

The Catholic Worker, April 1966, 5, 8.

Summary: Through graphic stories of guests at the Worker she distinguishes between poverty ("the poor have some hope.) and destitution ("The destitute are ill and lonely, the hopeless ones.") Also distinguishes poverty, voluntary poverty, and holy poverty. Keywords: anarchism, pacifist (DDLW #838).

This article is about New York and its particular brand of poverty and destitution. We see enough of it, surely, around the offices of the **Catholic Worker**, which in the last 28 years have been located successively on East Fifteenth Street, near Avenue A; West Charles Street, near the North River; 115 Mott Street; 223 Chrystie Street; 39 Spring Street, and now our address is 175 Chrystie Street. The last three houses of hospitality have been within two blocks of the Bowery; so the men and women we see have reached what is considered the lowest depths of degradation.

Here are a few stories of some of the people we have encountered in New York who have lived with us for long periods, so that they became part of our community. They were with us some years ago, and I do not feel that I am violating their privacy by writing in this way.

Elizabeth was a big blowzy redheaded woman, with a good-natured face and eyes that squinted at you between long lashes. She was good-looking in her way, but the day she came in to us she was filthy from sleeping out in basements, hallways, even on fire escapes. She was not alone; there was a tall gaunt man with a grey face with her. She was eight months pregnant and the two of them felt that some shelter was needed now. They were both very much afraid. When we became more acquainted with them we learned that they were legally married, and "in the church" too. Elizabeth was feeble-minded, and yet she tried to hang on to religion, and one thing she knew was that she should not be married out of the church. He was the first addict I had ever encountered, and, as far as I knew, what he was taking were what they called on the Bowery "goof balls." That, in combination with the kind of liquor he drank, was powerful enough to make him fall unconscious in his plate of soup when he came to eat with us. We did not have accommodations for married couples, so we took Elizabeth into the rear house at Mott Street and put her husband in the front house into the ten-bed dormitory on the top floor.

John Cort had just come to us from Harvard, hoping to become more acquainted with the field of labor, and found himself instead helping, as he said, to run a "flophouse." John used to get down on his knees at night and pray. He prayed for himself and for those around him, the destitute and the poor, I suppose.

We may as well clarify this notion of the destitute and the poor. The poor have some hope. They have not been so long in this condition that they see no way out. They stay with us for months and years sometimes and then, finally, they get jobs. Or they go back to school, or get married, or rejoin their marriage partners. Anyway, something happens to them, they survive, and there is a certain joy and freedom in their condition. There is involuntary poverty and voluntary poverty, and all of us who try to earn a living by writing experience voluntary poverty. And there is, of course, the holy poverty of those who try daily to strip themselves of all attachments and to approximate to some extent the physical condition of the destitute. The destitute, on the other hand, have nothing–physically, intellectually, or spiritually. You never see them reading a book or a newspaper as they wait on the breadline, or listening to music, or playing with an alley cat as they sit on a curb in the sun, or laughing, or telling stories.

There is life of a sort on the Bowery, a wild boisterous life, and seamen, longshoremen, restaurant and institution help and all kinds and conditions of workers to live there for a time. You can get a cubicle with clean bedding for a dollar a night and a cheap meal and companionship. But the destitute are those who are always drunk or drug-ridden, who are always lying in gutters and in doorways, who are finally picked up by the morgue wagon early in the morning, who are afflicted mentally, who stare stonily around them, or rush about with anguished faces, and who suffer the torments of hell. The destitute are the ill and lonely, the hopeless ones. They may be of any age.

Pattern of Destruction

Elizabeth's husband was one of the destitute. We were never able to reach him–to get inside that hard exterior. When he was conscious he was only anxious to become unconscious again as quickly as possible, and when he could find no other companion on the Bowery, no other means to get money for drugs and liquor, he would come pounding on Elizabeth's door, demanding that she go out and get a job as dishwasher to take care of him. But Elizabeth was too far gone to work. Her baby was born, and died, and she returned from Bellevue Hospital and rested a day or so, and then rejoined him. He would not let her stay longer with us, nor could we let him stay, because he used to fall asleep with lighted cigarettes and set fire to mattresses, and he stole. So they left us, these destitute ones, and began their life again, sleeping out. (It was summer.)

Later, when Bob Steed and Kieran Dugan and other members of the Catholic Worker staff were looking for a house to which we could move, after notice had been served on us by the city because they wanted to put a subway under our house and were demolishing the entire block around us, we found many evidences of such families as Elizabeth and John. In all the empty, boarded-up houses on the Lower East Side there were heaps of rags in corners,

old mattresses dragged in, evidences of humans living like animals, like rats, in these old tenements. Water had been shut off, of course. There were no lights. Candles were used and empty rooms served as toilets. It must have been unbearably cold in winter. But they were out of the wind and the rain, the snow and sleep, these destitute ones.

Before our Chrystie Street house was torn down we could look into the windows of the tenement which was to one side of us and see a Puerto Rican family which shared its home with another family, bedding down on the floor in each of the three rooms. There was often screaming and fighting and sobbing and crying in these rooms. What wonder people turn to drink and dope and the dope of television to stupefy themselves and the children, so that they will not suffer so much.

When I was in jail for refusing to take shelter in the April 1959 Civil Defense Drill, there was a young Negro girl in the bed opposite me who claimed that the only place she could be alone was in the toilet. She had taken drugs, and later, in order to provide the money for drugs, she turned to prostitution.

If such desperate measures to escape from destitution (only, of course, one does not escape) seem fantastic, one can only say: go live in such circumstances for a while and see.

We were talking about Celia the other night and how enormously she ate at the table, and how she used to take away some crusts of bread and put them, wrapped up, under her pillow at night. With rats around, this is a dangerous habit. Just yesterday, Italian Mike told me that rats were jumping on his shoulders at night as he slept. He had brought in some alley cats but he wanted rat cages. Not traps. Traps get blood on them and the rats smell the blood and get wise and stay away. "I wash them off, of course," another neighbor said. "No, I want a cage," Mike insisted. "I'll catch them and drown them every day and after a while they'll stay away." Another man said that the best way was to sit quietly by the rat holes, and as they came out hit them over the head with a club. He had killed thirteen one night. Big ones. Put them in a gunny sack and they filled an ash can.

It was a bright day in May, and across the street, in the little Spring Street playground, old men sat at chessboards painted on the tables and the children ran screaming around at their games, which always involved jumping, dancing and whirling. Little ginkgo trees, with their fan-shaped leaves and upstanding branches, were bright green and shimmering. Mike was happy, standing over his garbage cans, waiting for the trash collector, surveying his clean-swept sidewalk. Mike fetches the bread each day from Poppilardo's bakery, ten dollars' worth, and on Friday gets the free swordfish tails which a big wholesale house at the Fulton Fish Market saves for us. They make good chowder. Every Friday he calls out to Larry the cook, "What kind of fish?" and Larry makes the stock answer, "Dead fish!" which never fails to get a burst of laughter.

Mike is public relations man as well. "One hand washes the other," he explains as he sweeps off the neighbor's sidewalk. Once, when he was staying with us at the Peter Maurin Farm on Staten Island, he refused to come in to dinner and said, "I won't eat." John, the farmer, had taken away his hoe that morning and done the cultivating himself.

I have interpolated this little sketch of Mike, one of the poor, possessing nothing, with no salary, just the clothes on his back, a bed in a rat-ridden tenement, yet one of our best

workers and in general a happy man, because he loves his work, he loves to be part of a community, serving others and working for the common good.

Celia, on the other hand, was one of the destitute. She came to us years ago because she could not live with her father, who was on welfare, because when he got his check he would drink and try to attack her. The welfare people had no remedy for this. He was an inventor, a man of brains, talked intelligently to the welfare people–he was cooperative, in other words. Celia, on the other hand, was obviously defective and when she told tales of her father's having tried to rape her, she was not taken seriously. The welfare worker would not put her on separate relief, so she came to us. She was a greasy, black-haired girl, short and stout, and wore several suits or dresses and two coats. She was afraid that someone would steal her clothes, so she wore them all the time. She did not trust our community any more than she did her father. She never missed meals, wandered in and out with a huge purse clutched under one arm (she probably slept with it that way) and an armload of school books. She went to night school and got good grades. She was forty before she finally left us and she was still going to school.

It was the Second World War and its dearth of manpower that finally parted us. There was a job open at a little movie house on the Bowery for an honest cashier, and Celia got the job, which she held for five years. At our persuading, she got into a girls' shelter, where she paid weekly rent, made her own meals in the basement, and washed her own clothes. She also had a locker with a key, so she stopped wearing all her clothes at once. This simple solution had not occurred to us. Or perhaps we did not have the money for lockers then; we do not now. You buy for one and you have to buy for all. Her father had meanwhile died, and she was saving her money, she said, to buy him a tombstone. We urged her to put her money in the bank but she would not, and sure enough, one night a purse snatcher ran off with her savings, which by then amounted to several hundred dollars. Her screams brought the police, who caught the thief. From then on they cared for the purse, honestly, until she spent the money for the tombstone.

Housing Conditions

Then there is Maria, a beautiful young Puerto Rican. At the age of thirteen she was seduced and had a baby in Bellevue Hospital. She was allowed to bring it home with her but her mother put her out–the house was already too crowded. She was taken in by a neighbor, who used her for prostitution purposes. She jumped out of the window of the rooming house and was brought to the hospital with broken legs, which kept her there for a long while. I have seen the scars of her injuries. Her child was taken from her and put into a foster home, since she would not give it up or put it out for adoption. When we met her she was eighteen, married again to an amiable young fellow who was always losing his job. She had a child by him and another coming. He had lost his job through a very bad accident to his hand. He never got compensation or his job back. His mother took him and his one child in and Maria was sleeping in the hallway, pregnant as she was, because their house too was overcrowded. So she came to live with us for the time. After the baby was born her husband found a job and an apartment. The rent charged these babes in the woods was fantastic.

"How I got this place," she began, "it was this way. This house has Italians and Jews, and the place is all run down anyway, and nobody cares as long as the rent is paid. So they had just as soon rent to Puerto Ricans. Each apartment is supposed to be for $28 a month, and there are four apartments on a floor and seven floors walk-up. I'm lucky I'm on the third floor with the kids. There was an Italian woman living in the building and she told me about this place when I was over at Eldridge Street in a two-room place and we were desperate, the water frozen in the pipes and the toilet stopped up and the gas and electric turned off. So we just had to move. So she said, 'There's an empty place in the house where some friends of mine moved out, and it is my furniture and if you will buy the furniture you can get the apartment. It will be $23 a week.' My husband was getting thirty-five, and here we were going to have to pay $23. So we signed a paper, that was last June, and moved in, and then from June to December we paid her $23 a week and she paid the rent for us."

Maria got up from the chair by the good kitchen table and fetched a box from the kitchen shelf full of papers and odds and ends, and began sorting through them. "Here are the receipts for the statue of the Blessed Mother. You pay every week until you pay the thirteen dollars and thirty-four cents, and it takes twenty-five weeks to pay. Landan Brothers, down on Chambers Street. And here are the receipts for the rent."

True enough, there were the evidences of man's inhumanity to man, the exploitation of the poor by the poor. One set of immigrants exploiting the newest set of immigrants.

"My husband got sick in December and had to stay home from work, so then the neighbor told us we could pay ten dollars a week to her and the rent $28 to the 'super,' so that it what we have been doing."

In the front room, which had two windows looking out on the street, there were a dresser and two over-stuffed chairs; there had been plastic curtains and a davenport which had since fallen apart and been replaced by a smaller one which a neighbor had given her. There was a crib which Maria herself had bought at a second-hand store and in the kitchen an old-fashioned icebox. There are still coal and ice men in cellars all over the East Side, carrying heavy loads of ice and coal up steep tenement-house steps. Our Mike had done just such work and supported his father and sisters until his father died and his sisters married.

The stove in the kitchen was a combination coal and gas stove, but the gas had been turned off and the coal stove had holes in it and the pipe which led into the chimney had rusted apart. I didn't look into the two bedrooms, but I knew that the older boy slept in one and another family had the other. Another evictee, jobless, the destitute being helped by the poor. Or perhaps the poor being taken in by the poor, as between the two of them they were able to raise some food to feed the hungry mouths. The toilets were in the hall, which smelled of cats and rats and toilets, a most familiar tenement-house odor. Windows in the kitchen and bedrooms looked out on an airshaft and other windows, and only by peering out and straining one's neck to look up four more flights was it possible to see the sky.

The back bedroom was just the kind of place I had lived in when I went to work for the New York Call during World War I. I paid five dollars a month, and I had a phonograph on which I had paid a dollar down and a dollar a month, and the bed was warm, with a sheet-covered featherbed, and there was a good smell of cooking from the kitchen. The tailor and his wife

and three children lived in the other rooms and there was always work and the gas had never been turned off. But here there was no fire to cook by, and according to the Arabs, "fire is twice bread."

The poor can live in such places and have some measure of comfort, but the destitute are dogged on every side by ill health, unemployment, accident and hunger.

I sat there for a while with Maria at her kitchen table, pondering over the slips before me, wondering how we could help her out of this slough. For seven months she had paid $93 a month, rent and furniture payment. Since then she had paid $40 a month to the avaricious widow and $28 to the landlord, $68 in all, instead of $93. That had been a generous reduction indeed. I frowned over the arithmetic before me. "The furniture looked quite good when we moved in," Maria tried to apologize for having been taken in. "It looked wonderful. You can't imagine how good it looked."

And there was still a year and three months to pay on it. Over a thousand dollars for junk, and nothing left of it by the time it was paid for. The gas and electric bill was $38.64 and had to be paid before the utilities could be turned on again. "It is very expensive to be poor," a friend says.

When we finally got this mess straightened out for them, Maria's husband's job sufficed to keep them.

Maria never comes to us except when she is in real need and then a few dollars helps her out. There is always someone in the office who chips in to help if we are short. There are always clothes coming in for children. Her household furnishings are certainly not of the best and they sleep on mattresses on the floor because the wages of Francisco are not enough for furniture. Like most hospital workers, he has no more than thirty dollars a week take-home pay, and that has to support Maria and four children. Here is poverty but not unhappiness. There are schools for the children, and free medical care for the family, and all the little comforts and luxuries which spill over in a big city. (One of our staff furnished her first home after marriage with the bits of furniture which are put out, even in the slum areas, to be carted away by the garbage-disposal men.)

Tragic Ending

But another story of utter horror and tragedy gives some indication of the destitution of a new people like the Puerto Ricans coming into the city and living on starvation wages in noisy slums. It happened about a mile away from us. Pilar could speak no English. She was a violently emotional young woman, not too attractive, and was always getting into fights and arguments. One day she went to a tavern to make a telephone call to find out if her two older children had arrived at the agency which was to take them to camp for a few weeks. The telephone was defective, she lost her dime, had no other, and began to make a scene with the bartender, which included screams and kickings and led to police action. The officers' arrival meant terror for Pilar, who was dragged hysterical into a police car and taken away to the psychiatric ward at Bellevue, where her behavior was such that she was

given heavy sedation. Evidently, no one on the ward spoke Spanish and she could not make herself understood. The next few days were an utter horror for her, leading only to more hysteria. It was only when a relief worker who had Pilar on her caseload came and pushed in the unlocked door of the little one-room apartment, that two infants were found dead in their cribs of starvation and thirst. If the children ever wailed, their voices were feeble and could not have been heard above the din of traffic and radio and television.

Ah, the pain, the anguish, the sin and despair, the remorse, at not living as one knows one should live, as a human being should live, fully and abundantly! The poor feel guilty too. It has been dinned into them so often that here we have a land of opportunity, of equality, of abundance. What is wrong with them that they cannot get out of the morass, they wonder. One of the saddest things about the poor and the destitute is that they are blamed for it too. Everything is expected of them. "If you would only do this . . ." "This is what I would do if I were in your place . . ."

Yes, we know the poor and the destitute, from twenty-eight years of close association, and if we did not have so many social theories, if we had not constantly proclaimed our philosophical anarchism, and the nonviolent pacifist means by which we sought to attain it, we might have come a little closer to the ideals expressed in **Fields, Factories and Workshops** and **The Conquest of Bread**. These are two books of Kropotkin which Peter Maurin, the French peasant founder of the Catholic Worker movement, very often quoted as texts. He also talked constantly about "the art of human contacts," and man's freedom, which must impel him, rather than the use of force. And because Peter Maurin was a saint as well as a social thinker, we keep to his program, which we feel is fundamentally sound and holy, and so we have not, in these short twenty-eight years, been able to found any true cooperative farms, though there are a goodly number of houses. Perhaps if we had stopped talking about our principles of personal responsibility, which do not allow us to take state aid or endowments from foundations, which we consider money stolen from the worker and the poor, we might have been able to accomplish more.

"To make the rich poor and the poor holy" (that is, whole men), that is what the late Eric Gill, artist-philosopher, said should be our aim. It is a lifetime work. Meanwhile we are free, and freedom is an inestimable treasure.

Ed. note: "Poverty and Destitution" was first published in a special (Summer 1961) issue of **Dissent** devoted to New York City. This important socialist and anti-war magazine is now appearing bi-monthly and we commend it to the attention of CW readers. Frequent contributors include Irving Howe, Michael Harrington, Nat Hentoff and Paul Goodman. **Dissent** is published at 509 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, NY. A subscription is four dollars and fifty cents a year.
