

Of Finances and Personal Initiative

Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, February 1938, 1-2.

Summary: Explains the C.W.'s perpetual necessity to help the poor. Objects when states responsibility impedes personal responsibility. Calls her readers to have a Christ room in their homes, hospices in poor parishes and coffee lines for the transients, in order to exercise personal responsibility. (DDLW #145).

Outside the rain pours down in sheets but it is warm. Men stood on our coffee line this morning like dripping pedestals, but at least they were not shuddering with the cold as they have been so many mornings lately. I was looking over our last February issue this morning and note that we were feeding about four hundred men a morning then. Now the line has doubled and still we go on, God alone knows how, because these last two weeks there has been nothing in the bank. Just what came in every few days went to the grocer, and the printer waits patiently. Half a dozen speaking engagements brought in some money which went right to the wholesalers for coffee, sugar, milk and bread. May God bless those friends who continue faithfully to bring in armloads of bread and donations of coffee.

We spoke last year too, of the necessity of starting this work in other centers throughout the country, and now we note with joy that Pittsburgh, Detroit, Milwaukee, Boston, Houma, and other places are feeding the Ambassadors of the gods who come to them.

Always the Poor

In our editorial this issue, we speak of plans to form unemployed groups with the end in view of getting them on the land, of starting a movement in that direction all over the country. We do this with the full recognition that these bread lines, this work of feeding the hungry, must always go on. "For the poor we have always with us." That is a saying which has griped many for nineteen hundred years. They have not been able to take it. The Marxists use it with sneers, pointing that Christianity preaches "pie in the sky," and the rich use it to excuse themselves from aiding those same poor. But we must recognize the hard fact, that no matter how good a social order, there will always be the lame, the halt and the blind who must be helped, those poor of Christ, the least of

His children, whom He loved, and through whom there is a swift and easy road to find Him.

The most profound expression of this I came across last month in Bernanos' "Diary of a Country Priest," a tremendously moving book which has become a best seller in France. Poverty and suffering, and the joy of Christ found through them! The book is overwhelming on first reading, and one feels the necessity of going over passages again and again to get their full meanings. 11 of us who are engaged in trying to build a new social order, who consider ourselves revolutionaries, need this book to work with a fuller understanding of the place our work takes in the temporal scheme. It helps us to preserve a balance.

Peter is always making lists of books for people to read so I shall give my own list herewith:

Diary of a Country Priest; Manriac's Life of Christ; Silone's Bread and Wine; Dostoevsky's Legend of the Grand Inquisitor in The Brothers Karamazov; Chautard's Soul of the Apostolate; Fr. Knox's abridged Bible; Maritain's Freedom in the Modern World.

This is plenty for several years' reading.

Personal Responsibility

We are always having fresh occasion to make the point of personal responsibility, much to the amazement of our hearers who often doubt our sanity when we start expounding. It was the Health Department last month. We protested their right to come into our home at 115 Mott Street and snoop around our kitchen. We were not running a restaurant or a lodging house, we explained. We were a group of individuals exercising personal responsibility in caring for those who came to us. They were not strangers, we pointed out, since we regarded them as brothers in Christ. We were not an institution, or a Home with a capital letter, but a home, a private home. We were protesting in general against the tendency of the day to emphasize state responsibility, and we considered ourselves good Americans as well as Christians in working as individuals. We were protesting against organized charity which made so many hate the beautiful word charity.

We were able to convince the supervisor and the office man as to our principles and motives but not so the inspector, who surveyed us with a stony glare and great contempt. We did concede that to come under the law which held that we were feeding the public, that we had to cook as well as serve in the store, and that we would have to comply with their regulations there. So now the work is going on, with no money in sight to pay the plumber. St. Joseph, the good workman, will have to take care of this for us.

Houses of Hospitality

With Houses of Hospitality growing up all over the country, we emphasize again that in spite of the need of centers for indoctrination, meetings and the distribution of literature, the ideal is personal responsibility. When we succeed in persuading our readers to take the homeless into their homes, having a Christ room in the house as St. Jerome said, then we will be known as Christians because of the way we love one another. We should have hospices in all the poor parishes. We should have coffee lines to take care of the transients; we should have this help given sweetened by mutual forbearance and Christian charity. But we need more Christian homes where the poor are sheltered and cared for.

Last winter, remember, the Communist readers of the Daily Worker fed a few thousand seamen on Thanksgiving and Christmas Day. When they gave a banquet they did not invite their rich neighbor, but the men who were in need. And what an indoctrination this was! They were knowing Marxist teaching through the breaking of bread, instead of Christian.

So we do not cease to urge more personal responsibility on the part of those readers who can help in this way. Too often we are afraid of the poor, of the worker. We do not realize that we know him, and Christ through him, in the breaking of bread.

Four Pages

It saddens us to come down again to four pages, but it is better than skipping a number. We are so broke that we dare not run up too big a printers' bill. We are most daring in regard to groceries, feeling confident that our Lord will not let us down. He is too grateful to St. Joseph for the care He got on this earth to disregard his requests, and St. Joseph is our special protector in his work. And the one thing we are sure in feeding the unemployed is that our Lord wants us to do this work so we must do it. We are liable to make mistakes in the paper not being theologians or philosophers, nor experts in the line of economics and sociology; but we can make no mistake in feeding God's hungry ones.

We ask for help again of you readers, asking you to pardon our importunity. The days have passed when Jehovah sent down manna in the wilderness. Nowadays you are the dispensers of His bounty, and through you, we are, to those who come to us. He can only send us help through you, so we ask you to please remember our work. Men must be fed, morning after morning, and we pray for the faith of those poor mothers who live from day to day as we do, confronted by hungry mouths and not knowing where the next meal is coming from to feed them.