

Aims and Purposes (1943)

Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, May 1943, 4

Summary: On the tenth anniversary of The Catholic Worker she explains their purpose as promoting love of God and our brother. Their work expresses the beauty of Christianity in supporting the worker, the poor, and eschewing violence. She highlights instances of violent racism. (DDLW #919).

“Let us therefore love God because God hath first loved us. If any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar. For he that loveth not his brother whom he seeth, how can he love God whom he seeth not?”—**St. John**

It is because of this invitation that we are engaged in the work of getting out the **Catholic Worker**. “Love is an exchange of gifts,” St. Ignatius said. And we want to show our love for our brother, so that we can show our love for God; and the best way we can do it is to try to give him what we’ve got, in the way of food, clothing and shelter; to give him what talents we possess by writing, drawing pictures, reminding each other of the love of God and the love of man. There is too little love in this world, too little tenderness.

Love Fulfills the Law

How can we love God and kill our brother? How can we love our brother and kill him? How can we fulfill the Gospel precept to be perfect as our heavenly father is perfect; how can we follow the precept to love God when we kill our fellow man? How can war be compatible with such love?

To kill, to destroy, to starve, to inflict all these sufferings with love—that is sadism of the most hideous kind. That is perversity. It has long been said that religion is the opiate of the people. Pope Pius XI said that the workers of the world are lost to the church. If that is true, if the poor of the world are turned from the Bride of Christ, it is because there is no relation between the spiritual and material. We are not trying to put into effect our Christianity, our Christian principles. They are not animating our lives.

Why do we write about cooperatives, credit unions, mutual aid? Because when we see what Christianity is, when we see the beauty of our faith—when we have gone through something analogous to a conversion, we see all things new, as St. Paul says. We look upon our work, our lives, and we say, “How do these things square with Christian teaching? Can we go on making money at the expense of our brother? Can we be profiteers, can we work on Wall

Street? Can we go in for advertising which sets up false standards, which perverts the people, which fills their minds with meretricious desires, making the good sweet life of the Christian unpalatable?" If we wish to follow Christ, we will be workers like Jesus, like St. Joseph, like St. Paul. We will think of the dignity of labor, we will respect the worker, will bear our share of responsibility toward making that new social order wherein justice dwelleth, where people will have that certain amount of goods which St. Thomas says is necessary to lead a good life.

Why do we talk about houses of hospitality, bread lines, and farming communes and the necessity of taking care of our poorer brother? Because the greatest hypocrisy is this, to say to our brother in need, "Go, be now filled," and give him no bread.

How can we show our love for God except through our love for our brothers?

How can we cease to cry out against injustice and human misery?

The first Sunday in May, I went visiting through Paterson and Passaic with Sr. Peter Claver, and saw some of her Negro students and heard some of their stories. There was one elderly woman caring for grandchildren, two little boys, working at hard days' work, living in a cold house. During the depths of the winter she had no stove. At one time she was so poor she sold her bed and slept on a board between two chairs.

There is always work, people will say. Yes, but what if your children are sick, or if you are too ill yourself to work?

This poor woman had supplied the bouquet of flowers that Low Sunday morning for the altar of the little Negro Chapel in Paterson. They were the only flowers there, and it was the month of May.

She had one of her grandchildren in her arms all during the mass and it cooed like a little pigeon.

Oh, the suffering, the poverty, of these poor of Christ, and the indifference of Christians!

On my recent visit South I heard of a white man who had killed seven Negroes, one for not getting out of his bed, one for marrying a mulatto of whom he was enamored. And in speaking of these things to one of the brothers of the order I had visited he said to me:

"But that is not the worst. When I was down south as a brother, I saw a young man with his arms and legs grotesquely crippled. He had offended a white man at the age of 12 or so and the man had laid hold of him and broken both his arms and legs like matchsticks. They were never set properly and he was crippled for life."

Are not these sins crying to heaven for vengeance? And how can we do anything but howl over the sins in which we share? They are our sins. Just as we believe in the communion of saints—that we share in the merits of the saints, so we must believe that we share in the guilt of such cruelty and injustice.

We cannot talk of the love of God, the love of our neighbor without recognizing the dire need for penance. In a world in which such cruelty exists, in which men are so possessed, such a spirit cannot be cast out but by prayer and fasting. Our Lord Himself said so.

(This article was also reprinted in the May 1967 issue, p. 7.)