

MANNNA *in The wilderness*

Spring/Summer 1988

The Newsletter of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker

Vol. 2, No. 3

Aims and Means of the Catholic Worker

As the Catholic Worker approaches its second anniversary in Las Vegas, we wish to recall our commitment to the AIMS AND MEANS OF THE CATHOLIC WORKER MOVEMENT. To honor this commitment this summer, as part of an intern program, the Las Vegas Catholic Worker will host a series of speakers, films, and Round Table Discussions designed to promote a deeper understanding of the vision outlined in the following article. (See schedule on the back.)

The aim of the Catholic Worker movement is to live in accordance with the justice and charity of Jesus Christ. Our sources are the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures as handed down in the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, with our inspiration coming from the lives of the saints, "men and women outstanding in holiness, living witnesses to Your unchanging love." (Eucharistic Prayer)

This aim requires us to begin living in a different way. We recall the words of our founders, Dorothy Day who said, "God meant things to be much easier than we have made them," and

Peter Maurin who wanted to build a society "where it is easier for people to be good."

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When we examine our society, which is generally called capitalist (because of its methods of producing and controlling wealth) and is bourgeois (because of a prevailing concern for acquisition and material interests, and its emphasis on respectability and mediocrity), we find it far from God's justice.

In economics, private and state capitalism bring about an unjust distribution of wealth, for the profit motive guides decisions. Those in power live off the sweat of another's brow, while those without power are robbed of a just return for their work. Usury (the charging of interest above administrative costs) is a major contributor to the wrong-doing intrinsic to this system. We note especially how the world debt crisis leads poor countries into greater deprivation and a dependency from which there is no foreseeable escape. Here at home, the number of hungry and homeless and unemployed people rises in the midst of increasing affluence.

In labor, human need is no longer the reason for human work. Instead, the unbridled expansion of technology, necessary to capitalism and viewed as "progress," holds sway. Jobs are concentrated in productivity and administration for a "high-tech," war-related, consumer society of disposable goods, so that laborers are trapped in work that does not contribute to human welfare. Furthermore, as jobs become more specialized, many people are excluded from meaningful work or are alienated from the products of their labor. Even in farming, agribusiness has replaced agriculture, and, in all areas, moral restraints are run over roughshod, and a disregard for the laws of nature now threatens the very planet.

In politics, the state functions to control and regulate life. Its power has burgeoned hand in hand with growth in technology, so that military, scientific and corporate interests get the highest priority when concrete political policies are formulated. Because of the sheer size of institutions, we tend towards government by bureaucracy; that is, government by nobody. Bureaucracy, in all areas of life, is not only impersonal, but also makes accountability, and therefore, an effective political forum for redressing grievances, next to impossible.

In morals, relations between people are corrupted by distorted images of the human person. Class, race and sex often determine personal worth and position within society, leading to structures that foster oppression. Capitalism further divides society by pitting owners against workers in perpetual conflict over wealth and its control. Those who do not "produce" are abandoned, and left, at best, to be "processed" through institutions. Spiritual destitution is rampant, manifested in isolation, madness, promiscuity and violence.

The arms race stands as a clear sign of the direction and spirit of our age. It has extended the domain of destruction and the fear of annihilation, and denies the basic right to life. There is a direct connection between the arms race and destitution. "The arms race is an utterly treacherous trap for humanity, and one which injures the poor to an intolerable degree." (Vatican II)

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In contrast to what we see around us, as well as within ourselves, stands St. Thomas Aquinas' doctrine of the Common Good, a vision of a society where the good of each member is bound to the good of the whole in the service of God. To this end, we advocate:

- **Personalism**, a philosophy which regards the freedom and dignity of each person as the basis, focus and goal of all metaphysics and morals. In following such wisdom, we move away from a self-centered individualism toward the good of the other. This is to be done by taking personal responsibility for changing conditions, rather than looking to the state or other institutions to provide impersonal "charity." We pray for a Church renewed by this philosophy and for a time when all those who feel excluded from participation are welcomed with love, drawn by the gentle personalism Peter Maurin taught.

(Continued on back page)



SUMMER SPEAKER SERIES

(at St. John the Baptist House)

"Together with the Works of Mercy, feeding, clothing, and sheltering... we must indoctrinate. We must 'give reason for the faith that is within us.' Otherwise we are scattered members of the Body of Christ. We are not 'all members one of another.' Otherwise our religion is an opiate for ourselves alone, for our comfort or for our individual safety or indifferent custom." (Dorothy Day)

Join us this summer for our speakers, films, and discussions, coming together to better understand and live that faith within us.

Wed., June 29th, 7:30 p.m.: Jeff Crouse; Merton scholar will speak on **NONVIOLENCE AND SPIRITUAL ROOTS — MERTON/GANDHI**.

Wed., July 6th, 7:30 p.m.: Dr. Thomas Wright: Received his Ph.D. in Latin American history at U.C. Berkeley; currently a professor of history at U.N.L.V., will speak on **THY NEIGHBOR IN CENTRAL AMERICA**.

Tues., July 12th, 7:30 p.m.: Mary Luke Tobin S.L.: Currently the coordinator of the Thomas Merton Center for Creative Exchange in Denver, Colorado will speak on **CHRISTIAN SERVICE, FAITH AND ACTION**.

Wed., July 27th, 7:30 p.m.: Peter Ediger, Nevada Desert Experience; will speak on **TESTING BOMBS AND TESTING FAITH**.

SUMMER FILM SERIES (at St. John the Baptist House)

Tues., June 28th, 7:30 p.m.: *The Arms Race Within*

Tues., July 5th, 7:30 p.m.: *Faces of War*

Tues., July 19th, 7:30 p.m.: *Bill Moyers Journal: Dorothy Day*

Tues., July 26th, 7:30 p.m.: *Healing of Brian Wilson*

L.V.C.W. SCHEDULE

Monday - Saturday, 6:30 - 8:30 a.m.

Serve coffee at D and Bonanza Sts.

Thursdays, 4:30 - 7:30 p.m.

Serve a dinner meal at St. James the Apostle Church at 821 N. H St.

Fridays, 6:00 - 7:00 p.m.

Stop Testing Vigil at the Federal Building, 300 S. Las Vegas Blvd.

Fridays, 7:30 - 9:30 p.m. (after the Vigil)

Round Table Discussions at St. John the Baptist House. Refreshments will be served.

SIGN ME UP!

Yes, I want to receive **MANNA**, the L.V.C.W. Newsletter.

Name _____

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Send to: L.V.C.W., 1309 Gold Ave., Las Vegas, NV 89106

LAS VEGAS CATHOLIC WORKER

St. John the Baptist House

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Las Vegas, NV 89106

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• **A Decentralized Society** in contrast to the present bigness of government, industry, education, health care and agriculture. We encourage efforts such as family farms, rural and urban land trusts, worker ownership and management of small factories, homesteading projects, food, housing and other cooperatives—any effort in which money can once more become merely a medium of exchange, and human beings are no longer commodities.

• **A "Green Revolution,"** so that it is possible to re-discover the proper meaning of our labor and our true bonds with the land; a Distributist communitarianism, self-sufficient through farming, crafting and appropriate technology; a radically new society where people will rely on the fruits of their own soil and labor; associations of mutuality, and a sense of fairness to resolve conflicts.

We believe this needed personal and social transformation should be pursued by the means Jesus revealed in His sacrificial love. With Christ as our Exemplar, by prayer and communion with His Body and Blood, we strive for the practices of:

• **Nonviolence.** "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." (Matt. 5:9) Only through nonviolent action can a personalist revolution come about, one in which one evil will not be replaced simply by another. Thus, we oppose the deliberate taking of life for any reason, and see every oppression as blasphemy. Jesus taught us to take suffering upon ourselves rather than inflict it upon others and He calls us to fight against violence with the spiritual weapons of prayer, fasting and noncooperation with evil. Refusal to pay taxes for war, to register for conscription, to comply with any unjust legislation; participation in nonviolent strikes and boycotts, protests or vigils; withdrawal of support for dominant systems, corporate funding or usurious practices are all excellent means to establish peace.

• **The works of mercy** (as found in Matt. 25:31-46) are at the heart of the Gospel and they are clear mandates for our response to "the least of our brothers and sisters." Houses of hospitality are centers for learning to do these acts of love, so that the poor can receive what is, in justice, theirs: the second coat in our closet, the spare room in our home, a place at our table. Anything beyond what we immediately need belongs to those who go without.

• **Manual labor** in a society that rejects it as undignified and inferior. "Besides inducing cooperation, besides overcoming barriers and establishing the spirit of brotherhood (besides just getting things done), manual labor enables us to use our body as well as our hands, our minds." (Dorothy Day) The Benedictine motto "Ora et Labora" reminds us that the work of human hands is a gift for the edification of the world and the glory of God.

• **Voluntary Poverty.** "The mystery of poverty is that by sharing in it, making ourselves poor in giving to others, we increase our knowledge and belief in love." (Dorothy Day) By embracing voluntary poverty, that is, by casting our lot freely with those whose impoverishment is not a choice, we would ask for the grace to abandon ourselves to the love of God. It would put us on the path to incarnate the Church's "preferential option for the poor."

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We must be prepared to accept seeming failure with these aims, for sacrifice and suffering are part of the Christian life. Success, as the world determines it, is not the final criterion for judgment. The most important thing is the love of Jesus Christ and how to live His truth.

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