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."

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 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, agriculture 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)

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 ourselves, 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
(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; cur-
cently 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.: Cur-
rently the coordinator of the Thomas Merton Center for Cre-
tive 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
Doy
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 a dinner meal at St. James the Apostle Church at
821 N. H St.

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 ____________________________
Address ____________________________
City/State/Zip ____________________________
Phone ____________________________
Send to: L.V.C.W., 1309 Gold Ave., Las Vegas, NV 89106

LAS VEGAS CATHOLIC WORKER
St John the Baptist House
1309 Gold Avenue
Las Vegas, NV 89106
Tel: (702) 647-0728

• A Decentralized Society in contrast to the present big-
ness of government, industry, education, health care and agri-
culture. We encourage efforts such as family farms, rural and
urban land trusts, worker ownership and management of
small factories, home reading 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 living; a healthy community
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 hear the needed personal and social transformation
should be pursued by the means Jesus revealed in His sacrifi-
cial love. With Christ as our Exemplar, by prayer and commun-
ion 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, in one
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 suffer-
ing 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 boy-
cotts, protests or vigils; withdrawal of support for dominant
systems, corporate funding or usurious practices are all excel-
 lent 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 we can "see" what it is, in justice, theirs: the second
cloak 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
arms 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 "preferen-
tial option for the poor."

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.

Reprinted from the May 1988 issue of the Catholic Worker.

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED