

Roots of the Catholic Worker Movement

DISTRIBUTISM: **Ownership of the Means of Production and Alternative to the Brutal Global Market**

by Mark and Louise Zwick



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Roots of the Catholic Worker Movement:

Distributism:

Ownership of the Means of Production and Alternative to the Brutal Global Market

by Mark and Louise Zwick

The plight of workers throughout the world is at a crisis stage. Many are not only working for slave wages, but have been removed from their own communities and local economies and left desperate.

The Business pages of the *Houston Chronicle* of August 1, 1999, featured several entire pages on the economic devastation of Latin America in 1999, exactly like that of Asia in 1997. It is incredible that the reporter could quote "experts" as pointing out that the hope for these countries was more "economic reform," in the shape of the very structural adjustment and austerity programs, combined with speculation in the stock market which had devastated the economies in the first place.

This appalling situation makes the study of the roots of the Catholic Worker movement more relevant than ever.

It is very much in the tradition of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin to write about economics. Under the editorship of Dorothy Day, the *Catholic Worker* criticized an unbridled capitalism which put the majority of money and resources in the hands of a few big corporations and individuals. The Catholic Workers not only disagreed with industrial capitalism on a mass scale, but presented an alternative economics called distributism a person-centered economics.

Person-Centered Economics

As personalists, Catholic Workers believed there had to be a better way than to have the world run by Standard Oil, General Motors and Henry Ford (today we have the global market, giant corporations, sweatshops, maquiladoras).

Peter and Dorothy recommended the works of G. K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc and Fr. Vincent McNabb, O.P. on distributism, and R. H. Tawney on capitalism, and their ideas were published in the paper. These writers insisted that all people were created in the image and likeness of God and should not be treated like cogs in a machine or made to work twelve hours a day in back-breaking work as wage slaves (in coal mines, for example) while large corporations and their directors became fabulously wealthy.

Chesterton, theorist of person-centered economics and critic of the excesses of

capitalism, shared the views of the Catholic Workers. He knew that the opinions of Henry Ford (who said that most people preferred the mechanical action of the assembly line and were only fitted for it), were against Catholic teaching on the dignity of the human person. Ford made it clear that most people were not smart enough to do anything except repetitious work. As Chesterton put it in *The Outline of Sanity*, "It will be noted that Mr. Ford does not say that he is only fitted to mind machines."

Chesterton argued that the Catholic Church taught that every human being was worth saving. He insisted on "respect for the humanity and dignity of ordinary, shabby, ignorant people." (Margaret Canovan, G. K. Chesterton: *Radical Populist*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977, p. 9).

Property for Everyone

After extensive discussion of distributism, people still ask, "Just exactly what is it?" The word and the answer come from the idea that a just social order can be achieved through a much more widespread distribution of property. Distributism means a society of owners. It means that property belongs to the many rather than the few. It is related to the idea of subsidiarity, emphasized in all papal encyclicals relating to social teaching and economics. Subsidiarity, in the words of the *Quadragesimo Anno*, means that "It is an injustice and at the same time a great evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social and never destroy and absorb them."

Peter and Dorothy also recommended subsidiarity. This meant they were opposed to big government. They were also opposed to massive government programs to care for the poor, believing that Christians should care for others in need. However, neither were they in favor of privatizing all government programs and passing laws to increase the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few or in huge corporations at the same time as taking away the opportunities of the poor to be self-sustaining.

Dorothy described it this way: "The aim of distributism is family ownership of land, workshops, stores, transport, trades, professions, and so on. Family ownership in the means of production so widely distributed as to be the mark of the economic life of the community-this is the Distributist's desire. It is also the world's desire. (Catholic Worker, June, 1948).

The CW Program

In *The Long Loneliness*, Dorothy spelled out the way in which distributism was at the heart of the Catholic Worker program: "As Pete pointed out, ours was a long-range program, looking for ownership by the workers of the means of

production, the abolition of the assembly line, decentralized factories, the restoration of crafts and ownership of property. This meant, of course, an accent on the agrarian and rural aspects of our economy and a changing emphasis from the city to the land" (*The Long Loneliness*, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1952 p. 221).

While Peter emphasized aiming for the ownership of the means of production, he spoke just as strongly about "acceptance of the responsibility" it entailed (LL, p. 222).

The economics of the Catholic Worker was rooted in the Gospel and in the papal encyclicals, beginning with *Rerum Novarum*. Workers and distributists believed in ownership of property, but property for everyone, including the means of production. They knew that owners would benefit and business would benefit if workers had a sense of responsibility and ownership of the work they did worker ownership paid off with better production.

The Land

One of the keystones of the three-point program that Peter Maurin presented to Dorothy when they met in 1932, in addition to cult and culture, was cultivation.

In *The Long Loneliness*, Dorothy reported that, "Every talk of Peter's about the social order led to the land. He spoke always as a peasant, but as a practical one. He knew the craving of the human heart for a toehold on the land, for a home of one's own, but he also knew how impossible it was to attain it except through community." (LL, p. 224). Because of this, Peter suggested farming communes, credit unions, cooperatives.

One hope for the survival of family farms in the face of the competitive edge of agribusiness is in cooperatives where farmers bond together to sell their products.

The *Catholic Worker* recommended setting up farms and many were started. Catholic Worker lore and legend tend to denigrate the farms because they were not run like model, mechanized farms of the time. The experience of families on the farms was often difficult, because of lack of knowledge of farming, and of money and equipment. However, they were an important part of the attempt to live out the principles of distributism.

It was not easy to finance the beginning of family farms or communal farms. By the time Dorothy Day published *The Long Loneliness*, Peter had died. She explained his ideas in her book (p. 225), always acknowledging him as the theorist of the movement: "Peter's plan was that groups should borrow from mutual-aid credit unions in the parish to start what he first liked to call agronomic universities, where the worker could become a scholar and the scholar a worker. Or he

wanted people to give the land and money. He always spoke of giving.

Those who had land and tools should give. Those who had capital should give. Those who had labor should give that. 'Love is an exchange of gifts,' St. Ignatius had said."

Peter Maurin, who so often spoke of living according to Gospel simplicity, also spoke of a philosophy of work. He recommended this philosophy to young married couples related to the Catholic Worker: "Man should earn his living by the sweat of his brow... and a gentleman, truly speaking, is one who does not live on the sweat of someone else's brow" (LL). For this reason, and because of teachings of the Bible and the Fathers of the Church, Peter was against usury and speculation.

As Dorothy said, "Peter was no dreamer, but knew men as they were. That is why he spoke so much of the need for a philosophy of work. Once they had that, once their desires were changed, half the battle was won (LL, p. 226).

The distribution of land today is not more just than when Dorothy and Peter wrote about it in the '30's. In fact, larger portions of land than ever are in the hands of the few. Enormous agribusinesses crowd out family farms.

The Catholic Bishops of Ohio and the Bishops of Nebraska have both recently published statements about the crisis for small farmers. The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace document, *Toward a Better Distribution of Land*, addresses the extreme inequalities regarding ownership of land around the world.

Archbishop Oscar Romero, martyred in El Salvador, where fourteen families own all the land, said one could discuss and rearrange many things, but when one touches the land, it called forth its martyrs.

What is Capitalism?

Chesterton knew that when most people spoke of capitalism, they had in mind something quite different than a few very wealthy people controlling everything. To clarify for his readers what he was criticizing, he first described the situation where a few people hold the wealth and all others struggle: "When I say 'Capitalism,' I commonly mean something that may be stated thus: 'That economic condition in which there is a class of capitalists roughly recognizable and relatively small, in whose possession so much of the capital is concentrated as to necessitate a very large majority of the citizens serving those capitalists for a wage.'" He emphasized that others had something quite different in mind when they spoke of capitalism: The word... is used by other people to mean quite other things. Some people seem to mean merely private property. Others suppose that capitalism must mean anything involving the use of capital.

“If capitalism means private property, I am capitalist. If capitalism means capital, everybody is capitalist. But if capitalism means this particular condition of capital, only paid out to the mass in the form of wages, then it does mean something, even if it ought to mean something else.

“The truth is that what we call Capitalism ought to be called Proletarianism. The point of it is not that some people have capital, but that most people only have wages because they do not have capital.”

When Chesterton wrote about the enormous discrepancies in income and wealth of the haves and have nots, it sounded as if he were speaking of today's world:

“To say that I do not like the present state of wealth and poverty's merely to say that I am not the devil in human form. No one but Satan or Beelzebub could like the present state of wealth and poverty” (G.K. Chesterton, *The Outline of Sanity*, London, Methuen and Co., pp. 108,151, 148).

Dorothy Day also wrote about the discrepancy between what the average person believed capitalism meant and the reality. The average person hoped and believed “that the capitalist system, unlike Communism, meant that all were free to own, none compelled by law to labor.” Dorothy pointed out that “popular magazines like *Time* and *Saturday Evening Post* are filled with the illustrations of these principles, which all admit are good, but unfortunately the stories told are not true. It is the reason why great trusts like the Standard Oil and General Motors have public relations men, why there is a propaganda machine for big business, to convert the public to the belief that capitalism really is based on good principles, distributists' principles, really is working out for the benefit of all, so that men have homes and farms and tools and pride in the job. Unfortunately, in practice under capitalism the many had not the opportunity of obtaining land and capital in any useful amount and were compelled by physical necessity to labor for the fortunate few who possessed these things. But the theory was all right. Distributists want to save the theory by bringing the practice in conformity with it.” (*Catholic Worker*, June 1948).

Economic Democracy and Shared Ownership vs. “Democratic Capitalism”

Businesses are bigger than ever in the global market, the owners are in many cases anonymous, and the person finds it more difficult to find a secure place. In fact, the enormous growth of income for corporations and stockholders would seem to be directly related to worker insecurity.

As Randy Cohen wrote in the New York Times on June 20, 1999, “When a thief, having stolen your wallet, hands you back carfare, it's tough to mutter much of a thank you. Similarly, nice as it is that Bill Gates gives money to libraries, a decent country would tax Microsoft at a rate that lets cities buy their own books.”

Contemporary writers like Wendell Berry voice the same concerns on economics and life that Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day expressed, and follow the same line of reasoning.

Berry, who appears to be a Catholic Worker at heart and who believes in economic democracy, says we are in trouble if we have an industrial economy--and he believes we do--"which is firmly founded on the seven deadly sins and the breaking of all ten of the Ten Commandments" (*Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community*, San Francisco: Pantheon Books, 1993).

The seven deadly or "capital" sins are pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony and sloth. The 10 Commandments you know--especially the sixth, which is used so much for advertisement to promote consumption.

Those who speak of and help to plan what they call "democratic capitalism" on a global scale do not inform the world of the totalitarian measures which are needed to enforce this type of "democracy." They do not mention, as does Wendell Berry, that "If you are dependent on people who do not know you, who control the value of your necessities, you are not free, you are not safe." (*Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community*).

The term "democratic capitalism" has been used as a euphemism for the global market. Those who speak of its glories do not mention the actual lack of freedom for local people and local governments in this market. The dictators who imposed these policies were propped up by soldiers trained at the School of the Americas in Georgia throughout the '80's.

Daniel Krotz, of the American Chesterton Society, recently commented, "Distributists believe that widespread ownership of property is the only guarantee democracy has against a dominant centralized state or unbridled monopoly capitalism. Distributism supports local government, stable traditions, and permanent, self-sufficient communities united against servitude and alienation." (<http://www.chesterton.org>.)

In *The Ownership Solution*, Jeff Gates advocates "shared ownership." He points out that while free market advocates try to give the impression that their system is open to all, the reality is that the person who does not already have large quantities of capital cannot buy into it: "Policymakers routinely claim that capitalism is an 'open' system because anyone can purchase shares. It's a free market anyone (i.e., anyone with money) can buy those new equities.

"Expecting a broad base of wage earners to buy their way into significant ownership (i.e., from their already stretched paychecks) is what I call 'Marie Antoinette Capitalism,' only instead of urging 'Let them eat cake,' the modern refrain is 'Let them buy shares'" (Jeff Gates, *The Ownership Solution*, Addison-Wesley, 1998).

New Feudalism

Peter might have pointed out, as did R. H. Tawney in his books that Peter recommended to the readers of the *Catholic Worker*, that the situation of industrial capitalism in the twenties and thirties, like that of today's global market, was very like feudalism, in terms of the wealth of the few and the hard labor of the many who serve them in factories around the world. This past spring, *Business Week* reported that even in the U.S. the average top executive is making 419 times the pay of the average manufacturing worker.

E. F. Schumacher, writing in the 1970's, thought that perhaps world financial planners might be people of good will who simply didn't understand. He hoped that the neocolonialism he saw growing throughout the developing world was unwitting (Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful*, New York: Harper Collins, 1975, 1989, p. 213).

However, the structural adjustment programs imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund on developing countries during the '80's raise issues about the possibility of good will, or at least a great lack of wisdom regarding loans and debt payments.

Structural adjustment programs require developing countries to devalue their currency, open up to world markets and privatize government programs. "Opening up to world markets" means they can no longer grow food for their people, but only for export, and then purchase imported food at higher prices. International agribusiness has been consistently favored in this process, along with deforestation of land to plant crops for export.

The campaigns of the Vatican and non-profit groups to forgive the external debt built up in the '80's as a part of celebration of the Jubilee year 2000 have brought the problems of neocolonialism to the public's attention. The debt forgiveness agreements to date unfortunately involve forgiveness of a small part of the debt for only certain countries and include continued harsh structural adjustment measures to be imposed on the few countries involved.

Multinational companies and the World Trade Organization are the most powerful forces in the world today. They are stronger than any country or combination of countries, beholden to no one. There is no national conscience or international conscience that can inhibit them.

Speaking against the adoption of the GATT trade agreements, which have since been passed and converted into the World Trade Organization, Wendell Berry wrote,

"What these proposals actually propose is a revolution as audacious, far-reaching, and as sudden as any the world has seen. Their purpose is to bypass all lo-

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cal, state, and national governments in order to subordinate the interests of those governments and of the people they represent to the interests of a global 'free' market run by a few supranational corporations" (*Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community*, p. 48-50)

The control of the WTO extends to such unheard-of areas as the robbery and patenting by neocolonial multinational companies of the plants and seeds developed in poorer countries over centuries. This patenting through the WTO means that those who developed the seeds will no longer be able to use them. (See *An Introduction to the WTO Agreements*, Malaysia: Third World Network, 1998).

What is the GDP?

Statistics and figures are used to show that in spite of lack of participation of the people in decision-making, in spite of the destruction of small business by international trade agreements, economies in various countries are still doing well. Much is attributed to a figure called the GDP, or the gross domestic product... It is fascinating to read in *The Ownership Solution* of the various statistics which enter into this mysterious figure of the GDP: "Nowadays, the implicit assumption is that people are better off when spending is on the rise. That makes for certain perverse measures of progress. The cleanup expense of the Exxon Valdez oil spill, the costs of the O. J. Simpson murder trial, outlays for prison construction and rising fees paid divorce lawyers—each implies real progress. Working longer hours may require that parents shift childcare from the home to a paid day care center, suggesting a rise in GDP but possibly a lower quality of life for both parent and child. Costs and benefits are given equal weight. Income and expense, even assets and liabilities—all are washed out by a measure that translates any dollar-denominated exchange into an economic 'good,' even if those exchanges reflect a weakening of the social glue that binds the nation together. It can even signal rising prosperity (because more money is changing hands) while much of the population is losing ground" (p. 321-322).

Dorothy Day Criticized

Dorothy explained why perhaps other Catholics would not understand the Catholic Workers and even reported them to the Bishop: "We were not taking the position of the great mass of Catholics, who were quite content with the present in this world. They were quite willing to give to the poor, but they did not feel called upon to work for the things of this life for others which they themselves esteemed so lightly. Our insistence on worker-ownership, on the right of private property, on the need to de-proletarianize the worker, all points which had been emphasized by the Popes in their social encyclicals, made many Catholics think we were Communists in disguise, wolves in sheep's clothing."

Dorothy continued, "The Vatican paper warned us recently of regarding Americanism or Communism as the only two alternatives. It is hard to see why our

criticism of capitalism should have aroused such protest" (William Miller, *Dorothy Day: a Biography*, Harper and Row, 1982, p. 428).

Dorothy quoted Joseph T. Nolan from *Orate Fratres* on the support of Popes for the CW position: "Too long has idle talk made Distributism out to be something medieval and myopic, as if four modern popes were somehow talking nonsense when they said: the law should favor widespread ownership (Leo XIII); land is the most natural form of property (Leo XIII and Pius XII); wages should enable a man to purchase land (Leo XIII and Pius XI); the family is most perfect when rooted in its own holding (Pius XII); agriculture is the first and most important of all the arts and the tiller of the soil still represents the natural order of things willed by God (Pius XII)" (*Catholic Worker*, July-Aug. 1948).

Some tried to dismiss Peter Maurin. He, seeing all the problems of an economy based on consumerism and the accumulation of wealth by the few, made it clear that he did not support that system: "I told them I am the son of a peasant and so pre-capitalistic. I don't like capitalism and I don't like socialism, which is the child of capitalism" (Arthur Sheehan, *Peter Maurin*, Hanover House, p. 191).

Superstition of the "Invisible Hand"

Since Adam Smith, the proponents of wealth creation have promised heaven on earth if their ideas were followed: Just believe religiously in the market and allow it absolute freedom, then salvation will come. It is hard to imagine a heaven where one's creativity and destiny are squandered working on an assembly line or at MacDonald's.

Pope Pius XII went so far as to call the idea that the invisible hand of the market will on its own rather like fate control the world, a "superstition." (Dorothy Day, "Distributism vs. Capitalism," *Catholic Worker*, October 1954).

Adam Smith vs. *Centesimus Annus*

The Catholic tradition has always taught the importance of working toward the common good. Adam Smith, in opposition to this teaching, advocated self-interest as the motivation for one's life. He added the adjective, "enlightened," to the phrase (whatever that means). Unfortunately, economic developments which today take place on the global level in the name of Adam Smith's philosophy have excluded any idea of "enlightened." Peter Maurin, by contrast, "talked about Christ's technique, of working from the bottom and with the few, of self-discipline and self-organization, of sacrifice rather than enlightened self-interest...." (*LL*, p. 221).

Some neoconservatives have claimed that with the fall of communism/state socialism, the capitalism of the global market is the only choice left. They apparently neglected to read #35 in *Centesimus Annus*, where the Holy Father writes

that there are not just two alternatives: "We have seen that it is unacceptable to say that the defeat of so-called 'Real Socialism' leaves capitalism as the only model of economic organization. It is necessary to break down the barriers and monopolies which leave so many countries on the margins of development, and to provide all individuals and nations with the basic conditions which will enable them to share in development."

Even Elephants Need Parents

It is impossible for most families to survive or to maintain their lifestyle without two salaries in today's economy.

The authors recently saw a special program on public television about elephants and rhinos. The adult, parent elephants had all been taken away from the group because of overpopulation. Only "child" elephants remained. They grew up without role models.

When later these young, now "teenage" elephants went on a rampage, killing twenty per cent of the neighboring rhinos (a bizarre behavior for elephants), the problem could only be solved by bringing in adult elephants to live with the young ones.

Many children in 1999 do not have a parent at home to guide them, either, and many parents have little time to devote to sharing their wisdom.

What about the Children?

As Daniel Krotz says it, "to suggest that the economic system has an impact on the culture brings out the 'Capitalist as Victim' strategy: it's not the fault of the capitalist system that families are falling apart, that small children are warehoused for 8 or more hours a day, or that the majority of high school students can't locate their state capitals on a map: 'Hey, it's not my fault! It's the culture.'"

As E. F. Schumacher said over 30 years ago, "What is at stake is not economics but culture, not the standard of living, but the quality of life" (*Small Is Beautiful*, p. 278).

Consumerism

Wendell Berry reminds us that we have the right to what we need and no more, and that that is why usury is outlawed in the Old Testament. Large accumulations of wealth and real estate are forbidden in the twenty-fifth chapter of Leviticus. Berry also reminds us that "The world is being destroyed, no doubt about it, by the greed of the rich and powerful. It is also being destroyed by popular demand." (*Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community*, p. 96, 32).

For all practical purposes we have in place again atheistic materialism, even though lip-service may be paid to God and other concerns.

The acquisition of wealth and material things has become the highest goal in the world, a world in which economics takes priority over all else. Economics is actually all that exists.

Dorothy Day objected strongly to the totally materialistic life style dominating our culture. She talked about the need for a revolution a revolution of the heart to break away from the grip of materialism that tries to overthrow us and our values and take possession of our souls. She said: "We are all guilty of concupiscence (desires of the flesh), but newspapers, radio, TV and the battalion of advertising people (Woe to that generation!) deliberately stimulate our desires."

For her, to tempt people constantly and to barrage them with advertisement is immoral and unethical. One of the greatest sins, she says, is "to instill in the heart of the worker paltry desire, so compulsive that he or she is willing to sell liberty and honor to satisfy them."

Wendell Berry outlines the clear connection between the commandment against adultery and advertisement:

"To make sex the preferred bait of commerce may seem merely the obvious thing to do, once greed is granted its now conventional priority as a motive... Television is the greatest disrespecter and exploiter of sexuality that the world has ever seen; even if the network executives decide to promote 'safe sex' and the use of condoms, they will not cease to pimp for the exceedingly profitable 'sexual revolution.'" (p. 124, 133).

Even our wars (as Dorothy Day pointed out years ago) have to do with promoting our economics and consumer lifestyles and acquiring land rich in resources (e.g., oil).

JP II Asks us to Change our Lifestyles

Pope John Paul II challenged us all to change our very lives when he wrote in *Centesimus Annus*: "Love for others, and in the first place love for the poor, in whom the Church sees Christ himself, is made concrete in the promotion of justice... It is not merely a matter of 'giving from one's surplus,' but of helping entire peoples which are presently excluded or marginalized to enter into the sphere of economic and human development. For this to happen, it is not enough to draw on the surplus goods which in fact our world abundantly produces, it requires above all a change of life-styles, of models of production and consumption, and of the established structures of power which today govern society" (#58).

Present-day Examples

Dorothy Day explained that while distributism had an agrarian emphasis, that “does not mean that everyone must be a farmer” (*Catholic Worker*, July-Aug. 1948).

The most famous example of worker-ownership and management in a successful business which is not agrarian is that of Mondragon in the Basque country in Spain.

Mondragon

The inspiration for the Mondragon businesses came from Don Jose Maria Arizmendiarietta, a priest who put the personalist philosophy into practice. Don José María never actually directed or worked at Mondragon, but encouraged and advised those who did so.

In a recent book, Fr. Greg MacLeod wrote about the success of Mondragon and how it “flies in the face of the Hobbes-Smith tradition which holds that the ‘rational’ economic person acts out of pure self-interest” (Greg MacLeod, *From Mondragon to America: Experiments in Community Economic Development*, Sydney, Nova Scotia, Canada: Univ. College of Cape Breton Pr., 1997, p. 14).

The Mondragon business complex was set up in 1956 when five young engineers, inspired by the ideas of Don José María, set up a small enterprise to produce oil stoves. MacLeod’s description of these early years is fascinating: “With the help of their former teacher and pastor, they borrowed some money and went into production following principles of democratic decision making, profit sharing and community responsibility.... This enterprise became successful in a very short time. When they needed further capital for expansion they formed a bank following the same principles of cooperative ownership. As each enterprise became successful and grew, it divided and sub-divided to create a complex of inter-related worker-owned enterprises that is still growing” (From *Mondragon*, p. 19-20).

The vision of Mondragon is different at its foundation than most businesses. While Don José María “promoted the technical formation of workers and the introduction of world-class technology in order to survive in the competitive world,” he never lost sight of the priority of the worker as a human person (p. 88). The principle of solidarity is key at Mondragon, requiring members to share in good times and bad, and to work toward the common good of the whole society. Don José Maria believed that sale price could not be merely a question of commercial circumstances, but must take into account the common good. He also insisted that the role of industrial corporations, remaining subordinated to the common good, being socially responsible, must not be political. As MacLeod says, “He saw the danger that the corporation could become totalitarian,

and try to control all aspects of life.” (From *Mondragon*, p. 89-90)

Distributism in Houston

Casa Juan Diego receives immigrants and refugees every day who have been unable to survive in their countries in this “free” global market. Many risk all to have one person work in another country so the family can survive and children can go to school. The 1987 Immigration Law, which provided amnesty for some immigrants, introduced penalties--large fines--for employers who hire the undocumented, but made a special provision for cooperatives. A cooperative hiring hall is in full operation at Casa Juan Diego, where undocumented men are able to work legally through this special provision. The City of Houston pays the salaries of two men to work at the Centro San Jose Obrero.

Christ the Good Shepherd parish has a farm where vegetables are grown to help Casa Juan Diego CW. Andy Wright has a garden at Casa Juan Diego and also raises chickens.

Recommendations

Race Mathews of Australia, in his G. K. Chesterton Memorial Lecture on May 27, 1999, made several recommendations on the implementation of the principles of distributism today:

1. Measures are needed to insure that small businesses are not crushed by larger ones, outlawing predatory pricing and other anti-competitive practices as well as unfair retail leases in large shopping complexes
2. Acknowledgment by government that agribusiness and smallholder farming--the authentic family farm--differ radically from one another and accordingly have different requirements in terms of public policy.
3. Every worker should own a share in the assets and control of the business in which he works. This can be implemented through ESOP's, mutualism and cooperatives which should reinvent themselves for new needs.

Our Hope is in Grace and Conversion of Heart

Dorothy described Peter's vision: “Peter rejoiced to see men do great things and dream great dreams. He wanted them to stretch out their arms to their brothers, because he knew that the surest way to find God, to find the good, was through one's brothers. Peter wanted this striving to result in a better physical life in which all men would be able to fulfill themselves, develop their capacities for love and worship, expressed in all the arts. He wanted them to be able to produce what was needed in the way of homes, food, clothing, so that there was enough of these necessities for everyone.

"It was hard for me to understand what he meant, thinking as I always had in terms of cities and immediate need of men for their weekly pay check. Now I can see clearly what he was talking about, but I am faced with the problem of making others see it. I can well recognize the fact that people remaining as they are, Peter's program is impossible. But it would become actual, given a people changed in heart and mind, so that they would observe the new commandment of love, or desired to" (LL, p. 171).

Rebuilding the social order, renewing the face of the earth, cannot be done by human efforts alone. Dorothy often said that, "All is grace."

Centesimus Annus ends with the same theme: "...in order that the demands of justice may be met, and attempts to achieve this goal may succeed, what is needed is the gift of grace, a gift which comes from God. Grace, in cooperation with human freedom, constitutes that mysterious presence of God in history which is Providence" (#59).

But after these beautiful lines, John Paul II addresses again the fact that too many people live, "not in the prosperity of the Western world, but in the poverty of the developing countries amid conditions which are still 'a yoke little better than that of slavery itself'" and challenges all of us to work to create a more just social order.

(From the *Houston Catholic Worker*, Sept.-Oct. 1999)

About the Authors

Mark and Louise Zwick founded the *Houston Catholic Worker*, Casa Juan Diego, in 1980 to serve immigrants and refugees. Over 50,000 immigrants have stayed at least one night in the Houses of Hospitality. The Zwicks received the Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice award from the Holy Father and the Jefferson award in Houston for their work. They are co-editors of *Houston Catholic Worker*, a bi-monthly newspaper. They are the authors of:

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