

Psychology

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In the last section I quoted from an old labor song: "Hearts starve as well as bodies. Give us bread but give us roses." So far I have explained the Catholic Worker's objection to any economic system that puts profit (private or collective) above people, and to any political system that pretends to secure human freedom by making laws. These go hand in hand; and where they don't starve the body, they starve the heart. Usually they starve both, because hearts and bodies are inseparable.

If we fail to see that unity, we have not begun to make a real revolution. If we fail to provide roses, what good is bread? For a Christian, as the late Bishop Dingman (former bishop of the Des Moines diocese) often reminded us, "the bottom line is the dignity of the human person," not the bottom line of a balance sheet (whether a capitalist balance sheet or a state-centralist one). Any way of looking at a person that does not take in the whole of that person lessens the sum of human

dignity, because it mars the likeness of God which each human being is created to be.

Giving in to a false picture of the human person as some kind of spirit trapped in a body not only blasphemes against the Incarnation, it alienates us from ourselves and of course from each other. Since people have to live with other people, we have to strengthen human dignity by just relations with the individuals in our lives and a just order of society.

All of these levels go together. There is no social or economic revolution without a personal one, and no personal revolution without a social and economic one, all simultaneous, all inseparable. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4). Made in that God's image, so are we, individually and collectively, one.

Throughout John Paul II's first encyclical, Redemptor Hominis, we are taught to give first place to human persons "in all the unrepeatable reality of what they are and what they do, of their intellect and will, or their conscience and heart." The Pope quotes his conclusion in his later encyclicals: "[The human person] is the primary and fundamental way for the Church, the way traced out by Christ himself." To be sure, no individual is without sin, but, as the Council says, "To the children of Adam, Christ restores the divine likeness which had been disfigured from the first sin onward. Since human nature as Jesus assumed it was not annulled, by that very fact it has been raised up to a divine dignity in our respect too. For by his incarnation the son of God has united himself in some fashion with every human being."

Catholic Workers try every day to recognize this fact. Some accuse us of being a band-aid, letting the deeper trouble

go untreated. But to us who see Christ in each person, there is a special urgency in dealing with that person's immediate needs. So we are committed to "the daily practice of the works of mercy."

We are all too aware that the works of mercy can be practiced in such a way as to deprive the other of dignity. St. Vincent de Paul reminds us to practice them so that the poor can forgive us the bread we give. Peter Maurin urged us to practice them at a personal sacrifice, because only that can restore the equality between have and have-not. When you give of your need, not your abundance, you are giving not only alms, you are not only sharing justice, but you are sharing dignity — because you are sharing something you believe you deserve yourself.

This picture, however, is a far cry from the way our society treats people. We think of each other — indeed we often think of ourselves — as less than whole, so our dignity is a thing of words only. This is covered up by talk of human rights. Even the most well-meaning cannot see that this vocabulary sets us up as separate. Rights language is based on private property language, is the language of limits, of protecting yourself against other people, of buying your wholeness at the expense of others. Dorothy Day used to say over and over, "Christians cannot stand on our rights." We must be more concerned with how much we can *give* to our sisters and brothers, not how much we can *protect* ourselves from them, much less how we can use them.

In this society we see our sisters and brothers in terms of our needs. We make them into objects, tools for our own use. We no longer look for our vocations, but for jobs. We are

concerned with how much money we can make. In a time of enormous unemployment, Peter Maurin shocked many by speaking not of providing jobs but of "firing the bosses," a complete reorientation of the way we look at work. John Paul II speaks of a call: "We must see first and foremost Christ saying in some way to each member of the community: 'Follow me'." This requires "an adequate awareness of the individual Christian's vocation and responsibility for this singular, unique and unrepeatable grace by which each Christian in the community of the people of God builds up the body of Christ."

It also requires that we structure work and work-places, so as to reclaim work itself as something enriching. In the 1880s when many factory workers were still able to recall the (usually) more humane working conditions of the workshop, the Chicago anarchist paper *The Alarm* could diagnose the roots of workers' psychological suffering in a sentence: "We have lost sight of the pleasure of work." And why should it not be a pleasure to us, as the six days of Creation were to God?

If we foster this deep sense of divine purpose, the problems of self-esteem that trouble us so in these times will vanish — but we cannot confuse searching out our vocation with job-hunting. We must fire the bosses and instead trust in God and each other. We must say: "I trust that God, through my sisters and brothers, will take care of me if I am pursuing the vocation that is God's special gift to me for the good of all." It is the lilies of the field, pure and simple. And any Catholic Worker can tell you it works.

And once we find that vocation? Then we will no longer be divided against ourselves, because we will be living out our deepest, truest nature.

We are kept from this knowledge by the way society regards people purely as items in the cost of production. Work need not suit the worker, only the assembly line and the ledger. Pius XI put it best: "Very many employers treat their workers as mere tools. . . . Bodily labor, which was decreed by Providence for the good of the human body and soul, even after original sin, has been changed everywhere into an instrument of strange perversion, for dead matter leaves the factory ennobled and transformed, where human beings are corrupted and degraded." And those who are not *productive*, by reason of age or physical or mental condition, are shut away.

When we go home from work, we are again put into a slot that serves profit rather than human dignity, and again our whole nature is betrayed. As at work we are valued by how much we produce, at home we are valued by how much we consume. We are taught to *need* things we in fact have no use



for, and we feel insecure and inadequate when these *needs* cannot be met.

The most extreme example of this is the tendency even to include people in the category of consumer goods. From the habit of using sex to sell things, sexual allure has become a saleable item in its own right. People are summed up by how closely they conform to some arbitrary (but expensive) standard of beauty, and woe to those who fall short of the standard. The connection between sexual attractiveness and capitalism isn't simply the result of taking our standards from Calvin Klein ads. The standards themselves are class based. To take only one concrete example: access to dental care is available only to the well-to-do. Even those with health insurance are seldom covered for dentistry. But how many beautiful people on TV have anything but perfect teeth?

This is reinforced at a deeper level, an internal one. We are taught to be ashamed of our bodies. We grow up out of touch with them; we despise and abuse them, unable to see that they are temples of the Holy Spirit. We live entirely in our heads or our hands. We forget that even in prayer we are matter as well as spirit, we have voices to sing with and hands to gesture with and knees to kneel on.

At the same time, if we lack any of those things, if we have any disabilities at all, we are assumed to be economically unproductive and hence socially worthless. The near total failure of businesses to use the 18-month grace period they insisted on putting in the Americans with Disabilities Act to make their premises and services accessible is only one example of this.

Meanwhile, we judge our relationships by the physical

equipment of the people involved, and fail to see the possibility of a loving relationship with someone of the "wrong" gender. Worst of all, if we are men we deny the "feminine" parts of ourselves, or if we are women, the "masculine" parts. We cannot know ourselves, we cannot know each other. How can we love?

None of this is what Christ wants for us. Jesus joined divinity with humanity, the perfect contradiction to our attempts to split them apart. Christ came to bring us abundant life, varied life, rich life, life in all our parts, life rooted in wholeness. It is no accident that the words *holy*, *healthy* and *whole* all come from the same root, just as it is no accident that *salvation* comes from the Latin word for health.

This is not to say that we should spend our days working for some kind of self-fulfillment or perfect adjustment. A truly human vision, a true picture of the wholeness of the human person, includes the reality of suffering. It has to, because it includes the need to serve. The pursuit of wholeness and holiness is not the pursuit of personal pleasure. Our guidebook is not the latest self-help manual but the Scripture, and our model is not the successful graduate of a weekend quick-fix seminar but the Suffering Servant. There are no short cuts to the personal revolution that breaks down the division I have mentioned.

The Catholic Worker depends on three things to help bring about this revolution: personalism, nonviolence and community.

Personalism means we believe in taking each person as unique. That is why our houses of hospitality are so different from social agencies. We have no guidelines for eligibility, no

proper chain of authority, no cut-and-dried formula for dealing with our guests. The person's own history and needs and behavior are our norms. This personalism goes the other direction too. We do not expect others to carry out our responsibilities, and we do not try to play it safe and avoid committing ourselves. Personal responsibility for ourselves and each other is a powerful antidote to the poison of indifference which permeates our society.

Worse even than indifference is violence. It strikes at the very root of human dignity. For us, nonviolence is never just the tactic of the day; it is the core of our life. It means being willing to yield for the sake of another, because we know the other as a whole person, with the dignity of a child of God.

This is only possible if we respect ourselves. Our nonviolence is not merely keeping our hands clean of violence (which is in any case impossible in this violent society), nor is it passivity or abjectness. It is both assertion of our truth and an ability, which comes only from being grounded in truth ourselves, to hear the other party's truth as well. This is the path to justice, a justice established on human dignity and the collaboration of equals. Just as violence, infringing on the dignity of another, can never make up for our lost dignity, so no violent revolution can establish justice because violence is itself the worst of injustices.

Finally, once we see each other as we are, the way nonviolence lets us see each other, we come to nourish the seed of community. Community is both teacher and remedy. It teaches us the skills of cooperation and accommodation we must master to live nonviolently; and it replaces indifference and alienation with the healing warmth of love and respect.

Community makes sure our personal revolution is not empty — either because there is no one to share it or because it is based solely on self.

The quest for wholeness is not rugged individualism. It builds no fences. It is granting to others the dignity you have found in yourself by discovering your wholeness. It is servanthood to all, as Christ was servant to all, and as such it inevitably flows into our social relationships.