

The Catholic Land Movement

Its Motives, Aims and Methods. (Plus an Up-date.)

By Father Vincent McNabb, O.P., S.T.M. and Commander Herbert Shove, D.S.O., R.N.
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FOREWORD.

BY G. K. CHESTERTON.

FATHER Vincent McNabb, who has helped innumerable individuals in innumerable ways, has helped his own generation and the whole world especially by fixing and affirming and re-affirming the view, which he expresses as putting first things first. How unutterably un-intellectual was the intellectualism, which paraded itself so impudently in the nineteenth century can be sufficiently judged from this; that it actually tried to deny or ignore the fact that the soul and the mind come first; and that all other things, from the body to the balance at the bank, are dependent upon them. Men talked as if there could be some essential economic good, which was not only more practical, but even more primary, than the good that is recognised by the soul. It was stark staring nonsense even on the lowest or most practical plane of thought. A man hoards in his pocket; he digests with his stomach; but he is happy with his soul. And the cheap materialism of the small economists can be turned upside down by the simple operation of saying, "Would you like to be well paid, to be well fed and to be unhappy?"

It is well therefore that in this pamphlet, which Father McNabb and Commander Shove have used so lucidly to expound the fundamentals of the Catholic Land Association, its principle is primarily stated in primary or spiritual terms. It deals first with the fact that men are spiritually unhappy, which comes before the fact that they are now economically and materially unhappy; though this is quite as much of a fact.

An entirely practical proposal, that men should seek the most solid of things, which is the earth, for the most useful of things, which is food, is none the less dependent on the principle that it must not be sought in a servile or bestial or merely mechanical manner. If it were, it would not give the normal degree of human happiness, which it is the object of such an experiment to give. You can treat a man like a machine, but you cannot make him an unfeeling machine; you can treat a man as a beast, but you cannot make him a happy beast; you can treat a man as a slave, but you cannot at the same time produce out of mere food the sensation of freedom.

This pamphlet presupposes, not merely that men should live on the land, not merely that they should own the land, but that they should work it and own it with a certain status of domestic dignity and decency, without which a completely civilised man will always lose his self-respect. I was asked only today whether such a scheme (or schemes of the same kind which I have defended elsewhere) must be regarded as a purely economic scheme; or whether we did not conceal in it (sly and unscrupulous devils) certain moral and religious implications. I answered that our proposal is a purely economic proposal, in the sense that we can state in purely economic terms what it is that we

propose. But we could not possibly state in purely economic terms our reason for proposing it. For that reason ultimately refers not to land but to life; not to property but to happiness; not to the body but to the soul.

This distinction, as I pointed out, is perfectly normal to any other enterprise; say, for the sake of argument, a Foreign Mission. We can state a particular provision for missionary enterprise in the most coldly and correctly economic terms; as in saying, for instance The Rev Isaiah Bunter shall have charge of a thousand pounds. But we cannot give anybody the least idea of why we give him a thousand pounds, without explaining what religion he is preaching, and why we wish it to be preached. My interlocutor, being a very intelligent Socialist, so intelligent that he was trying to find out why he was not a Distributist, admitted the distinction at once; and also admitted that Socialism itself, though often priding itself on being reducible to purely economic terms, probably had as its real motive power certain moral ideals about comradeship or co-operation. But though he was too sensible not to see the point about the soul, it is a horrible thing to think of how many thousands of people must still be walking the world, full of that monstrous muddle-headed materialism, which supposes it to be in some way “scientific” to separate the fact of physical prosperity from the mind which can alone enjoy it or enjoy better things.

This elimination of the spirit is stupid, not only from a specially spiritual standpoint, but from the ordinary logical standpoint. It is therefore essential that these perfectly practical agricultural movements for the solution of the perfectly practical problem of food and perhaps for the averting of the perfectly practical peril of famine, should be introduced in a manner worthy of the intellect and conscience of Christian men; by the assertion of first principles, which must be moral and spiritual principles; and which are asserted in the pages that follow.

ITS MOTIVES.

Father Vincent McNabb, O.P., S.T.M.

Out of Egypt have I called my son. (Matthew 2:15 Jeremiah 30:15)

“In any case we clearly see, and on this there is general agreement, that some opportune remedy must be found quickly for the misery and wretchedness pressing so unjustly on the majority of the working class. . . .” (Pope Leo XIII, Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, A.D. 1891).

“The law therefore should favour ownership; and its policy should be to induce as many as possible of the humbler classes to become owners.

“Many excellent results will follow from this, and first of all, property will certainly become more equitably divided. For the result of civil change and revolution has been to divide society into two widely different castes. On the one side there is the Party which holds power because it holds wealth; which has in its grasp the whole of labour and trade; which manipulates for its own benefit and for its own purposes all the sources of supply and which is even represented in the Councils of the State itself.

“On the other side there is the needy and powerless multitude, broken down and suffering and ever ready for disturbance. If working people can be encouraged to look forward to obtaining a share in the Land the consequence will be that the gulf between vast wealth and sheer poverty will be bridged over, and the respective classes will be brought nearer to one another.

“A further consequence will result in the greater abundance of the fruits of the earth. Men always work harder on what belongs to them; nay, they learn to love the very soil that yields, in response to the labour of their hands, not only food to eat, but an abundance of good things for themselves and those that are dear to them. That such a spirit of willing labour would add to the produce of the earth and to the wealth of the Community is self-evident.

“And a third advantage would spring from this; men would cling to the country in which they were born; for no one would exchange their country for a foreign land if his own afforded him the means of living a decent and happy life.” (*Rerum Novarum*).

(All quotes are from *The Pope and the People*, 1929 edition, starting at page 134. From the Catholic Truth Society.)

The challenge of these inspired words of Holy Scripture and authoritative words of a Papal Encyclical has led the Catholics of these Islands of Britain to begin a Movement out of the towns and back to the country. Not that the challenge of itself led immediately to the present Movement. There have been forty years of social wandering since Pope Leo called the need of a remedy “urgent.” When his challenge was first sounded,

“Some minds were not a little disturbed, with the result that the noble and exalted teaching of Leo XIII, quite novel to worldly ears, was looked upon with suspicion by some even among Catholics and gave offence to others. For it boldly attacked and overthrew the idols of liberalism, swept aside inveterate prejudices, and was so far and so unexpectedly in advance of its time that the slow of heart ridiculed the study of the new social philosophy and the timid feared to scale its lofty heights. Nor were there wanting those who, while professing their admiration for this message of light, regarded it as a Utopian ideal desirable rather than attainable in practice.” (Pope Pius XI, Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, A.D. 1931).

The group of Catholics, Priests and Lay-folk, who are beginning an exodus from the famine to the possibility of ownership have, in fact, yielded to authority only as brought home by circumstances directly observable by themselves. They have been finally moved to act and to re-act not merely, or mainly, by the challenge from Rome but by the cry from the penury and sin of Glasgow, Birmingham, and London. In conviction, if not in words, they had anticipated the following words of the Holy Father:

“After modern machinery and modern industry had progressed with astonishing speed and taken possession of many newly colonised countries no less than of the ancient civilisations of the Far East, the number of the dispossessed labouring masses, whose groans mount to Heaven from these lands, increased beyond all measure.

“Moreover, there is the immense army of hired rural labourers, whose condition is depressed in the extreme and who have no hope of ever obtaining a share in the land. These, too, unless efficacious remedies be applied, will remain perpetually sunk in their present conditions.” (*Quadragesimo Anno*).

Let us then set down in order some of the main motives that have led these Catholics to see in obedience to the Holy Father in this particular matter not only a generally right and desirable thing for Christendom to do, but the best and most urgent thing for themselves to do here in Great Britain and at the present time.

FIRST AND PRINCIPAL MOTIVE: TO WORSHIP GOD.

Like the chosen people, they are minded to leave the flesh pots of Egypt, not for the “milk and honey” of the Promised Land, but that the people may go and worship God. (Exodus chapter 6).

They wish to put first things first. Their law, or rule, like the law of the people of God, begins: I am the Lord, your God, that brought you out of the Land of Egypt and out of the house of bondage. You shall not have strange gods before Me. (Exodus 20:2-3.) Not only will they not worship by desire what is wrong — like Mammon — but they will not desire as a primary good what is only a secondary good. Thus they will leave the ugliness of the town, not for the beauty of the land, but for the beauty of God’s face; they will fly from the disease of the town, not for the health of the body, but for the health of the soul; they will cut the tangled complexity of town life, not for the simple life with nature, but for the quiet life with God.

SECOND GREAT MOTIVE: TO FOLLOW CHRIST.

Moreover, as a greater than Moses has, by His death on the Cross, led them out of a greater bondage than that of Egypt, the God whom they worship and would follow is He whose name was written on the Cross as JESUS OF NAZARETH.

Now Jesus of Nazareth, the Word made Flesh, did not come into our midst, to show flesh and blood an example but to be its redeemer.

Man’s power of willing what he knew, had always been so much less than his power of knowing what to will, that what he needed most was not leadership or even example making a plain way still plainer, but redemption making his weak human will stronger.

Now what must be said of the human race in the days before the coming of Jesus must be said today. If we may believe two Popes, who have written about social matters, mankind has done wrong so effectively that social good has to be, not only stored, but re-stored. An evil or a mistaken past must now be redeemed at a great price. But only the weights and measures of Nazareth will give individuals and nations the ownership and sovereignty of their own souls. The modern world needs redemption; and redemption means a return to Nazareth. It is for this reason that over the lintel of every home and homestead we would build on the land might well be cut in stone:

And He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was subject to them. (Luke 2:51).

THIRD MOTIVE: FAMILY LOVE.

One of the most explicit motives of those who are turning their faces towards the land is the desire to restore the Catholic Family. Most of the older men and women who can themselves remember parents and grandparents, know that the modern arrangement of the world has put an end to the historic institution called HOME. Many of the younger men and women, too, realise as if by intuition that a state of things that makes race-suicide seem to be the only practical policy is only a state of chaos — if, indeed, it can be called a state. (Footnote: ‘race-suicide’ was the polite way of referring to contraception.)

The splendid vision of wedded love, granted by God to the heart of youth, seems but divine mockery when met by town conditions, which make the begetting of a family seem a crime against the State.

It is to the credit of our sober days that amongst the most sober fugitives from that proximate occasion of sin called “the modern town” are to be found young men and women whose heart is stirring with the self-sacrificial desires of wedlock and parenthood.

It is in these aspirants to wedded vows that poor prodigal, man, turns from the squalor of a sty and the company of swine to a home furnished and adorned with husband and wife, parent and child.

In that holy place of human love, room and need will be found for the parent, now become the grandfather or grandmother.

How ill-organised is a world that has no other place than an "Institution," a Workhouse, for the wisdom of the old. But what a school of human and divine love, and therefore of wisdom that springs from love, is a Home made possible and safe by the Homestead. Modern seekers after the true method of education will seek in vain until they recognise the wisdom in the phrase once uttered by a woman of the crowd: "I had nothing but home-schooling." Yet the home-schooling now almost absent from town life is so fundamental that, in another phrase of a Priest of God by Jeremiah Curtin: "Political Economy is the child of Domestic Economy." This only says, in language of the Schools, that God has made the Family to be the unit and model of the State, and that the greatest praise of Sovereign Power is to call the wielder of that power the "Father of his People."

FOURTH MOTIVE: LOVE OF CHASTITY.

This family life, with its craft of love, leads to another motive driving Catholic men and women out of city life to the land. Everywhere around them there are the sight and reek of bodily sin. These men and women are beginning to burn with shame at the insult offered to them. If they are men, they feel the insult of being considered so sensual that even a food or a holiday haunt cannot be offered to them without the recommendation of some sensual nudity. If they are women, in an age of self-consciousness they feel even more insulted by the suggestion that women's chief interest for man is not spiritual or intellectual, but carnal.

Town life, with its daily herding together in dwellings and modes of transport, is tending to produce a sensual disease which only isolation will cure or prevent. Psychologists of the mob — and a modern town is hardly more than a mob — will recognise that no moral disease is so contagious and persistent as that which is based on the bodily pleasure without the accompanying altruism of parenthood.

Too often has mob psychology studied merely the wild outbursts of a crowd in anger; forgetful that, though "You shall not kill" is a more fundamental commandment than "You shall not commit adultery," yet taking life is, in itself, so mentally abhorrent, and creating life is so physically pleasurable that when men and women are herded together in our modern towns sexual un-control tends to spread like a social plague. To flee that sensual plague, Catholic men and women are going out of the crowded town to the wide spaces of the countryside, where the infection of sin within them will not be in the fittest medium for its growth and spread.

FIFTH MOTIVE: LOVE OF JUSTICE.

Another motive behind the Catholic land-crusaders is the ideal embodied in the Redeemer's first reveille: "Blessed are the Poor, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." Yet that reveille does not awaken the ideal of a starving poverty that is hardly permitted to give, or even to live. On the contrary, it is the heroic and socially valuable poverty of Him who was poor yet enriching many. Return to land-work, and its twin-fellow hand-work, means the return to a stable, profitable state of things, where the worker lives over his work and deals directly with the things made by infinite

wisdom and love. When man has made this return, not to things primitive, but to things primary
MAN NEED NOT WASTE A MOMENT OF TIME OR AN OUNCE OF MATERIAL.

In other words, return to land-work and hand-work gives all men the chance, and unselfish men the inducement, to the ideal — Poverty of Work in Production — Poverty of Thrift in Consumption. These are the two kinds of Poverty linked with the two primary functions of Production and Consumption.

By Poverty of Work, a man seeks to produce as much as possible of real, as distinct from, token wealth. His ideal will be to produce the most he can of the best he can. Saint Paul's challenge to the discussion-loving Ephesians will seldom fail from his thoughts — "He that stole let him steal no more. But rather let him toil, working with his hands the thing that is good that he may have wherewith to give to the needy." (Ephesians 4:28).

Such a worker will have all the more to give if after he has produced as much as he can he consumes as little as he needs. Poverty of Work joined with Poverty of Thrift. A land-worker or a hand-worker who measures his rights by his duties, and his wants by his needs, will leave the world that welcomed him richer than when it gave him a welcome.

Set against this enriching poverty of land-work and hand-work, the machine-work of the town is seen to be essentially wasteful of time and material. When, then, the Catholic land-crusaders plan to leave the town it is not merely through a desire to worship God and keep the hard command: — "You shall not commit adultery," but in a desire to fulfil, "You shall not steal."

SIXTH MOTIVE: LOVE OF LIBERTY.

A further motive of urgency with the Catholic Land Crusaders may be called their Love of Liberty. To some of them this motive expresses itself as a principle: — "The Home is the Social Defence of Liberty and the Homestead is the Economic Defence of the Home."

Yet this liberty is not a man's physical and moral power to do what he would, but to do what he ought. The half-truth, and therefore heresy, of "self-expression" takes no lasting root on the land.

But only on the land, with its easy direct access to the forces of nature, is there the normal possibility of that unselfish self-reproduction which is nature's counterstroke to "self-expression."

On the land, therefore, the father of a family, which is the divine unit of human society, can seek liberty without himself falling into any anti-social selfishness. His demand to be free from servile conditions is a demand to have no hindrance to the good use of his power to beget and rear a family.

Put briefly, the ideal of liberty appears thus to the young men and women of the Land-Crusade. They think that human love, being a divine instinct, lives only by the making and the keeping of promises, or vows. Now, every vow made is a duty forged. For wedded love the mutual promise of the husband and wife, and the promise, all the more sacred because not mutual, of the father and mother towards the child, forge a chain of duty which demands the utmost freedom from all let or hindrance. And the youth who are now looking for the liberty to worship God by family life are turning from the servile conditions of the modern town as man has made it to the free conditions of nature made by God.

SEVENTH MOTIVE: LOVE OF THE FATHERLAND.

Lastly, the men and women who are preparing to quit the towns for the land of their native country are prompted by the love of their country. They recognise that no town feeds or clothes itself, but must necessarily be fed and clothed by the dwellers on the land. Moreover, they go on to recognise that the more people dwell in the town, the more people must dwell on and till the land. Hence, a State so organised that town-dwellers increase and land-dwellers decrease is a State bleeding to death.

But no other country in the world has our excess of town-dwellers over land-dwellers. The results of this ill-made distribution of our people are set out with startling clearness by the Prime Minister — Mr. Ramsay MacDonald — in a recent utterance on the National Crisis:

“It is essential that the confidence of the world in our credit should be restored; otherwise we shall not be able to maintain the value of the pound sterling and the results of that should be very carefully considered. First of all, if there was any collapse of the pound we should be defaulting in our obligations to the rest of the world, and our credit would be gone. This would be fatal, since this country, above all others, depends on the maintenance of its credit, having to buy, as we do, so large a part of our food and raw materials from abroad.” (Broadcast Address — 25th August, 1931).

“If our financial stability is endangered and a run made on our financial resources, the consequences are too terrible to envisage.” (Letter to unofficial members of the Labour Party — 26th August, 1931.)

It is sometimes urged that land-work is hard. The reply must always be: — “Hard or easy, land-work is necessary.” If then, the Nation needs for its life the sacrifice (or, as the present writer would say, the seeming sacrifice) of land-work, this work must be organised, either voluntarily or compulsorily; because a nation, like an individual, cannot take its own life. If voluntary effort fails, the Nation will be compelled to apply compulsion. Flens dico. (“I say it with tears.”) Such compulsion would be a disgrace to any people, especially the people of these Islands, to whom God has committed land that is the most fertile and a climate that is the most temperate of His World.

But the Catholic Land-Crusaders are determined to prevent this disgrace by making voluntary effort not a failure, but a success. Filled with a hope and love that spring from their high vision of faith they are tided to go forth from Egypt’s servile conditions to the liberty of the sons and daughters of God, where they may worship Him with hand and heart. They will not be forgetful that when God bids them worship Him by the commandment “Honour your father and your mother,” He has bid them to give honour, reverence, obedience, and, at times, self-sacrifice to the land that bore them and the breasts of earth that gave them suck.

Prepare your work without and diligently till your ground that afterwards you may build your house. (Proverbs 34:27.)

ITS AIMS AND METHODS.

BY COMMANDER HERBERT SHOVE, D.S.O., R.N.

(Chairman, South of England Catholic Land Association)

The past few decades have seen the birth and death of not a few “Back to the Land” movements in Great Britain. So notorious is that fact that nearly everyone now distrusts all such attempts as “Utopian ideals, desirable rather than attainable in practice.” British farming, we are told, “does not

pay” and the British farmer cannot “compete” with his overseas congener. We have elected to become “the Workshop of the World” and on our ability to maintain that position must depend our national life or death. Events are now showing that, if this be so, Britain is indeed sick unto death.

FIRST AIM: FAMILY SECURITY.

At the moment of writing, there are nearly three million registered unemployed in Great Britain. Never in the past ten years have there been less than a million. All these, as well as all those in employment and the dependents of both classes, have to be fed on the produce of husbandry. They do not eat money, whether they receive it in the form of wages or of a “dole.” Their subsistence, then, is ultimately measured in agricultural produce, and somebody’s farming obviously “pays” them. What is meant by saying that farming in Great Britain “does not pay” is that the directors of the secondary “workshop” production find it easier to make their profits — that is, to get their food — from an exchange with overseas rather than with home producers of the primary things. This can only affect the home producer in so far as he himself lives by exchange — that is, he does not consume his own products, but relies on selling them in a more or less consumable state in order to have money to buy what he does consume, which is too often itself an imported, and generally a factory product. It is because of this commercial way of looking at farming as an “industry” on a par with the secondary industries that it can be said not to pay its practitioners. This concern primarily with markets is the root heresy that has led to the failure of previous “Back to the Land” movements. It is in the avoidance of it that, under God’s providence, the new Catholic Movement hopes to find success.

Peasant Farming is not an industry. It is the art of living on the soil, of extracting first for one’s own family and only secondarily for a market, the treasures of the “storehouse that shall never fail, affording the daily supply for his daily wants” which man “finds solely in the inexhaustible fertility of the earth.” (Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*). It is this sort of farming that alone can offer the freedom from the temptations, the slavery and the miseries of the towns described by Father Vincent McNabb in the first part of this pamphlet. It is therefore this sort of farming that the Catholic Land Associations are seeking to recreate in Britain, whence it has disappeared more completely than from any other State of which we have historical or contemporary record.

The figures of unemployment and the shrinkage of our foreign trade are symptoms of the ominous fact that Great Britain cannot, as a whole, continue to be the “Workshop of the World.” There is not space here to go into the economic reasons and inevitability of this. But to any Catholic it must be obvious that as “God is not mocked” no system founded on the principle that the love of money is the root, not of all evil, but of all “progress” and human improvement can be successful in the long run. Neither can fallen human nature of itself rise to such heights of self-abnegation, nor the image of God be so utterly destroyed in man, as would be necessary for the working of either the “idealist” or the “utilitarian” forms of Communism. As Catholics again, we do not need the economic or philosophical demonstration that can be given of the illusory nature of the dream of a “Leisure State” — whether its form be socialistic, capitalistic or any other ancient or modern system — wherein scientific invention and organisation shall relieve the bulk of mankind from the obligation of spending the major portion of their lives in working for their sustenance.

“Science” has not “abolished scarcity” as the growing school of “New Economists” would have us believe. This we know, because God Himself has said: In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread till you return to the earth out of which you were taken. (Genesis 3:19).

All attempts to mock God by escaping this necessary labour, whether through “science” or otherwise, are fore-doomed to failure. It is not we, the advocates of a return to simple sanity, but the followers of these “will-o’-the-wisps” who are the Utopists.

SECOND AIM: NATIONAL SECURITY.

But the new Catholic Land Movement must not be thought of as an attempt to overthrow the existing order by political or by any direct action. Still less are we seeking to attack any individual, corporation, or class. We realise that the directors of the present system, in helping it, however imperfectly, to supply the needs of the community may be performing a great social service in the world as it is, and deserving of great social respect and material, and even spiritual, reward. Circumstances, often much more than choice, mistakes, often much more than moral failure, whether on his own or others’ part, determine the work at which a man finds himself engaged. And provided that work is not in itself sinful, it can be hallowed, whether the whole system of which it forms part be desirable or no; for the individual is not responsible for that. But we do hold that it is our duty, as Patriots no less than as Catholics, to strive to open a road whereby our fellow countrymen may not merely escape the present bondage and temptations that beset them in the modern industrial city, even more than has notoriously been the case in all cities in all ages, but may build for themselves, and ultimately for the rest of the population, an ark of safety from the deluge of impending industrial decay. Already, as we have said above, industrialism is failing to fulfil God’s plan for humanity in that it cannot provide that work which God has said we must perform. It must therefore be supplemented and, as most of us believe, will ultimately be supplanted by a simpler, healthier and more righteous social system. That system must be based on the land, whence all our sustenance comes, and on the labour of our hands, which God has ordained as the means thereto.

Now, while we believe that, whether in the meanwhile we work for or against it, this is the only possible ultimate development, the continued existence of the vast commercial-industrial organisation, with its specious offers of wealth, luxury and “convenience,” its false philosophy of ease, leisure and mechanical distractions as the ends of human life, and of work as mere irksome toil to be curtailed as much as possible, must remain as a stumbling block and an irresistible temptation to those not supported by true principles in facing the undoubted physical hardships and inconveniences involved in the return to a peasant life.

It has been said that no people has ever voluntarily gone out from the city into the wilderness, save under the influence of a religious ideal. Mere economic considerations are not enough. Individual selfishness keeps its victims herded together in the doomed city right up to the moment of its final chaotic debacle, when, at last, famine, disease, and bloodshed drive them from the smouldering heap of ruins. Only those with Faith in the Divine Guidance, with Trust in the Divine Providence for the future, will flee, as Lot fled from Sodom. The rest will wait until it is too late and the fire and brimstone, once it begins to rain upon them, rains faster than they can fly. So, as the Faith was the means of re-civilising Europe after the break-up of the Roman Empire, only that same Faith can be the means of re-creating the modern world. Only a firm grasp of ultimate truth and the assistance of God’s grace can strengthen our weak human nature to become the pioneers and exemplars of the finally inevitable exodus. Without such pioneers and exemplars, that new British exodus can only become a blind panic, in which our civilisation will be destroyed as utterly as that of Nineveh or Babylon. On the Catholic minority must fall the burden of saving our country.

THIRD AND FINAL AIM: SPIRITUAL SECURITY.

In order, however, that we may have the full benefit of such Divine Help, it is vital that we should not begin by cutting ourselves off from the freest possible access to all the means ordained by God for our reception of it. Isolated individuals, single families, or even very small groups of families, going out from the towns into our depopulated countryside are very much exposed to such dangers. The first pioneer to go forth at the head of our armies must be Our Blessed Lord Himself, and there must be rallied round Him a bodyguard strong enough and concentrated enough to uphold the honour of His court, as well as drawing their own inspiration from as intimate and as continuous contact with Him as possible.

FIRST MEANS: THE VILLAGE COMMUNITY.

This dictates to us the primary conditions of our method. It is not our object merely to help Catholics back to the land, but to re-create a Catholic Community on the Land. The unit of our re-colonisation then must be the group of families large enough to support a priest and a school. In short a country parish.

Besides the spiritual advantages of this, it will powerfully contribute to make possible the realisation of the economic organisation we have in view; the true Peasant Life. An individual, or even a single family, would find it very difficult to provide all their essential needs from their own plot of land. The degree of comfort thus attainable would also be very limited. Such hardships — approximating to those of Robinson Crusoe on his island — even if it were possible to find heroic souls willing voluntarily to undergo them, are neither necessary nor desirable. God made man to live in society, and the rule of society is the rule of mutual help. As it is incumbent on the members of a Family to co-operate for their mutual support, so it is the obligation — at any rate in charity — of neighbours to co-operate for the lightening and better performance of their common toil. Such co-operation can, however, only be carried on safely and without the friction, jealousies, distrust, and intrigues that have wrecked so many well-meant attempts, if the spirit of the society is a right spirit; if the commonly recognised ideal is the service of God, rather than the service of Mammon. This we shall not find if we continue to rely on things only producible by, or obtainable from, the commercial-industrial system. We must, as far as possible, cut ourselves off from such things. And the stronger our group is numerically — provided it can remain a group of real neighbours in the spiritual as well as in the local sense — the greater will be its capacity thus to become truly self-supporting, and the greater the comfort in which it can support itself from its own land.

At the Conference of the Catholic Land Associations of Great Britain, held at Oscott College in August, 1931, a resolution was passed affirming the incompatibility of our objects with industrialised or large scale farming, and both the Midland and the South of England Catholic Land Associations have definitely included in their statements of objects a clause pledging themselves to work for the “Family Subsistence Farm” as the normal type to be re-created. This must, however, be read as complementary to the idea of group settlement and of mutual neighbourly help within the group, as outlined in the preceding paragraph.

SECOND MEANS: FAMILY INDEPENDENCE.

The principle of the “Family Subsistence Farm” is that each family should plan and execute the cropping of its own land with a view primarily to its own needs and not with an eye to the market. In practice, there will certainly be a surplus of some products, if only for the reason that prudence dictates the allowance of a margin for contingencies of season, et cetera. This surplus will be the

marketable produce, which will provide for the feeding of those specialists in town or country whose business it is to produce the secondary things of life, the “culture building” class of non-manual workers, the “artistic” craftsmen, et cetera, et cetera, whose concern is with the spires and pinnacles of the social order, whose foundations are laid in the land by the husbandmen. But in any truly stable order of society, it must be the rule that “the husbandman that labours must first partake of the fruits.” This is best ensured by freeing him as far as possible from dependence on a system of exchange over which he has no control, and of the conditions of which he has no opportunity of forming an accurate judgment.

These are the conditions of production for a distant market, but they do not obtain in a small community of neighbours, and in such a community specialisation, whether in the production or the preparation of consumable or of “capital” goods — that is, tools, buildings, et cetera — makes for material improvement without loss of freedom. The principle governing such specialisation is generally respected in the practice of normal peasant societies, though not often recognised as a clear theoretical basis of civil policy. It is simply the common-sense idea that the normal family should, as far as reasonably possible, provide itself with all those requirements of which it needs a continuous supply, and in the provision of which its members will therefore necessarily become proficient, and should obtain from specialists those things of which the need is more rarely felt, and in the making of which its members will thus be less proficient, because less practised, than the specialists, and usually un-provided with the necessary tools, et cetera.

There are also certain pursuits, such as bee-keeping, herb-growing, the raising of stock — as, for example, horses, poultry, or pigs — not so much for immediate utility as for the improvement of the breed, et cetera, the efficient performance of which seems to require a special aptitude or study and may well become a whole-time speciality.

But these will grow naturally in a peasant community to supply the needs of that community. The danger today is that the thing is hopelessly overdone and the general type of “small-holding” is thought of as a “chicken-farm-cum-tomato-house” to supply produce for a distant market. This makes the small-holder a mere outlying urban worker dependent on the towns, and reverses the natural order of things, wherein the towns exist to serve the country and not vice versa. That is why we stand for the general mixed subsistence holding as our type, though we do not condemn the specialist as the exception.

THIRD MEANS: ORGANISED TRAINING.

It will be readily understood that such a programme can only be carried out by the acquisition for each settlement of a considerable area of land. Scattered plots cannot be utilised for the full application of our principles. Our policy, therefore, is to collect the main body of our “parishioners” and get the organisation as complete as possible, concurrently with seeking out for them an area on which they can settle as a group. We do not, as a general rule, advocate sending our colonists out piecemeal, even if there is room for the extension of a colony round land to be originally occupied by one or two families. Later, when a group has its organisation, it will be more practicable to send recruits direct to the settlement if we have sufficient land not fully occupied. In the meanwhile, it is felt that the most hopeful policy is that of beginning with a training farm, whereon the future settlers can learn the necessary technique and at the same time get together and organise their personnel. It has to be kept in mind that the majority of our recruits will need to be taught, not only the

technique, but the very conditions of country life. We cannot hope to succeed merely by emptying them directly out of the cities onto the land, and there leaving them to fend for themselves.

It is, of course, possible that we shall find it most practicable to cut up the original training farm itself into individual holdings for those trained there. If we are so blessed that we find ourselves coming into possession of suitable estates and recruiting suitable recruits sufficiently rapidly, the foundation of colonies by a process somewhat analogous to the spread of a Religious Order, by establishing new houses or off-shoots from a “Mother-House,” may well be looked for. But that is a matter for the future. At present, our endeavour is to get the training centres established. For this purpose, each association requires in its area a suitable estate and sufficient funds to make a beginning.

There are already two such centres in being. [See the ‘Update’ section, for the latest news.] At Broadfield Farm, Symington, Lanarkshire, the Rev. John McQuillan, D.D., has established a colony under the aegis of the Scottish Association — the pioneer of the movement — where between twenty and thirty young men and boys, recruited for the most part from the poorer quarters of Glasgow, are daily becoming more proficient and more nearly entirely self-supporting so far as the production of their own food direct from the soil is concerned. All the work is done by hand, even to the thrashing of corn by the flail and the cutting of both hay and corn with the scythe. In this connection, it is amusing and instructive to note that so far from the original gloomy prophecies of lost crops made by local farmers having been fulfilled, a request was received from one of them towards the end of the first harvest for assistance from the colonists in cutting his own “laid” oats!

At Old Brown’s Farm, Chartridge, near Chesham, Buckinghamshire, a group of young men have been established by the South of England Catholic Land Association. This farm, situated in the Chilterns, is pre-eminently suited for the growth of cereals; indeed, even when taken over, considerably more than half its 140 acres were under the plough. In addition to the training of the colonists, it is hoped here to provide an object lesson in what really can be done towards the revival of Rural England by the application of the true principles of local self-support and the elimination of the dominating middleman.

So far as possible such surplus as has to be sold will be sold direct to consumers and in a completely consumable form.

This will entail the development of subsidiary crafts and an eventual revival of a number of village industries at present swamped by urban mass-production and commercial methods. It is hoped that in a few years practically completely self-supporting groups may be thrown off as “swarms” from this parent hive, able at once to take over and distribute amongst themselves some of the now almost derelict estates and “ranches” with which the country is covered.

Meanwhile the multiplication of such centres as each Association or each Diocesan Branch of the various Associations is able to set up its own establishment is in itself a step towards the re-population of our countryside and a means of creating widespread local interest in different districts, as well as going some way towards making each such district self-supporting.

GENERAL METHOD: COORDINATED DECENTRALISATION.

It may be asked why there is more than one association. As a matter of history, the English Associations were founded by the independent, but almost simultaneous action of groups happening to come together in different centres—in London and Birmingham respectively. But it is felt that the

difference of conditions in the South and in the Midlands, and of both from Scotland, makes the preservation of distinct organisations the most convenient method of attaining our ends. In fact, we welcome the multiplication of Associations, for we believe in decentralisation of all that can be efficiently decentralised and in associations rather as a means of coordinating than of initiating individual and local effort. But to watch over the interests of the Movement as a whole, and as a coordinating link between the associations, a Standing Joint Committee, consisting of the Chairman and Secretary of each local association, has been set up.

Generally speaking, the Associations are formed to operate within areas corresponding with the ecclesiastical divisions of the country into Provinces or Dioceses, though the Provincial division in England has had to be somewhat modified owing to the rather anomalous geographical boundary between Westminster and Birmingham, a boundary which does not correspond with any natural division of the country from the point of view of land settlement or agricultural conditions. The ideal, of course, is that each diocese or even each county within a diocese should eventually have its own Association or branch of a larger provincial or diocesan Association working as an officially approved diocesan institution, and where possible in co-operation with other such institutions, for example, Rescue Societies.

HOW YOU CAN HELP US.

From the foregoing, it will be seen that we have a difficult task. But for our reliance on the Providence of Almighty God and our belief in the principles laid down by His Vicars on earth in the great Encyclicals on which we have based our constitution, we might think it too difficult. With our present small numbers and smaller material resources, we have to devote a great part of our energies to propaganda and, above all, to Prayer. If you, the reader of this pamphlet, feel that you cannot help us materially, do not, we beg of you, forget that, whatever your circumstances, you can powerfully assist us in these directions. We need funds, we need land — either as a gift, or on loan or lease — we need pioneers, both clerical and lay, who will actually undertake the resettlement of our devastated country and personally make the sacrifices thereby entailed. Of potential settlers, there is no lack, if we can provide them with leaders. But not all those leaders can be actual settlers themselves. We must maintain touch with the urban population from within, if we are to help the new exodus on any large scale or over any extended period. Those then, who, from whatever cause, feel themselves unable to go out in person or immediately, can still be of great service to us by giving us their leisure, by working on our committees and in our propaganda, even if they cannot subscribe largely to our funds, or offer us land or technical knowledge. And all, without exception, even if they cannot spare the time for active work, can pray for us and for our intentions.

AN UPDATE.

By Kevin Ford.

THE NEW CATHOLIC LAND MOVEMENT.

<http://catholiclandmovement.org/>

1. Introduction.

The following question is often asked today of those seeking information regarding the New Catholic Land Movement:

What is the New Catholic Land Movement and what are its motives and goals? It is also often questioned whether such a movement is necessary today. It is believed by the advocates of the New Catholic Land Movement that such a movement is central to the restoration of Catholic rural life and culture. What follows is a brief history of the movement, as it was once known in Great Britain and the United States at the start of the Twentieth century as well as the motives and goals for the movement and the need for its re-establishment today.

2. History.

The Catholic Land Movement began in Great Britain in the early Twentieth century as a response to the ever growing industrialization happening in that country. This movement sought to restore Catholic families on the land not for the sake of profit, but for the sake of the family. During the 1920s and 1930s, England was hit with high unemployment. At this point, many Catholics had left the land in search of the promised wealth of industrialization in the cities. What these families often found in urban areas was squalor, decadence, and vice that would have been unimaginable on the farms they once owned. It was this injustice that caused Pope Leo XIII to write in his Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*: “In any case we clearly see, and on this there is general agreement, that some opportune remedy must be found quickly for the misery and wretchedness pressing so unjustly on the majority of the working class.” It was at this low point in history that the Catholic Land Movement was established in hopes of repopulating the countryside with Catholic farmers unfettered from the bonds of factory work and urban destitution. It was hoped that man, when freed from these burdens of wage slavery, would be happy providing primarily for his family on the land and only secondarily selling the surplus to provide what he could not provide himself. The movement established training farms and founded several Catholic Land Associations across Great Britain. There was some level of success, but ultimately the movement was doomed to fail for a variety of reasons that will be explained below.

The Catholic Land Movement was a practical application of the economic theory often called Distributism, which was promoted by G.K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, Father Vincent McNabb O.P., and other influential English Catholic thinkers. Distributism is an economic system based on the family rather than on the individuals (Capitalism) or on the Society as a whole (Socialism). It is an alternative to the twin evils of Capitalism and Socialism that concentrate wealth in the few and make servility of the many. Most importantly, it is a Catholic Economy, that builds up the family rather than destroying it.

The premises of Distributism are rather simple and straightforward: 1.- Real Property, or the ownership of the means of production, ought to be as widely distributed (hence the name Distributism) to as many people as possible. That is, — No monopolization, chains, et cetera. 2.- Farmers and Craftsmen ought to form guilds to protect their rights to real property and maintain the system. These guilds protect against monopolies and chains and assist those of the same profession in setting prices, standards of quality, qualifications for the practice of the trade, et cetera. These set prices, for example, then make competition based on quality rather than extortion, which is often the case in the ‘big box stores’. 3.- The principle of subsidiarity, whereby the responsibilities of a given authority are not usurped by a higher authority and vice versa, should be practiced to properly order society. These are the three basic tenets of Distributism. It was the aim of its promoters to form an economic system that upheld family life by allowing men to have control over their own property and to stay put to work with their families rather than selling their labor to work on property owned by others.

Distributism is often swallowed up in the Catholic Land Movement because this economic theory is dependent on the existence of a large group of land-owning families and craftsmen. The Catholic Land Movement ultimately was doomed to fail, and its main remembrance in history is through the essays written by its founders.

The reasons for its failure were many, but the greatest amongst these were the following. Its greatest proponents were lost during the outset of the movement: G.K. Chesterton died in 1936 and Father McNabb died in 1943. Hilaire Belloc suffered a debilitating stroke in 1941 and died in 1953. The Voice of the movement was suddenly silenced. Without the guidance of these leaders, it was only a short time before things began to unravel. This untimely loss of leadership was coupled with a general lack of material and spiritual support. If you add to these setbacks the onset of World War II, you have an almost insurmountable obstacle to the movement's success. The last of the training farms closed during the beginning years of World War II. Nonetheless, the movement did not fall from the history books and today it is more needed than at its founding. The original movement's greatest fault may have been that it was simply premature. The scourge of materialism was nowhere near what it is today, and many people simply had not tasted enough of its poison to be sick enough to seek an antidote. Thus ended the saga of the original Catholic Land Movement, but let us move forward to our modern day and learn why the Catholic Land Movement is needed now.

3. Why the Catholic Land Movement is Needed Today and What is its purpose?

Over seventy years ago, the last of the training farms set up by the Catholic Land Movement closed, and the movement was largely forgotten in the aftermath of World War II, which followed directly. Yet, today many voices again are speaking up about the need for a New Catholic Land Movement. Pope Benedict XVI once remarked that "This is the moment for the re-evaluation of agriculture." If indeed the initial Catholic Land Movement failed primarily due to its prematurity, then indeed the problems unresolved then have matured and borne much rotten fruit. Both Capitalism and Socialism have done their share to destroy the family and expel them from the land. Socialism confiscated lands while Capitalism made farming unprofitable with its constant focus on income and the industrialization of the fields. It is then, duly noted that a living out of Distributism could indeed have many positive effects for families. Distributism is not based on the constant need for expansion and profits, but rather based on higher Catholic spiritual principles. It is believed that independent communities of small farmers and craftsmen could form a basis for the restoration of all Catholic life. However, until now there has been no one to lead this charge out of the cities and into the fields. Without leadership and vision, often families find themselves alone on a farm working to make ends meet, and unfortunately, all too often, the farm is second to some other job. Families in cities and suburbs experience a similar isolation and loneliness even while being surrounded by many people. Below you will find motives, aims, and means for the restoration of the Catholic Land Movement to address these concerns. It should also become clear what the movement is, what it wishes to accomplish, and what means it will use to accomplish these.

4. Motives.

Love of God, the Church, the Family, the Land, and Catholic Culture.

No movement has ever been successful that did not have as its first motive love for God. The New Catholic Land Movement is motivated by and derives all its motive force from God Himself. We seek simply that in all things God would be glorified. It is hoped that families leaving our modern materialistic culture to live in rural community with other families will best be able to serve Jesus

Christ and His Bride the Church. As Christ makes it clear in the Parable of the Seed and the Sower, only the seed that falls on good ground will bear good fruit. The New Catholic Land Movement seeks to provide good soil by founding and building up rural Catholic communities that are as independent as possible. This then would allow families to remain on the land to pray and work together while preventing the dismantling of family life so common today.

5. Aims.

1.- Restoring the family as the basis for society.

Our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI once stated: “The rural family must regain its place at the heart of the social order.” Individualism is at the heart of many of the woes seen in today’s society. The New Catholic Land Movement seeks to remedy this by providing the conditions necessary for families to grow together in holiness through work and prayer. A family that provides for itself most of its own necessities can live peaceably on the land without some modern conveniences. Too often, the cost of this modern materialism is the soul of the family.

2.- Stewardship of Creation.

Stewardship of Creation is one of the tenets of Catholic Social Teaching and is something that must not be left to the secular order. Christians need to step in and be the leaders by living in ways that counter the modern materialistic mode of life. The New Catholic Land Movement seeks a simpler ideal where the family provides as much for its own needs as possible and is dependent on the other families in the community for much else that is needed. In this way, family independence and security are ensured and not subject to every economic high and low. The father (and mother often) is no longer forced to leave the home and become a mere money provider. Rather, this simpler mode of life allows the father to remain physically present on the farm and remain in his place as the spiritual leader of the family. This then allows the mother also to have an important economic role in running the farm and taking care of the home and the children. This order is restored and the insanity of the modern way of life is combated in some small way.

3.- Building Catholic Community.

Today, many Catholic families feel isolated and alone in the larger cultural milieu. Often times there are many fears and anxieties as these families seek to keep the purity of the children’s minds and bodies intact. Catholic community is essential for living out our Catholic faith in its fullness. In true Catholic community, charity is the rule of life and children can be raised without the negative pressures found in the larger culture. Christianity is not meant to be lived alone. We are members of one Body and it is the movement’s hope that rural Catholic communities one day again will thrive.

4.- Restoring Catholic Culture.

In many rural places in the West, there are still traces of Catholic rural life from an era when Catholic rural culture flourished. If Catholic culture is to be revived it will happen around the hearth in homes filled with love for Christ, in quiet evenings of singing Christian hymns, reading good books, and filling the home with authentic Christian Charity. The New Catholic Land Movement seeks to restore Catholic culture in rural homes everywhere. When again families live out and celebrate the great feasts of the Church and kneel together again for family rosaries then Catholic rural life will be well on its way to a true restoration.

6. Means.

1.- Prayer.

The motive force behind any active movement must be prayer. No movement whatsoever would be pleasing to God if it did not rely on His aid constantly. The New Catholic Land Movement then seeks to set up an apostolate of prayer for the success of the movement. Members of the movement will be asked to pray daily for the success of the movement. Especially recommended prayers are the Rosary, the major hours of the Divine Office, and mental prayer. It is even more fitting if the prayers can be said together with the family. The only requirement will be one of prayer, but as to the mode and amount of prayer, that will be left to the participants.

2.- Education.

The New Catholic Land Movement seeks first to get the ideas of the movement to people rural and urban. Through educational pamphlets, talks, conferences, articles, books, et cetera. the movement will be spread first intellectually in hopes of preparing people to make great leaps of faith in order to live out the vision of an authentic Catholic family life. The movement will seek to establish a newsletter and eventually a press to disseminate ideas and to provide for the promotion of the ideas of Distributism and the New Catholic Land Movement.

3.- Organizing Catholic Land Chapters to promote the ideas and form Community.

In order to organize the New Catholic Land Movement, chapters will be established wherever there is a steady group of people willing to make sacrifices to advance the cause of Catholic rural life. The goals of these chapters will be to form authentic Catholic rural communities or to build up those already existing.

4.- Establish a Catholic Rural Life Institute.

As interest increases, it is the goal of the movement to establish a Catholic land training apostolate and Catholic Cultural Center to aid families in gaining the skills necessary to live a Catholic rural life based on the principles of the New Catholic Land Movement. It will also be a place where families can come to not only learn about farming and rural life skills, but to experience and learn about Catholic rural culture with other families. It is hoped that such an institute will also spawn authentic Catholic culture and community.

5.- Work toward building Catholic Rural Communities.

The ultimate goal of the New Catholic Land Movement is to restore Catholic rural culture by building Catholic rural community and building up those which already exist. These communities would be a bulwark of strength for families against the tides of secularism that arise on all sides in our day. The communities would work to live out Distributism and have a variety of craftsmen and small farmers providing for one another's daily needs.

7. The Creation of The New Catholic Land Movement.

The New Catholic Land Movement is greater than just returning to the land. The New Catholic Land Movement can have a large impact on Catholics around this country of the United States and even the world, not only by helping families directly move to the land, but also by teaching about a fuller Catholic way of life that is bound up with this move to the land. In general, this means living a way of life that is radically directed by the Catholic faith. Land fits into this because man is hylomorphic (matter-body and form-spirit-soul) and so has essential ties to the physical, material, and earthly. We have almost completely eclipsed this aspect of our lives in the modern world. It

could be said that we are no longer living a human way of life and this makes it almost impossible to live a Catholic way of life, because grace builds upon nature. This is the key foundation of the land movement, to return to a more human and grounded way of life, to heal our souls and our culture. This has to be more than the action of the few who can and are willing to make an actual move. What about everyone who is “left behind”? The New Catholic land Movement can be a general impetus toward evangelization and a renewal of culture.

It is our hope that the New Catholic Land Movement will receive Church approval to move ahead with our Mission: “Restoring the family on the land to work and pray as one.” It is hereby declared that the founders will be obedient to the Magisterium in all matters and as the inheritors of this movement, we will seek to live out the ideas of the founders of this venerable tradition. May the Holy Family of Nazareth be our constant example and guide.

Check out the U.S. based website: <http://catholiclandmovement.org/>
