

Fr. Dubay's book, *Happy Are You Poor*, is a masterful exposition of the Gospel teaching on material wealth. It presents a compelling, through argument proving that every Christian is called to some level of material poverty, while clearly explaining both what this poverty is and why it is important, and dispelling some common confusions about the topic. Along the way, important frameworks for making decisions and examining one's underlying presuppositions are discussed. The book provides thought provoking questions for individual reflection, including a complete examen, and chapters which lay out how poverty applies to those in different states of life. In the final chapter, the author concludes that it truly is the poor who possess authentic joy.

In the first section, Dubay explains who this book is written for: all who wish to take up the challenge of the Gospel. There are many confusions and misconceptions around the topic of poverty, and in the second chapter these are laid out, ranging from the conceptual to the theoretic to the practical, including questions about the meaning of poverty, the relation of poverty to destitution, detachment, moderation, availability, whether poverty is comparable with admiration of Creation, how political and economic orders relate to Gospel poverty, and the practical problem of living poverty within a marriage, community, or society. All these questions and concerns are temporarily set aside, while some basic criteria in the quest for the truth of the matter are laid down. Among these basic criteria are the rejection of relativism, the primacy of New Testament revelation and the Teaching Church, and the witness of the saints. The author also provides secondary criteria, including sociological research on our world and philosophic reflections on the meaning of ownership. The following discussions presuppose agreement with these criteria. In the fourth chapter, a set of basic premises is laid down: that our destiny is eternal, that joy is found in the Holy Spirit, not in material things, that we are to be totally in love with God, that asceticism is integral to the Gospel, that no one can serve God and Mammon, that Christians are called to totality of pursuit, that we ought to have a consuming concern for the kingdom, that we are all strangers on the earth, that we are all pilgrims together, and that understanding Gospel poverty requires complete conversion of heart.

The Second section opens with what Gospel poverty is not: e.g., laziness, destitution, miserliness, mere detachment, availability, insensitivity, or sentimentalism. This clarification is followed by a series of four chapters in which the premises from the preceding section are used to explain the primary values of poverty: an emptiness that readies one for the kingdom by freeing one from the values of the world and predisposing one towards humility; a personal frugality that gives one the ability to share material goods with others even from our own need; a radicality which gives one credibility as an apostle before the world; and the ability to treat life as a pilgrimage, and give a pilgrim's witness to others.

The Third section lays out the three levels of radicality: the first level to which all Christians are called, comprising correct motivation in the use of material goods, working for one's living, sharing to equality with the poor, avoiding superfluities, contentment with simplicity of life, and avoidance of vanity in dress; the second level, to which at least some are called, comprising the giving up of necessities for others, directly serving the poor, and poverty just short of destitution; and the third level for which some are given a special call, comprising actual destitution as an

identification with the sufferings of others and a particular way of following Christ. This explanation is followed by a chapter on the difference between superfluities and necessities. Necessities are those things which are essential to the fulfillment of a goal; in our case, the goals of survival, health, spiritual well-being, and fulfillment of our human functions in society. Fr. Dubay then goes on to point out that less pressing needs must give way to more pressing needs, and that if we love our neighbor as ourselves, his pressing need will obligate us to "give from our need." He goes on to lay out the harm done by a focus on superfluities: the dulling of the mind, the loss of taste for prayer, the depriving our neighbor of what he needs, and the loss of delight in God. The section concludes with an examen on superfluous use of material goods.

The exercise of voluntary poverty in the various states of life is addressed in the Fourth section. The author stresses that the New Testament calls all to voluntary poverty; there is no dispensation for the married, although the practice of poverty may look different in the lives of the married than in the lives of monks and nuns. He gives six suggestions for living frugality in the married state: correct motivation; maintaining one's state in life (i.e. not neglecting duties to children and spouse); being aware of "secular signs" (i.e. even secular writers and thinkers realize that living with moderation and simplicity is healthier); challenging the world by obviously adhering to a different standard of values in life; focusing on genuine, spiritual beauty instead of world vanity; and finally, saintly radicality (some married couples are called to more radical levels of poverty.) There follows a chapter on poverty as it applies to religious, which focuses on the concept that celibacy calls for poverty (it would be a perversion to give up a relationship with a person merely to fill that space with things) and on the love expressed in the total lack of individual possessions in a communal setting; and a chapter on poverty as it applies to the clerical state, which focuses on the need for clergy to be totally, radically in love with God alone, so that they can give an authentic witness to their flock. All chapters in this section contain examples from the lives of saints in the relevant states of life.

The final section consists of a discussion on the joy of poverty. First, arguments from an imagined opponent are refuted. To this opponent, talk of joy in poverty seems like nonsense; because he has made several basic mistakes. The first is dismissal of the Gospel; no mere human being announced that the poor are happy, but rather God in the flesh. The second mistake is the old confusion between poverty, which is called for, and destitution, which is not. The third is a kind of worldly superficiality which equates happiness with comfort and pleasure. Contrary to this position, joy is a spiritual, lasting, inward reality, while pleasure is merely a transitory physical condition. Outward pleasure, while good, tends to lead to excess and boredom, while joy is capable of continual growth and expansion. The saints who embrace poverty, both material and spiritual, can access and achieve this joy, while the worldly can not. This is because poverty empties us, removing the distractions that prevent God from filling us with joy.

The book concludes with a detailed examination of conscience on the use of material goods.

