

THE LITURGY  
OF THE LAND

*Cultivating a Catholic Homestead*



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Jason M. Craig & Thomas D. Van Horn

TAN Books  
Gastonia, North Carolina

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# I N T R O D U C T I O N

It seems that most families have an “agrarian moment” at some point. It happens when they dream of their family living on a farm, growing food, working together, slowing down, unplugging, and enjoying such a life with others. They see children in the yard feeding chickens, mothers in the garden checking on what is ripe for the table, and the father coming back from the field, perhaps discussing the day’s work with an older son in celebratory satisfaction, sharing work, responsibility, and care for the same place with one another. They see themselves working hard but closer to home and closer to each other.

Often, people that find themselves longing for life on the land are serious in their faith because they find something in their modern way of life that, at best, makes it difficult to live their faith and, at worst, is inherently opposed to it. In fact, many budding agrarians point to their faith as the very thing “driving” them to the land.

In *The Liturgy of the Land*, our proposal is that while it is possible to romanticize the life of homesteading to the point of sentimentalized caricatures of reality, it is also true that homesteading is romanticized because it is romantic. The family homestead is not simply a different *option* among others, as if life is nothing but a series of lifestyle choices, but it is the *natural* place and work that lends itself uniquely to growth in virtue and holiness. In short, life on a homestead is good because it brings us closer to our

family, to nature, and to our local community. Yet, the greatest motivation to take up this lifestyle is that homesteading can help orient us more fully and simply toward our true and lasting happiness, which is God Himself.

### AN OLDISH WORD

To better understand what we mean by a Catholic homestead, we might consider why we use that word in the subtitle and not “farm.”

The word “homestead” originates from the Old English word *hamsted*, which could refer to a specific home or even a village. “Home” obviously refers to the dwelling of a family, and the old word *stead* referred to a place that was firm and established; think of *stead* with another related word, “steady.” A homestead is a place where a family is rooted in the use or ownership of a piece of land.

American usage, however, has given the word staying power, as it referred to the various homesteading acts of the federal government that launched people out—especially in the westward expansion of the United States—to establish themselves on newly claimed or conquered lands. Wrapped up in this history, homesteading has some mixed realities for us today, but its roots are deeper than one nation’s history because the homesteaders then were mostly looking for the same thing they are today—even if the realities look very different.

In both Old and American English, therefore, we see that a homestead is not merely a property used to grow crops but a piece of land defined by the presence of a rooted family. Also, contrary to charges of isolationism, the connection to words defined as “village” reminds us that Catholic families rooted in the land always grow outward into communal life, hopefully and most ideally with other Catholics, so that the community can meet both physical and spiritual needs. The land is also utilized primarily for the purpose of providing for that family in a manner usually called *subsistence*, which means the agricultural effort is oriented toward the life of the family itself and, therefore, the family is oriented toward the life of the farm. The union of the family and the land is sacred, naturally mimicking the fruitful love of man that, when true and lasting, is fruitful and life-giving.







## A CATHOLIC HOMESTEAD

If it is the family that makes a piece of land a homestead, it is the true Faith that makes the homestead Catholic. Our Faith is not merely a sort of religious branding that surrounds the practical work of the land; rather, it guides and sanctifies our work. We don't just pray our work goes well, but the work itself becomes actual prayer. Our Faith is the very life of our homesteads, and the liturgy we work on our land is nurtured by and united with the liturgy at the altar. The teachings of our Faith shape how we approach and cultivate our land and homes. We often hear that you can't separate work and "real life" from Sunday Mass and your life of faith. The same is even more true when the liturgical seasons and the seasons of nature are more clearly united. The cultivation of faith and the cultivation of land are so easily intertwined that it becomes no mystery as to why Our Lord so often spoke in agricultural parables. The Kingdom of God truly is like a seed sown in good soil, and good soil reminds us of the Kingdom of God.

Most people know that our technology-loving, post-industrial society is new. For centuries upon centuries prior—literally from the beginning of time—the work common to most men the world over was finding, growing, securing, and preserving food. These acts were foundational for staying alive, but providing for bodily needs also grew into beautiful and intricate cultures where food wasn't just important for staying alive but for living a life. This is because we, as man, must provide food like the beasts, but our work builds up into culture because we have souls. Intertwined with and sanctified by the Church, the life of prayer, work, fasting, and feasting formed a single life, an integrated whole. In the vast countryside of Christendom, the work of God (worship) and the work of the land was the life of the people, a single life undivided.

This natural work of man could truly be called a liturgy, a Greek word that means "the work of the people." Liturgy is work done for others, with others. The liturgy of the Church, as we know, is the life of the spirit received in the body through earthen elements grown and gathered by the faithful and made holy by the clergy. There will always be a close link between the work of the land and the work of the altar since the latter cannot happen without the former—the farmer. It is man who, from the soil and by his work, brings forth the goods of the earth that become the sacraments, become heavenly things. The work of the land does not stop at keeping our bellies full but is literally taken up by God through the Church to bring us to heaven and heaven to us. This is why we entitled this *The Liturgy of the Land*, communicating the connection between

our life working in nature and our life in God. This is the work particularly suited to the laity, to the family, and to Catholic communities. It is by the cultivation of nature that we are brought into proximity and intimacy with the cultivation of faith and virtue.

The root of the word “cultivate” (*cult* in English from the Latin *cultis*) holds together a sort of holy tension between heaven and earth, and it is the vocation of man—body and soul—to hold the two together. “Cult,” in Latin, can refer to the worship of God *and* the work of the land. This dual-purposed work has even caused tension for theologians. In trying to put a word to the act of Christian worship in the liturgy, Saint Augustine described why he does not prefer the word *cultus*, which is where we get the word “cultivate”: “The word ‘cult’ (*cultus*) by itself would not imply something due only to God. . . . This word is employed not only in respect of things which in a spirit of devout humility we regard above us, but even some things which are below us. For from the same word are derived *agriculae* (cultivators), *coloni* (farmers) and *incolae* (inhabitants).”<sup>1</sup>

Saint Augustine would settle on the Greek *latreia* to describe Christian worship, but for homesteaders, the tension he sensed about the word *cult*, being a word employed both when man looks up to God in worship and down to earth in work, is perfect. Our homesteads and the work involved with them live in this space, unique to man, wherein our prayer and work are two lungs in the same body, physical and spiritual. This is the liturgy of the land.

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1 Quotes in R. Jared Staudt, *The Primacy of God: The Virtue of Religion in Catholic Theology* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2022), 35.







P A R T

— 1 —

CLEAR THINKING





# C H A P T E R

# — 1 —

## BACK TO THE HOMESTEAD

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*“Pater meus agricola est” (My Father is a farmer).*

—JOHN 15:1<sup>2</sup>

*“Go forth, Christian soul, to the unfallen earth, and there amidst the tares and briars sing the song of work that is worship. Soon around your croft will gather a sheaf of homes and homesteads, where the GREAT SACRAMENT may prepare the ploughman for the furrow, the monk for the choir, the priest for the Altar.”*

—FR. VINCENT MCNABB<sup>3</sup>

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The homestead is the natural habitat and setting for home and family. By “setting,” we do not merely mean that it is some sort of decoration or “look”; rather, it is a place where the most fundamental work and relationships of man are joined and ordered together for the health of body and soul. Many other arrangements of households and work are good, but the work of a homestead, of tending land with and for a family, is the original design for man’s life on earth.

Not only is the homestead secure in what it produces on a practical level (what is more necessary than food?) but it is that place where one works close to those things so

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<sup>2</sup> The translation usually reads that the Father is a “husbandman,” as in the Douay-Rheims, or some other specific aspect of farming, but the Vulgate has the word *agricola*, which can be translated simply as “farmer.”

<sup>3</sup> Vincent McNabb, *The Church and the Land* (Norfolk, VA: IHS Press, 2003), 35.

essential to human flourishing. The homestead experiences and feels the lessons from God through nature, through cooperation with the family, and in the cycles and seasons that represent life itself, like the “resurrection” of spring and the “death” of winter. It is a place where truth is obvious, though that truth is oftentimes as painful and difficult as it is instructive. The homestead is the place where our efforts are directed by and for their true ends, which are the faithful tending of our vocations and the glory of God, our ultimate end.

We have all felt how modern life seems to speed up with a centrifugal-like force that pulls us from the center, the home, each other, and even God. The more we do, the tighter we have to hold on to what matters. The force of it is dizzying and requires much attention and effort to stay close. Sometimes, we feel like we’re losing our grip entirely and long for a different way to live, one that draws us back into the center.

We might ask why homesteading, which is also very “busy” and demanding, seems to have a different effect. Instead of pulling us outward, it is a way of life that draws us toward the home and the relationships that matter most. The well-ordered and devout homestead achieves that seemingly impossible goal of bringing the various pulls of life into true balance: work, provision, family, play, nature, and prayer. It does this precisely because it isn’t actually bringing anything into balance. Things can only be balanced when they are *separated* for comparison or coordination. Picture a scale with two sides. What we place on the scale is disconnected; that’s what makes the comparison of weight possible. The homestead gives a sense of order not because it is balanced but because it *integrates* these things into a working whole by living in the natural setting—the habitat if you will—of the family.

Of all the motivations for moving away from our modern, technologically saturated lives to the simple work of a homestead, one of the best is to reintegrate our lives in a truly human and holy way.

As an example of the difference between integration and balance, just consider spending time with your family. When work is done away from home for most of the day, we often find ourselves trying to cram in quality time in a couple of hours at night and on the weekends. But because our job is at a desk, we might also have to find time for exercise, so we join a gym. And because our children also need exercise, they join a sports team. But because we know that our social life is important too, members of the family join this or that group based on their age, especially for the sake of the mentoring







and formation they need to mature and grow in virtue—at least that should be a reason. And, don't forget, we have to get to Mass and find time for prayer together.

All of these things are good and even necessary. But because they are separate (you can spend hours a day just commuting to activities), we must work hard to keep these different things in balance. Disputes and competition for time disrupt the peace of our family, potentially estranging us from one another, or the less important eclipses the more important. Without proper balance, these competing interests might become something like an autoimmune disease, when the immune system attacks the body it is meant to defend. The good of work, exercise, and even leisure can all jump the bounds of order and, by doing so, attack other goods. Thus, a man may get awards and raises at work but be resented and disrespected at home, even if his paycheck pays the mortgage. A naturally athletic child becomes obsessed with being the best in his sport and finds himself willingly missing Mass to go to a training camp or utterly devastated to the point of despair by an injury. A mother tries to share her wisdom online through a monetized website but gets glued to her phone and grows vain, hypocritical, and artificial.

There are many who are very good at balancing these things and even thrive doing it. It takes a special skill and discipline. Some—perhaps many more—really struggle to keep things together, and as a result, we are seeing a steady disintegration of the family. Without careful balance, good things turn on themselves; things that are meant to live in peace go to war with each other. In fact, one of the most effective attacks of the devil is turning something good into a disordered and self-destructive evil. That is when imbalance becomes disorder, which is an invitation to sin and vice.

By contrast, on the natural homestead, the way of life does indeed draw us back together by *integrating* the good and natural needs of man. The work is right outside, and it involves everyone. And because it is hard work, you can cancel that gym membership; work and exercise are reintegrated. Perhaps the extra food grown there also lowers the grocery bill, allowing you to work fewer hours away from home. This might reintegrate you with your household by simply being present more. Interest in fruit trees, which can be propagated with literally fruitful work and without money, replaces interest in the newest gadget or toy, alleviating further not only the need for more money but the potential vices around wealth. And, in its best form, the work and life of the homestead involve the whole family, so you don't have to squeeze in time

together. As often happens, such work draws you into your local community as you look to mentors and neighbors for help and they look to you. This time together and with your community not only fulfills the natural social needs of man and strengthens those relationships but does so in a way that provides opportunities for mentoring and even for fulfilling the plain command to love your neighbors. You can do this in simple and organic ways because you actually know your neighbors and what their true needs are, such as helping with livestock when someone is sick or sharing the abundance of a garden. There is no need to create lessons of responsibility for your children because they actually are responsible for real things. A single activity on the homestead, like butchering a hog with neighbors, can literally bring together a multitude of human needs—from mentoring to exercise to eating—into a single act. As Wendell Berry says in his poem “For the Hog Killing,” by the need for food and the communal act of killing and preparing the hog “we renew the bond,”<sup>4</sup> speaking of both the bond to the earth and each other. The work brings together. These things are no longer competing for attention but function together, augmenting and complementing each other. That is integration.

### WHY “GO BACK” TO HOMESTEADING?

Here, at the very beginning of this book, we should take a hard look at the most common objection against homesteading: that it is an impractical, romanticized, and unrealistic idea. In short, there’s no “going back” because society is just not ordered that way anymore and, what’s more, to “go back” is a regression of human progress and genius. “Back to the land” is a slogan common to movements with different ideological reasoning—from Catholics to anarchists—but with a common rejection of modern society and a return to a more agrarian (land and farming-based) way of life. After all, one of the most famous books about one of the Catholic “back to the land” movements is called *Flee to the Fields*.<sup>5</sup> Is that what we’re doing when we move to a homestead? Running away? Are homesteaders retreating from modern challenges, withdrawing from society, and even failing to fulfill the call of Christians to be lights in a dark world all in search of some selfies with their boutique chickens?

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<sup>4</sup> Wendell Berry, *For the Hog Killing, 1979* (KY: Fireside Industries Books, 2019), 9.

<sup>5</sup> Hilaire Belloc and John McQuillan, *Flee to the Fields: The Faith and Works of the Catholic Land Movement* (Norfolk: HIS Press 2003).







Instead of “going back” to some agrarian idealism, some might argue, it would be better to make peace with our improved lives and show a little more gratitude for all our material abundance and speedy connectivity. If it is the case that modern man not only moved away from the farm naturally but “escaped” its drudgery, it is not without reason that we might ask, Why go “back” to something that our ancestors left behind?

There are two simple answers to the charge of “going backward” against progress. The first is that the very idea of progress that undergirds the charge comes from post-enlightenment and secularist philosophies that essentially see modern man as the best form of humanity *because it is the latest*. It is a theory not unlike, and not unrelated, to evolutionary theory that considers the “most evolved” form to be the best simply because it out-survived weaker creatures that were ill-suited to the challenges of real life. In other words, version 3.0 of a system is always better than version 2.0, and certainly better than 1.0. But that is precisely what must be challenged, that the latest version is the best version. Clearly, from a spiritual and even natural perspective, we are not only free to question the outcomes of all of our “progress,” but in the face of the breakdown of the family, of local communities, and of religious belief, we are forced to ask harder questions about the directions we have been going. Often, those that want to homestead are rethinking not just where food comes from but the foundations on which our lives are really built.

The second answer to the “going backward” charge is related to the first, but instead of thinking in terms of a timeline (*this* point in history is better than *that* point in history, so we should imitate that), it is a charge that homesteading is merely another lifestyle made possible by the modern order. Perhaps wannabe homesteaders are choosing to imitate some ideal in their imagination, thus demonstrating that they are merely finding another way to enjoy the modern life made possible by technology and the global economy. In that sense, homesteading is not unlike all of the other lifestyle choices of modern man. We might even see the various homesteading movements that come and go as nothing more than other lifestyle fads that only a wealthy and spoiled society could embrace. Perhaps this charge carries more water than the other, but the simple response is that homesteading is not just another lifestyle among others but a primordial one; it is something in us that needs to work with land and family under God’s care. Even if one is homesteading simply because one can afford to, like a wealthy and



retired couple, perhaps it is still good to do so. The act and art of cultivating the land can be pursued on a very large spectrum of engagement and true *need*, but that it gets done and becomes more foundational for life and culture is still something good and necessary, as we will see throughout this book.

Our goal as homesteaders and with this book is not merely to recreate some point in time. We're not just buying period clothing and a butter churn to look a certain way on social media. We are also not merely rejecting everything modern and accepting anything old. Man lives from the earth; it is a reality ever ancient and new. What we are trying to do is live in accord with our created nature while accepting and responding to the realities around us. What we are going "back" to is the philosophical principle that the homestead is the first and most natural place for the family, and that is the reason that it is a place of human flourishing and happiness. "[God] gave man the earth for his cultivation," said Pope Pius XII, "as the most beautiful and honorable occupation in the natural order."<sup>6</sup> The homestead, in other words, is a gift from God and not a construct of man. Pope Pius XII also said that our modern industrialized society and the natural agrarian society "produces altogether different men."<sup>7</sup> We are not only free to ask if we can build our lives on different foundations, producing "altogether different men," but compelled to.

## NOT ORGANIC

Another important consideration when we speak of society "leaving" the homestead is that the process—the loss of agrarian economies and households—was not organic. The reason most of us are no longer farmers is because society was rearranged by man in that way.

Catholic historian and scholar Alan C. Carlson helps show that families, especially in the United States, did not "leave" the land at all but have been moved from it by policy and practice. If it is something artificially imposed on the family, especially if it has had a traceably negative effect, then there are stronger arguments to push back and do our best to "go back." Carlson's work has shown that suburban developments have been an intentional objective of government housing policy for close to a century, and these

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<sup>6</sup> Pius XII, *The Life of a Farmer*, from *The Major Addresses of Pope Pius XII*, vol. 1 (St. Paul, MN: The North Central Publishing Company, 1961), 98.

<sup>7</sup> Pius XII, 99.

policies had explicit goals to increase urban populations with the obvious and intentional side effect of depleting the countryside of its farmers. The “suburban experiment,” as Carlson calls it, refers to homes being built in a fashion foreseeing that they would not be places of production but of *consumption*. The more money moves the better.

As an example of these policies that preferred suburbanization, we can consider that almost all homes in the United States once housed spaces for work, food preparation and storage (like cellars), and often even room enough for multiple generations. But in the middle and later 1900s, official policies put us on a different course. For example, mortgage guidelines from the FHA “were systematically denied to any residence that contained facilities designed for use as a productive shop, office, or separate apartment for an extended family member or renter, or preschool,” explains Carlson.<sup>8</sup> The government *wanted* to phase out rural and productive homes in favor of consolidated suburban neighborhoods as a necessary part of a consumer-based, industrial economy.

There is a logic to the government preferring non-productive, suburban homes. Productive homes, like homesteads, remove people from the workforce, reduce the need to purchase new products (consume industrially manufactured goods), and do not generate taxable income nor contribute to the revenue from various sales taxes.

The encouragement of suburbanization also coincided with policies in agriculture often summarized as “get big or get out,” which refers to the consolidation of farms into larger and larger ones, the obvious side effect being fewer farms, which means less farmers. Many can speak well of the low price of food, but the cost has been the loss of farming as a way of life, a general reduction of crop diversity, and lower nutrient density in food (i.e., less healthy food). Wendell Berry has famously traced the policies and their effects in books like *The Unsettling of America*, which points out that America was “settled” by farmers but then the farmers were systematically extinguished, “unsettled,” over time in favor of a corporate and industrialized model. What Berry and many others have shown is that the cost of cheap food is much higher than we have acknowledged.

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8 Allan Carlson, *From Cottage to Work Station* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 76.





*When we think of a farmhouse, we often think of a small, even impoverished dwelling. But traditional societies often built large homes because it was more economical to house multiple generations, as well as workspace, in the same structure. Pictured here is the farmhouse where St. John Bosco was born, which housed many family members.*

Large corporations and investors have also been happy and eager to see farmers leave the land. In the last century, as the number of farmers decreased, the size of farms increased. This was possible because of modern machinery, but it also happened because farming went from the common work of the common man to big business. A family owning a small farm could never be said to be an image of material wealth (i.e., rich with cash), but corporations owning the productive power of hundreds or thousands of those of farms could turn a real and consistent profit, and the need for the product will never go away since people don't just want it but need it three times a day. That's just good business. Therefore, as families left the farms behind, not only did large corporations and speculators gain their labor in the factories in the city, but they gained the land those workers left behind too.

We should note that farming on a large scale does not necessarily mean more food per acre. A man with a spade and a hoe can grow significantly more per acre than a massive farm plowed with a tractor because, as the unofficial chaplain of England's "Catholic Land Movement" Fr. Vincent McNabb point out, "whereas [machines] produces less



per acre, it deceives men because it can deal with more acres.”<sup>9</sup> If we are considering farming *first* as a way of life that also produces food for society, then this is not a net gain. If we think only in terms of production, forgetting culture and tradition, then the loss might not even register.

The housing policy of the government not only moved slowly away from the productive home, especially the farm, but even stopped being based on the family in general. For example, the original 1949 Housing Act explicitly purposed to create homes for families, but in 1982, the word “family” was dropped altogether, showing that the practice and policy of the country had “evolved” to be about houses, not households.<sup>10</sup> Remember, an unhealthy family is not necessarily bad for the economy. More houses based on making and spending money are better than productive, self-sufficient, and intergenerational households.

A family that moves from a homestead to an urban center becomes, by necessity, a more prolific earner so that it can be a consistent consumer and taxable base. If that same home splits into two homes through a divorce, then the consuming power of a home is doubled (two Christmases, two mortgages, more cars, more gas, and so on). And such breakdowns have become significantly more common and possible in the

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9 Vincent McNabb, *Old Principles and the New Order* (Providence, RI: Cluny), 100.

10 Carlson, *From Cottage to Work Station*, 84.



modern economy. Something has gone wrong. One of the reasons the sexual revolution has been so devastating to the family is that the foundation for disintegration was laid when the family became only a consuming unit. The procreative end of the family still gave it a clear purpose. But when the inherent consumerism was applied to sexuality—sex as an individual’s desires pursued for the individual’s fulfillment—the final strand holding it all together seemed to break. Our housing policy and our sexual revolution coincided in disastrous ways. “America’s massive program had turned on itself,” Carlson says of this general policy, “consuming the very social units it was intended to serve; yet few seemed to notice, even fewer seemed to care.”<sup>11</sup>

## THE EFFECT

What happens when the family no longer works together in the shared economy of the home itself? The observable state of the family is that it is in decline, but many focus only on decayed morals and the negative impact of secularization. While these factors matter, it is also clear that the family has a hard time with cohesion and relevance when it only lives together.

Social commentator Robert Nisbet has interpreted and articulated the trend well, pointing out that when a home loses its functionality—its practical usefulness and productivity—it becomes a place primarily for emotional support. Lacking shared work and a practical mutual dependence, the primary purpose of the family is to give unquestioning support to the individual’s interests, success, and endeavors. But being “supportive” meant something very different in times past. It meant that individuals support the family, not vice versa. “In earlier ages,” says Nisbet, “kinship was inextricably involved in the process of getting a living, providing education, supporting the infirm, caring for the aged, and maintaining religious values. In vast rural areas, until quite recently, the family was the actual agency of economic production, distribution, and consumption.”<sup>12</sup> In our present time, it is clear that the family “has progressed from institution to companionship” precisely because it doesn’t do anything productive together.<sup>13</sup>

Without the functional dynamic, it becomes more difficult to instill the truth that the family is the “basis of society,” as we often tell ourselves and our children. This is

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11 Carlson, 84.

12 Robert Nisbet, *The Quest for Community* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2014), 52.

13 Nisbet, 53.

simply because as soon as they walk out the door of the home, they see and sense that the family is *not* the basis of our society in its actual functioning, and this is related directly to the fact that the family is not the meaningful center or even purpose of much of our work and economic reality.

### THE ERODED SOIL OF FAITH

There is another side effect when the family loses its cultural significance and cohesion: the loss of faith. The secular world likes to credit itself for “defeating” faith, claiming that advancement in science and technology has simply displaced the unreasonable and superstitious need for religion. However, Catholic sociologist Mary Eberstadt<sup>14</sup> has shown how it is the very ordering of society away from the family, away from home, that has had the greatest impact on religious practice. Clearly, we have “lost God” in the West, but she shows that it happened alongside the process of industrialization, which had the side effect of disrupting family cohesion, much more than the attacks from atheists. When individuals are raised without meaningful and practical bonds of home, something made possible by industrialization, technology, mobility, and specialization especially, they tend to drift into the dangerous waters of the world much more easily. Men, for example, are significantly more likely to continue in their faith when they have work to share with their children, and children are much more likely to continue in faith if it is reinforced by the presence and example of the father’s work.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, the Church is losing members not because she is losing the argument but because she is losing the family. Removing work from the home has removed people from the home. This movement made the bonds of family more strained, and when the stretched threads snap, people fall away from each other and God. That fall, if you will, is in the same direction and with the same momentum.

Eberstadt also reminds us of the connection between apostasy and the increase of mammon made possible by the increased material production of today’s working world. The reordering of society through industrialization and suburbanization is founded upon material abundance; it’s a defining characteristic. While on the one hand, we can

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14 I am relying on Mary Eberstadt, *How the West Really Lost God: A New Theory of Secularization* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press).

15 These points are well documented in Eberstadt’s book, as well as Dr. Paul Vitz’s book *The Faith of the Fatherless* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2013).





be amazed at the sheer volume and security of material goods, we do well to consider the effect of wealth on the soul. “What caused secularization?” asks Eberstadt. “Material progress did. People got fat and happy and didn’t need God anymore.”<sup>16</sup> Eberstadt points out that this should not be surprising. Our Lord lays out the choice, telling us we cannot serve God and mammon (see Mt 6:24; Lk 16:13).

In summary, what Carlson and others have shown is that the move away from an agrarian society was not an organic market development but a *move*—a construct of man—specifically from government policy and the large corporations investing in farm production for profit. Today, the largest farmland owner in the United States is Bill Gates,<sup>17</sup> second only to the United States government itself. And the policy worked: in the 1800s, nearly 90 percent of Americans were farmers. Today, less than 1 percent are farmers. And the family can live happily in the new arrangement, but not without great effort. We are reasonable, therefore, to seek a different model. We could put it this way:

<sup>16</sup> Eberstadt, *How the West Really Lost God*, 81. Carlson, *From Cottage to Work Station*, 76.

<sup>17</sup> Ariel Shapiro, “America’s Biggest Owner Of Farmland Is Now Bill Gates,” *Forbes*, January 14, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/arielshapiro/2021/01/14/americas-biggest-owner-of-farmland-is-now-bill-gates-bezos-turner/?sh=539edaef6096>.

the displacement of man from his God-given occupation of farmer required the construct of a man-made alternative in the modern economic order. What we homesteaders want is to receive back a gift from God that was taken away by man. We would be delusional to think that starting a homestead would be a magic fix to all of our problems. We would be even more delusional, however, to think that it isn't a very important and reasonable step for many toward living a more natural and family-friendly life.

### WHO THIS BOOK IS FOR

We have written this book based on our experience that confirms the truth of the homesteading family. Both of us “converted” to a life of homesteading and farming around the same time, and we have been comparing notes the whole time, making many mistakes but also finding the truth that the homestead is a beautiful and holy place for a family. We do get to work alongside our family. We have delighted in the fruits of the earth and our labor. We have been able to slow down and enjoy the unique communication of God's life that comes with being in nature more.

But we have also experienced the tension and difficulty of converting to a way of life at odds with much of society's logic and rhythms. We have not fully integrated our whole life, and we recognize that the tension between the modern world and the harmonious homestead does not resolve overnight, so we still have to find a balance between office jobs, part-time jobs, and the demands of a farm. We did not inherit farming as a tradition, meaning we had the challenge of learning it as an art we are not trained in (despite what you might see online, learning to homestead will not come from watching videos). It has been humbling and trying. We have, therefore, written the book that would have been helpful to us in those early years, those that want to go from *here* to *there* on a homestead.

Classicist and Catholic professor John Senior said that it is much easier to make a college boy from a farmer than a farmer from a college boy. The practical, economic, and even emotional challenges are massive. We use the word “conversion” to homesteading intentionally because the more one goes toward the land for life and sustenance, the more you realize how different it is from modern, secular, and consumerist living. It works on a completely different logic, and the more you order your life around the homestead, the more things of modern life you might necessarily leave behind.



Some people will have economic and practical realities that might make the challenge seem insurmountable. We have included, therefore, a large section on some practical considerations for ordering your family differently even if you have to stay put in your current setting that is presumably *not* within an agrarian context.

We should be careful of a prideful and flippant proclamation of “going back to the land,” as if anyone could do it and the skills of farmers are nothing but “hacks” to getting food out of dirt. Homesteading is not another occupation or hobby that is simply a matter of technical application of facts. Where will you go? Who will teach you? What about money and mortgages and retirement? These are questions worth asking and answering if one is serious about investing a considerable amount of time, capital, and effort into the endeavor, especially when many have noted that novice homesteaders throw in the towel after only two to three years—long before the fruit of their labor can even be appreciated. What if you spend a life and family only to find yourself forced back to a “normal” life? In other words, we want to be careful that the trend to homesteading isn’t that, a trend or fad destined to disappoint.<sup>18</sup>

Understanding and examining our motivation for homesteading, therefore, is a helpful step in considering it as a way of life. This book’s contribution to that consideration is not in the technical aspects of growing and harvesting, though we will touch on that regarding broad decision-making. There are already many great resources on the practicality of working the land. What we want to do is point out that this *life of integration*—of work, land, family, leisure, and home—should be approached with a truly Catholic lens. This helps not only in defining success on the homestead but in finding true human happiness. To do that, we must understand that the work of the homesteader, the liturgy of the land, requires a recalibration of both thought and action. The Catholic homestead is simply built on different foundations than those of today’s secular world, and we must understand those foundations, aided by faith, for the house to be built to last. “Unless the Lord builds the house,” says the psalmist, “those who build it labor in vain” (Ps 127:1).

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18 For some observations of those that come and go to the land, see Amanda Fuhriman, “Homesteading is trending but don’t be fooled: ‘You work 10 times more when you live this life,’” Remote Family, March 7, 2023, <https://www.remotefamily.com/homesteading-trend/>.