

The Pacifism and Poetics of Dorothy Day

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Political action had formed Dorothy Day in her youth, and continued to motivate her work, although she was not associated with a political party once her socialist commitments lessened after her conversion to Catholicism. Nonetheless the pacifism she felt called to support in those early days—and its implicit link with social justice—never waned, as her life experiences and later commitments reveal. Multi-faceted and multi-talented, she did more than any other American Catholic to promote the cause of pacifism in the United States in the twentieth century. Trained to be a journalist, she was a gifted writer of prose. Day (1897-1980), who kept close contact with writers throughout her life, had written a successful autobiographical novel before she founded the Catholic Worker Movement with Peter Maurin in 1933. Edith Sitwell (1887-1964), her British contemporary and another convert to Catholicism, believed that to be a good poet one needed to be involved and committed to humanity, although this never led her to take political action. Sitwell wrote:

I am incapable of understanding political questions. I was (I believe as well as hope) born to be a poet; and nobody can be that who does not care for great human problems. But I am unable to understand the mechanisms of politics. (Sitwell qtd. Salter, 97).

Day was just the opposite; her life of action left her little time to write poetry, though she never hesitated to promote it. Poetry and religious faith were leading influences for this remarkable woman, who had as some have enjoyed repeating, something to offend everyone, and yet was nominated for sainthood by a unanimous vote of the United States Council of Catholic Bishops in December 2012 (Fain, on-line).

Life experiences confirm a quest for peace and social justice

Dorothy Day was born in New York, where her father was a journalist and the family moved with him as he sought out various assignments, from San Francisco to Chicago following the Earthquake, when she was eight. They began living in a poor neighborhood on the South Side before moving to Lincoln Park. Day knew about the stockyards, Chicago labor laws, Jane Addams and Hull House—later she would recall that Kropotkin had been received “in Jane Addams’s Hull House in Chicago,” (Day, *Loaves and Fishes*, 1963, 14)—and she was probably also aware of Harriet Monroe's efforts to start *Poetry Magazine*. Certainly the pacifist stance of Jane Addams during World War I would not have escaped her. As an adolescent, Day read Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*, which was set in her Chicago present—though in a different neighborhood. She took long walks with her younger sibling in the stroller, as far West as she could go from Lincoln Park. Excelling at school, she finished early, and aged 16, attended the University of Illinois at Urbana on a scholarship. Applying her new slogan “Workers of the World Unite!” she decided not to ask her parents for money while at school. After two years, she left her studies, moving to New York,

where she began working as a journalist for the socialist paper *The Call*, for a mere five dollars a week. In 1917 she covered a speech by wobbly Elizabeth Gurley Flynn,¹ interviewed Leon Trotsky (Day 1952, 64-65), and was sent to Washington to cover Wilson's declaration of war to Congress (Forest 1987, 29-32). She then worked with the Anti-Conscription League until hired by *The Masses*, where she met Max Eastman, Floyd Dell, and John Reed (Forest 1987, 32-33). After the newspaper *The Masses* was suppressed, Day went to Washington to demonstrate with women who requested the right to vote, on November 10, 1917, and with them she was arrested and jailed (Day 1952, 72-73; Forest 36). Agnes Boulton was Day's roommate after that incident, and they enjoyed going out with Eugene O'Neill who later married Boulton (Forest 1987, 41-42). Meanwhile, Dorothy fell in love with a hospital orderly named Lionel Moise, who would later work as a journalist with Ernest Hemingway. She lived with him for a time, deeply in love, and became pregnant in the summer of 1919. Realizing that she could not return to her family, or enter a home for unwed mothers, or tell her lover—who had promised to leave her if she fell pregnant, her situation seemed dire. When Moise was to leave for a job in Caracas, she gave him the news. He advised an abortion, which she carried out at the end of her second trimester (Forest 1987, 50). Day married “on the rebound” as she herself described it, with a man twenty years her senior (Forest 1987, 51). They went to Europe in the summer of 1920, staying a year, which allowed her time to think and write, resulting in an autobiographical novel, *The Eleventh Virgin*. By the fall of 1921, she had ended the marriage and went to Chicago “where Moise had a job on a city newspaper” (Forest 1987, 51). She worked odd jobs until coming into contact with Robert Minor who edited the communist monthly, *The Liberator*. Leftist groups were under aggressive surveillance at that time, and Dorothy and her roommate Mae Cramer were arrested under false charges for prostitution (Day 1952, 99; Forest 1987, 53). Then, after spending the winter of 1922-23 with her friend Mary Gordon in New Orleans, April 1924 found Day back in New York. With the royalties from the purchase of her novel by Hollywood, she was able to acquire a humble beach house on Staten Island, providing her with the stability of having her own lodging (Forest 56-57).

A new love adventure began with the anarchist Forster Batterham, whom she met through Peggy Baird and Malcolm Cowley. When she had a daughter with him in 1927, she wanted to share the joy and wrote the article “Having a Baby” for *New Masses*. Her text attained such international attention that when she met Diego Rivera in 1931, he mentioned that he had read it (Forest 62). She wanted her child to be baptized in the Catholic Church, but Forster Batterham, who “approved of neither marriage nor religion” (Forest 56), did not favor it. Nonetheless, a nun began coming to her home to give Catholic instruction. Tamar was baptized in July 1927 and Day herself was baptized on December 28, 1927, resulting in the couple's break-up, because they could not be married (Day 1952, 147-8). On her own, she again worked as a journalist to meet expenses, writing for *Commonweal* and *America*. But during the next five years, she was actively seeking “something that didn't exist,” as Jim Forest astutely assessed the situation, “a way of supporting herself and her daughter Tamar through work which joined her religious faith, her commitment to social justice, and writing” (Forrest, 1987, 70). Among other jobs, she began working part-time for Fellowship of Reconciliation, a protestant religious pacifist organization. She joined FOR then, as the only Catholic, and remained a member for the rest of her life (Forest 71). While covering the 1932 “Hunger March” from New York to Washington for *Commonweal*, she realized that the people marching had a community spirit and that Christ loved them whether or not they ever went to church. Recalling the show of police force and local hysteria in Washington, she wrote:

Various women's organizations, pacifist groups, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, Quakers, and others protested against the ludicrous and uncalled-for show of force. There were no Catholic groups protesting. (Day 1939, xi-xii)

The lack of Catholic support apparently irked her, and she thought to herself:

These are Christ's poor. He was one of them. He was a man like other men, and He chose His friends amongst the ordinary workers. These men feel they have been betrayed by Christianity. Men are not Christian today. If they were, this sight would not be possible. Far dearer in the sight of God perhaps are these hungry ragged ones, than all those smug, well-fed Christians who sit in their homes, cowering in fear of the Communist menace. (Day 1939, xiii)

The following day was December 8, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. Day went to pray in the crypt of the Catholic University in Washington: "...the prayer that I offered up was that some way would be shown me, some way would be opened up for me to work for the poor and the oppressed" (Day 1939, xiii). She returned to New York the next day and found Peter Maurin waiting for her. It was a meeting of two very different people, in personality and in social background, yet fortuitous in both senses of the word, since the two contrasting personalities would form an effective partnership.

Peter Maurin was a French peasant from Oultet in Lozère, who had been trained as a teacher by the Christian Brothers School in Paris, and had for a short time been involved with Marc Sangnier's movement, *Le Sillon* (Day 1963, 96). He had emigrated, leaving France for Canada to homestead in 1909, and when that did not work out, he did odd jobs and hard labor across the American continent, once settling in cozily as a French teacher in Chicago. But he soon moved again, to the East Coast, and made a radical decision to base his salary on voluntary donations. He was a self-declared personalist (after reading Emmanuel Mounier, though he would later trace his personalism also to Saint Francis of Assisi), and thought he needed to give Dorothy Day a proper Catholic education based on "voluntary poverty and the works of mercy" (Day, 1963, 97). He did this by assigning her specific readings of authors he had particularly enjoyed such as: Piotr Kropotkin, Vincent McNabb, Eric Gill, Jacques Maritain, Léon Bloy, Charles Péguy, Don Luigi Surzo, Karl Adam and Nicholas Berdyaev (Day and Sicius 2004, xix). Emmanuel Mounier, whose first book, *La Pensée de Charles Péguy*, was published in 1931, had started his philosophical form of personalism by founding the review *Esprit* in 1932.² Peter Maurin read Mounier, and *Esprit*, but his personalism was a more down to earth variety: his three tenants were: "cult-culture-cultivation." He felt that by being down-and-out, he could better commit himself to a practical personalist cause. Within the United States, he wished to give an example of non-ownership. Within six months of their first meeting, Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin co-founded The Catholic Worker Movement in 1933, with *The Catholic Worker* newspaper's first issue symbolically appearing on May 1. The newspaper was a key feature of the movement. It was a monthly, and was published 11 times a year (it is still published today, in 9 monthly issues).

In the 1930s, *The Catholic Worker* took up many causes. Those involved working on the newspaper were also required to prepare soup for the poor. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, "Day consistently emphasized the dignity and the importance of work while encouraging the solidarity of labor with the unemployed, and ever-present poor" (Gregory, 2001, 274). Day covered numerous labor issues from a trained journalist's perspective, including strikes in the steel industry in Philadelphia, a strike by Dairy workers, and a sit-down strike at a General Motors factories in Flint (where she was encouraged by the Archbishop of Detroit). *The Catholic Worker* was behind the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists (Gregory 2001, 278). It fought against anti-Semitism within the American Catholic Church. When Father Coughlin of the Detroit suburb of Royal Oak was broadcasting weekly national radio programs denouncing Roosevelt, Jews and Communists, Dorothy Day's response was to help co-found a new paper, *The Voice*, to counter fascist anti-Semitic Catholic propaganda. In racist America, the logo for *The Catholic Worker* newspaper intentionally featured two workers: one white, one black.

Catholic Worker Pacifism: positions and individual engagement

During the 1930s, and to this day, the *Catholic Worker* paper has promoted a pacifist stance. This was in keeping with Dorothy Day's idea that one could "write, write to arouse the public

conscience” (Day 1952, 213). The paper advised readers not to register for the draft (Forest 1987 104). Peter Maurin was in agreement with Day, said about World War II: “We are witnessing the historical liquidation of Jean Jacques Rousseau’s world” (qtd. Miller 1973, 158). *The Catholic Worker* was unique among American Catholic magazines, and even those of a more left-wing variety, such as *America* (1909-) or *Commonweal* (1924-), being “the only publication articulating a clear-cut anti-war ideology both before and after Pearl Harbor” (Roberts 1984, 176). Day received many letters in disagreement with “the extremism of our revolutionary pacifist position” (Day 1952, 263). The paper was consistently committed “to peace and social justice activism” and, according to Roberts, “represents the first fruitful journalistic union of Catholic theological traditionalism with social radicalism” (176-77). Not only that—during the 1950s and 1960s Catholic Workers participated actively in the Civil Rights movement, and the paper printed a list of hotels that were still segregated in New York in February 1962, so as to shame them. Writing in 1952 in her autobiography *The Long Loneliness*, Day expressed surprise that after publishing a paper that had supported pacifism for fifteen years, some “members of two of our groups were just beginning to realize what it meant” (264). While Quakers had historically expressed such positions (and one Quaker, the artist Fritz Eichenberg, became a regular and remarkable contributor to *The Catholic Worker* with his wood-engraving illustrations ranging from full cover front-pages to smaller formats), this was new to American Catholicism. Hence, it must have taken some time for people to latch on to it. Day wrote in 1952:

We had been pacifist in class war, race war, in the Ethiopian war, in the Spanish Civil War, all through World War II, as we are now during the Korean War. We had spoken in terms of the Sermon on the Mount and all of our readers were familiar enough with that. [...] But there were a very great many who had seemed to agree with us who did not realize for years that *The Catholic Worker* position implicated them; if they believed the things we wrote, they would be bound, sooner or later, to make decisions personally and to act upon them. (264)

Of course, other Catholic Workers were also making their positions as pacifists known. Bob Ludlow, who was a conscientious objector during World War II, and an active contributor to the newspaper was described by Day in 1952 as the “theorist of our pacifism for the past five years” (266). Ludlow kept an image of the Virgin Mary and a photograph of Gandhi over his desk, and pointed out in one of his articles that “the general rule of the early Church was that one who was baptized should not join the army” (Day 1952, 269). Ammon Hennacy made a yearly fast to commemorate the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and he also withheld tax money in an effort not to finance war activity. Alexander Berkman took an anarchist and personalist approach to Pacifism (Day 1952, 265). Father John J. Hugo’s articles and pamphlets during World War II were published by *CW* (“The Immorality of Conscription,” “Catholics Can be Conscientious Objectors,” “The Weapons of the Spirit,” and “The Gospel of Peace”), and two of them received the imprimatur of the Archdiocese of New York (Day 1952, 264). As Day mentions individual Catholic Workers who promoted Pacifism in her autobiography and elsewhere, one has the feeling that she encouraged individual initiative, incorporating pacifist choices by other members of the movement into the general direction she had been taking herself since World War I. She worked for peace through writing and protest actions, and others worked through their own methods to promote peace and pacifism. Dorothy Day's position as a pacifist was consistent from World War I through the Vietnam War. She supported conscientious objectors, and her autobiography makes a point of goading the reader. Like George Orwell, Dorothy Day had seen very clearly what war does to civilian society. Not being part of the war effort during wartime was almost impossible:

Union workers in steel plants, auto and airplane factories—many in industry and business would have to find other jobs, jobs not tied up with the war effort. And where could they get them? If they worked in the garment factories, they would have to fill government orders for uniforms. Mills turned out blankets, parachutes. Raising food, building houses, baking bread—

whatever you did you kept the wheels of industrial capitalism moving, and industrial capitalism kept the wheels moving on war orders. You could not live without compromise. Teachers sold war stamps and bonds. Children were asked to bring aluminum pots and scrap metal to school. The Pope asked that war be kept out of the schoolroom, but there it was. (Day 1952, 264)

Day has sometimes been presented as a lone courageous leading figure among American Catholics, promoting peace and pacifism for five decades in a nation whose expansionism, materialism and jingoism were on the increase—though in fact she often had at least private support from other religious and some of the Catholic hierarchy. Nonetheless, Day and the Catholic Worker Movement do hold a special place in the historical and geographic realm of American Christianity. In prior centuries, peace and pacifism were ideals promoted by Quakers, Mennonites, and Brethren before mainline Protestants also joined that cause in the early twentieth century (Piehl 1982, 189). Mainstream elements in the American Catholic Church became involved in peace activities only during the Vietnam war in the 1960s, but the Catholic Worker was a “forerunner” (Piehl 1982, 189).³

While Peter Maurin made no official pronouncement on pacifism (but one might do well to remember that he was a legal alien within the U.S. and perhaps chose not to agitate so as to avoid deportation), Dorothy Day promoted it from the newspaper. *The Catholic Worker's* stance was plain: Stratmann's *The Church and War* had been favorably reviewed in the paper, Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 was condemned, as was Franco's coup d'état in Spain (Piehl 1982, 192-3). Few Catholic voices opposed Franco in the US, though there were articles denouncing him in *Commonweal* and the *Buffalo Echo*, a diocesan paper. *The Catholic Worker* published articles about the situation in Spain by Stratmann, Mounier, Maritain, and Mendizabel. The debates about Spain “led, in 1937, to the first active organization of Catholic Worker pacifism,” when William Callahan formed the group *Pax* (Piehl 1982, 193).

Like Simone Weil, Dorothy Day wrote about the use of force, which she felt was in opposition to gospel principles. In the “Catholic Worker Stand on Force” she explained that using force led to the need for “a more savage and brutal force” to “overcome the enemy” (Piehl 1982, 193). Catholic worker arguments included the problem of commensurate destruction that modern technological warfare caused, in “violation of the just war principles of proportionality” (Piehl 1982, 194). And, as the world prepared for war, the Catholic Worker Movement tried to prevent it:

The Catholic Worker publicized the occasional papal statements urging negotiation among the powers. It brought noted European antiwar Catholics like Eric Gill to the United States to oppose war preparations. Day's speaking tours, too, focused increasingly on the danger of war. (Piehl 1982, 194).

....

In July 1940 the Catholic Worker joined a number of peace groups in carrying the anti-conscription message to Congress, which was then considering the proposed Selective Service Act. O'Toole, Day, and Joseph Zarella, a young draft-age Catholic Worker, testified before a House Military Affairs Committee that conscription was contrary to the teachings of the Church fathers and the popes and that some young Catholics could not conscientiously enter the Armed Services under compulsion. (Piehl 1982, 195).

Meanwhile, when the draft was made compulsory, the Catholic Worker movement split over the pacifism issue. Day wrote an open letter in *The Catholic Worker* of August 1940 to restate the pacifist position of the paper, which she wanted all Catholic Workers to read and distribute, though she did not require total conformity on the issue.

One example of Day's actions in favor of peace can be cited from the cold war period, when she was jailed four times for not participating in public air raid drills (O'Connor 1991, 68-69). She described one such episode, which occurred on June 15, 1955, in *The Catholic Worker* (July-August 1955):

Just before two p.m. we went to the park and sat down on the benches there, and when the sirens began their warning we continued to sit. That was all there was to it. A number of elaborately uniformed men with much brass, stars and ribbons of past battles hung upon their blue auxiliary police outfits marched upon us and told us to move. When we refused, they announced we were under arrest, and the police van was driven up inside the park, up over the curb and we were loaded in and driven away.

....

We make this demonstration, not only to voice our opposition to war, not only to refuse to participate in psychological warfare, which this air-raid drill is, but also as an act of public penance for having been the first people in the world to drop the atom bomb, to make the hydrogen bomb. (qtd. O'Connor 1991, 69)

Thomas Merton began to give attention to the pacifist stance in the late 1950s and corresponded with Day, saying that she was “very, very right in going at it along the lines of satyagraha” (qtd. Piehl 1982, 221). Soon he became a regular contributor to *The Catholic Worker*. During the early 1960s the cause of peace was promoted in the paper by Merton. There was also mounting excitement surrounding actions and discussion leading to the Papal declaration “*Pacem in Terris*” (April 1963), which was given detailed attention. Catholic Workers tended to believe that conducting a Just War was no longer possible in a technological age when civilians suffered as much or perhaps more from conflict than soldiers. In the usual eight-page long February 1962 issue of *The Catholic Worker* the articles included: “Nuclear War, Nuclear Peace: One is Ours to Make,” “Jim Crow on the Bowery,” and Thomas Merton’s letter for the first General Strike for Peace, sponsored by Catholic Workers and held during one week in January-February 1962, in which he wrote:

Of course the tragedy is that the vast majority of people do not understand the meaning of this kind of witness. In their pitiful, blind craving for undisturbed security, they feel that agitation for peace is somehow threatening to them. They do not feel at all threatened by the bomb, for some reason, but they feel terribly threatened by some little girl student carrying a placard, or by some poor workingman striking in protest. [....]

My Mass on February 1st, the Feast of St. Ignatius Martyr of Antioch, will be for all of the strikers everywhere in the world and for all who yearn for a true peace, all who are willing to shoulder the great burden of patiently working, praying and sacrificing themselves for peace. We will never see the results in our time, even if we manage to get through the next five years without being incinerated. really we have to pray for a total and profound change in the mentality of the whole world. (7)

Thomas Merton, theologian and poetic thinker, who was younger than Day, did not outlive her. But his writings and poetry remain. His is one of the numerous poetic minds that recognized Day’s talents and ardently supported them.

Day’s coming into the positive hierarchical spotlight for her pacifism occurred when she visited the Vatican in 1963 with the Mothers for Peace, “an international group of Catholic Workers, Pax Christi members, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, Fellowship of Reconciliation members, and others, from the United States, South America, Asia and Europe” (O’Connor 1991, 75). While Pope John XXIII gave the group no private audience, he did strongly encourage them publicly during a general audience, to the delight of their Italian translator. The Plowshares movement came out of the Catholic Worker movement. There was also the second Pax movement (which had no relationship to the small group that had existed before World War II) that began in 1962 and was led by Eileen Egan (Piehl 1982, 227). They began publishing a quarterly review called *Peace*. This was to be a specific movement within the Catholic Church that in 1971 became the official American branch of the French group that had formed Pax Christi.

Nonetheless, since the year 2000, like other outstanding figures of the Christian Left, Dorothy Day has been reprogrammed by some as a far more right-wing figure than was previously thought.

Bill Kauffman wrote about Day's "partially furnished and seldom occupied" home "on the American Right," suggesting that some figures on the right match quite nicely with Day, such as "the Agrarians, the Distributists, the heirs to the Jeffersonian tradition" (Kauffman 2001, 222-223). In particular, Kauffman cited poets such as Allen Tate, who had written to Donald Davidson in 1936 promoting *The Catholic Worker* (224). Dorothy Day had read the Southern Agrarian Manifesto, *I'll Take My Stand* in 1936, and wrote about it in her paper that year (224). Kauffman's rather simplistic politically-correct positioning of the Southern Agrarians notwithstanding, surely much more worrisome are the remarks of someone like Stephen Beale, who has worked for Fox news, and who wrote in March 2013:

But Day's status as a Leftist icon—a "saint for the Occupy era" as *The New Yorker* recently put it—has always chafed against certain inconvenient facts. Day's advocacy of distributism—a third way between socialism and capitalism advocated by such Catholic conservative stalwarts as G.K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc—has always made her an uncomfortable fit for the Left. And when the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops endorsed her cause for canonization, her staunch pro-life views garnered some attention in the ensuing news coverage. But just how far out of step she was with the Left remains largely unknown.

It is enlightening to see how far some critics will go to box in a figure like Dorothy Day. If she were such a right-wing conservative, what inspired the FBI investigations of the Catholic Worker movement in the 1950s (cf. Roberts 1984, 144ff)? Few people of the conservative right have participated in so many demonstrations in support of the poor and the working class, or have been so involved with militant pacifism. Have any been arrested as often? Dorothy Day was arrested and jailed close to a dozen times between 1917 and 1973 (O'Connor 1991, 68). Michael Harrington, author of *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (1962), certainly did not view Day as right-wing politically. He remarked in the late 1940s, "All I knew of the Catholic Worker when I walked into its House of Hospitality on Chrystie Street just off New York's Skid Row . . . was that it was as far Left as you could go within the Church" (Roberts 1984, 146). Characteristically, in a 1974 interview, Day described *The Catholic Worker* as a Pacifist and Anarchist movement.

Beale mentions Charles Péguy as one of Day's reference points, an author that she enjoyed reading, along with Martin Buber, and Dostoyevsky. Apparently Beale thought that reading Péguy was further proof that Day would be politically situated on the Right. But it is precisely because of Charles Péguy's prose and poetry that one should be inclined to link Dorothy Day with the Left. Although not all of Péguy's influence may have come directly from her own reading, the multiple mentions of Péguy in Day's autobiography attest to her personal reading of him in English translation (she apparently did not understand French fluently—see Day 1952, 245). Other Péguy influences could have come indirectly from Peter Maurin or Jacques Maritain (who both read Péguy and Mounier in French). It seems evident that Maurin would often quote from Péguy without explicitly naming him. Dorothy Day related that Peter Maurin would sometimes say: "I will give you a piece of my mind and you will give me a piece of your mind, and then we will both have more in our minds" (qtd. Day, 1963, 102). This sounds much like Péguy, translated into an abridged easy English, like that of Maurin's "Easy Essays." Upon hearing the adage Dorothy Day may or may not have been aware that it was a quotation from Péguy, but it is from *Pour Moi* (published in the *Cahiers de la Quinzaine*, II-5, January 28, 1901):

Quand je vois quelqu'un, je ne me dis jamais: Propagandons. Mais je cause honnêtement avec ce quelqu'un. Je lui énonce très sincèrement les faits que je connais, les idées que j'aime. Il m'énonce tout à fait sincèrement les faits qu'il connaît et les idées qu'il aime et qui souvent sont fort différentes. Quand il me quitte, j'espère qu'il s'est nourri de moi, de ce que je sais et de ce que je suis. Et moi, je me suis toujours nourri de tout le monde... (I, 679)

There is no telling how much of Péguy's thought Dorothy Day simply absorbed through her constant contact with Peter Maurin from 1932 to his death in 1947. Of course, proving that Péguy was on the left has also been tricky because his truncated poetic works were published by those who wanted to promote Pétain during the Nazi Occupation of France. Yet, Péguy's complete works attest to his continued strong—albeit extremely demanding—ties with the left, but that story is too long to develop properly here. What is also needed for Day's reputation is a fair assessment of the value of her work. It is disappointing that a book as interesting as *Sacred Aid: Faith and Humanitarianism* (2012 ed. Barnett and Stein) neglects to mention Dorothy Day at all. While she was not providing emergency aid in war zones, her life work perfectly corresponds to the title, especially with her linking the cause of peace to the cause of social justice.

Distributism, Personalism, and “The Retreat”

In *The Long Loneliness*, Day insisted that the anarchy promoted by Kropotkin, Tolstói, Godwin, and Proudhon was a parallel step toward a new social order, as proposed by Distributists such as Eric Gill, Father Vincent McNabb, G.K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc and others (55-56). Other readings suggested for Catholic Workers could be added to this list of seekers for a better social order, including Don Luigi Surzo, Nicolas Berdayaev (Day and Sicius 2004, xix), and Emmanuel Mounier with the review *Esprit*. In other words, the base-line philosophy of the Catholic workers arose from a special blend of anarchism, personalism, distributionism, and spiritual retreats. While not all of the Catholic Workers were Catholic, most were Christians, and Day encouraged all to make the retreat. But even so, there was no one set of principles that all were required to follow: what was required, according to Peter Maurin, was “clarification of thought.” All participants were encouraged to think for themselves, and to walk their own spiritual paths. Peter Morin wanted the Catholic Workers to grow organically, and Day remembers him saying “We are not an organization, we are an organism” (Day 1952, 182).

The Spiritual retreats of the Catholic Workers under Father Onesimus Lacouture, Father Pacifique Roy—a Josephite priest from Quebec, and Father John J. Hugo—author of *Applied Christianity* (1944), emphasized the idea found in Irenaeus of Lyon's second century treatise *Against Heresies*, that “God became man that man might become God” (Day, 1952, 246).⁴ The form of the retreat led by Father Hugo for some forty years, was learned from Father Lacouture in 1938, and lasted a week. It required silence of the participants, and was based on the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises as they were interpreted by Jesuits of the 18th Century—giving full encouragement to lay people to be as committed to Christ as religious. According to Rosemary Fielding, it was a Gospel that had “no room for consumerism, upward mobility, or the relentless pursuit of amusement” (Fielding 2011, on-line). Mark and Louise Zwick devoted a chapter of *The Catholic Worker Movement: Intellectual and Spiritual Origins* (2005) to the retreats for the Catholic Workers that began circa 1940, emphasizing Day's devotion to the spirituality expressed by those priests: she went to Father Lacouture's funeral in 1951 and wrote his obituary (Zwick 14), as well as an obituary for Father Roy in 1954. Thanks to those three priests, the retreats helped instill “a sense of the sacramentality of life” according to Day, who made the retreat more than twenty times (14).

Having begun her activism among laborers of the IWW, it is no surprise that Day had a highly developed philosophy of work and a utopian vision of its value. She viewed work as well as parenting as a kind of co-creative process whereby humans participated in the creative action that was also part of God's work. Day emphasized “the holiness of work” and “the sacramental quality of property” as she wrote in *The Catholic Worker* in 1946 (qtd. Kauffman 226). In *L'Argent* (1913), Charles Péguy had said “to work is to pray” (III, 792). Even in 1936, The Catholic Worker platform, in opposition to Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and the projected Farm-Labor Party, was “Tradition, Ruralism, Handicrafts, Personalism, Communitarianism, Organisms” (*CW* 11, 1936:2, qtd. Kauffman 227). But only Dorothy Day (not the Southern Agrarians) would argue Distributism

into the late 1950s. Day wrote in *The Catholic Worker* in 1956 that “distributism is not dead [...] because distributism is a system conformable to the needs of man and his nature.” (*CW* 7-8, 1956:4 qtd. Kauffman 2001, 232).

The Poetics of Dorothy Day

For Dorothy Day, aesthetics including an appreciation for poetry, were just as important to human nature as social justice, because human nourishment as she viewed it was intellectual, spiritual and physical in accordance with Peter Maurin’s program of “cult, culture, cultivation”—which featured as a regular column in the paper. Dorothy Day was a highly cultivated and articulate woman who traveled widely, and maintained quality intellectual pursuits in the midst of her busy life of direct action and writing. This becomes immediately evident to anyone who reads her. Not only is her own writing style carefully composed, it is often pedagogically pitched, stimulating curiosity with a scattering of raw data and multiple references. The company she kept with various writers and artists is impressive, and the names of writers in English, mentioned in her autobiography *The Long Loneliness* include: Hart Crane (113), Ben Hecht (95), James Joyce (257), Arthur Koestler (74), Charlie MacArthur (95), Edgar Lee Masters (49), Eugene O’Neill (84), Ernest Poole (51), Carl Sandburg (37), Shakespeare (49), John Steinbeck (212, 230, 236), Allen Tate (113), and Upton Sinclair (37, 41, 42). For a woman who claimed that she could not understand French, she had an incredible amount of knowledge of French Literature and culture, as evidenced with her allusions to Balzac (94), Léon Bloy (283), Claudel (209), Gide (221), Hugo (94), Huysmans (107), de Lubac (258), Maritain (186), Mauriac (59,71), de Maupassant (94), Pascal (107), Péguy (170, 177), Proudhon (245), and Romain Rolland (134-5). No doubt one should bear in mind that Dorothy Day’s earliest ambitions included becoming a writer of fiction (1952, 49). Her talent as a writer was noticed while she was still in college, and her literary friendships began then.

Day was extremely sensitive to certain poems, and read poetry with pleasure. She made mention of the stirring poems of Arturo Giovannitti (1952, 68). Her gripping biography of Therese of Lisieux makes a point to discuss the saint’s poetry:

So much time has been spent in apologizing for the flowery setting of the thoughts of Therese, that not much attention has been given to her poetry, which is simple and fresh and filled with love and longing for God. (Day, 1960, 1985, 144).

This should be no small consideration for those who are interested in the Catholic Worker movement. Writers from all quarters (as was seen with Thomas Merton above) not only befriended Dorothy Day, but also gave generous support and often made financial contributions to her work. No doubt that was only natural, given the ties of Maurin’s Personalism with Emmanuel Mounier, who explained in *Le Personalisme* (1951) that the word was first used by Americans of the nineteenth century: he cited Bownes, Brightman and Flewelling. Walt Whitman saw himself as an American Personalist, as attested by his essay “Personalism” (1868) and his “Song of Myself” (Schmidt 2004, v).

Day’s relationships with contemporary poets are noteworthy. She once startled Michael Harrington by saying about Hart Crane, “I used to have breakfast with him all the time when I was pregnant with Tamar” (qtd. Roberts 1984, 146). She must have known that Robert Lowell had been jailed for being a conscientious objector in World War II. As for Lowell, he—along with Allen Tate—admired her work greatly. As did W.H. Auden: in March 1956, after she had been fined \$250 and was in danger of being forced to close the St. Joseph House of Hospitality, Auden hand-delivered her a check to cover the fine (Roberts, 1984, 151). Allen Ginsberg sent his regards to Dorothy Day in 1961 (Roberts 1984, 165). Catholic Workers were hospitable to poets in general. For example Peter Maurin House in Oakland California hosted Kenneth Rexroth reading poetry to a large audience, in mid-May 1964.

Mr Rexroth also described some of his travels in Europe and spoke of the Church, its strengths and weaknesses in Europe as compared with the United States. He was extremely impressed with the vigor, the adventuresome nature, and the progressive ideas of the Church in France. Mr. Rexroth believes that all is not lost for the Church or humanity as long as Catholic Worker groups exist and multiply. (Harriette S. Atkinson, reporting on Peter Maurin House Group, in *The Catholic Worker* 23:1, July-August, 1964, page 4).

The Catholic Worker paper published under Day gave considerable space to creative work by offering a publication platform for poetry, and by reviewing published poetry. The poems published generally reflected the pacifist or religious leanings of the paper. Peter Maurin's "Easy Essays" in verse were first published there, before being assembled in a book in 1949, after his death. In 1962 and 1963 *The Catholic Worker* in its 8-page newspaper format published a significant amount of poetry, during the very same years that articles against the atomic war, encouraging pacifism, and promoting Pope John XXIII's April 1963 encyclical *Pacem in Terris* were also featured. In the *Catholic Worker* of January of 1963, for example, Thomas Merton's verse translation of "Soldiers of Peace" by Clement of Alexandria was published.⁵

Given Day's commitment to publishing poetry and the poetic qualities of many paragraphs of her own prose, it is only fitting that she has become the subject of numerous poems. Several can be found in the volume *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement: Centenary Essays* (2001). Among the more noteworthy poems about Day are those by Jeff Poniewaz and Ann Curran. The latter's "Me and Dorothy Day" (published in *Her Circle, A Magazine of Women's Creative Arts and Activism*, May 1, 2012) ends with an exhortation:

All I recall of our conversation:
THAT EXTRA COAT IN YOUR CLOSET
BELONGS TO THE PERSON WITH NONE.
She left a mark on me that day.
Every winter I give away a coat,
ashamed to own more than one at a time.

Dorothy Day would have enjoyed those lines: for her the work of peace was also the work of mending the divide between the rich and the poor.

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¹ Members of the IWW, Industrial Workers of the World, were familiarly called wobblies after 1911, but the actual origin of the term, though often discussed, seems to be uncertain.

² Personalism posits that the human being and the dignity of the person should be the starting point for philosophical reflection. Day placed emphasis on personal responsibility for the situation of the world at large, motivating people to take action. For a detailed history of the term, see Williams.

³ Until the 1960s, the American Catholic church had most often officially supported war efforts, and during World War I, there were only four Catholic conscientious objectors. During the Civil War the patriotic preaching at Saint Patrick's in New York City lent solid support for the war (Piehl 189-90). In the South, Bishop Augustin Verot was known for his positions supporting slavery and the Confederate war effort. (The Episcopalian Church was also divided with pro-war supporters in both the North and the South).

An organization called Catholic Association for International Peace, was formed in the US in 1927, with John LaFarge, Vincent Ferrer, George Shuster, John Ryan, Raymond McGowan and Carlton Hayes, but their actions were limited to "lobbying for American participation in the League of Nations and the World Court and advocating 'peace education' [and] 'international cooperation and arbitration' in Catholic circles" (Piehl192). In fact the CAIP would endorse World War II, the Cold War, the Korean War and Vietnam (192).

⁴ There is not enough space here to fully detail the spiritual retreats of Dorothy Day, but interested readers may wish to consult Father Hugo's *Your Ways Are Not My Ways, volumes 1 and 2* (1986) and *A Sign of Contradiction* (1947). The quotation by Irenaeus may also remind some readers of the French Jesuit François Varillon in *Joie de croire, joie de vivre* (1981).

⁵ In 1962 the monthly newspaper *The Catholic Worker*, with only 8 printed pages, published over thirteen poems and several works of criticism about poetry. Almost every issue contained at least one poem (**February**: Peter Maurin, "For Protections's Sake"; Walter Kerrell, "February". **March**: Bettie Richart, "Schumann's Soliloquoy". **April**: Anne Taillefer, "Silver Horns (May 1958)". **May**: Ned O'Gorman, "Spring"; Peter Maurin, several "Easy Essays" **July-August**: Review of poems by Raymond Larson Peter Maurin, "Institutions vs. Corporations"; Robert Herrick, "A Thanksgiving to God for His House". **September**: Denis Knight, "Man, Baby, Look!". **October**: No poetry. **November**: Peter Maurin, "Passing the Buck"; Herbert Burke, "The Peace-Makers". **December**: Harold Isbell, "Lorelee").

In 1963, the amount of poetry published increased with more than thirty poems, and three reviews of poetry. In addition, the November issue published an advertisement for the Association of Artists for Freedom that was signed by James Baldwin, among others. (**January**: Clement of Alexandria, "Soldiers of Peace" translated by Thomas Merton. **February**: Robert Kaye "Bob Lax", Review of poems by Robert Lax. **March**: St Francis of Assisi's Peace Prayer; Harold Isbell, "The Bridegroom to his Bride"; Review of poems by Suzanne Grosse. **April**: Denis Knight, "Maundy Thursday" and "Easter Sunday". **May**, 30th Anniversary Issue: Peter Maurin, Seven "Easy Essays" reprinted; Leopold Sedar Senghor, "To New York" translated by Anne Taillefer; Barbara Deming (two short poems); Review of poems by Brother Antonius. **June**: No poetry. **July-August**: No poetry, but prose quotations from Coleridge, Merton, and Auden. **September**: No poetry. **October**: Karl Meyer, "Catholic Anarchism." **November**: John Cogley, "How to Read an Encyclical"; Peter Maurin, reprints of eleven "Easy Essays". **December**: Elizabeth Sheehan, "Early Morning Fog"; Jeanne S. Bagby, "No Accommodations").