

**THE WISDOM OF DOROTHY DAY**

**Walter G. Moss**

**Copyright © 2011 by Walter G. Moss**

# THE WISDOM OF DOROTHY DAY

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (with links)

The Long Life of Dorothy Day, 1897-1980 4	
Childhood and Pre-College Years.....	4
University of Illinois, 1914-1916 .....	8
Back in New York, 1916-1920 .....	10
Chicago, New Orleans, Staten Island, a Daughter, and Conversion, 1921-1927 .....	16
Tamar, Forster, and the Searching Catholic, 1928-1932.....	20
Peter Maurin and the Origins of the Catholic Worker Movement.....	24
Foundations of the CW Movement: The French, the Saints, and the Popes .....	26
Foundations of the CW Movement: The Distributists and Russian Writers.....	33
From Depression to War .....	37
The Cold War Years .....	40
Dorothy Day's Wisdom 49	
Wisdom, Religion, and Catholicism.....	50
Wisdom, Love, and Other Values .....	52
Personality and Gender.....	57
Beauty, Nature, Music, Literature, and Transcendence .....	61
Pacifism, Society, and Politics.....	67
Conclusion and Legacy 77	

## THE WISDOM OF DOROTHY DAY

In his *Audacity of Hope* (2006) future President Barack Obama wrote, “Surely, secularists are wrong when they ask believers to leave their religion at the door before entering the public square; Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, William Jennings Bryan, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Jr.—indeed the majority of great reformers in American history—not only were motivated by faith but repeatedly used religious language to argue their causes.”<sup>1</sup> In an important speech before religious leaders in June 2006, he again named these five “great reformers”—four men and Dorothy Day—who were motivated by faith.

More surprisingly, five years earlier President George W. Bush had quoted Dorothy Day. The *National Catholic Reporter* commented as follows:

Now that George W. Bush is quoting pacifist-anarchist-jailbird-agitator-nonvoter-Karl Marx sympathizer Dorothy Day —“Any effective war on poverty must deploy what Dorothy Day called ‘the weapons of spirit,’” the president said at Notre Dame’s May 20 commencement—he might want to invite to the White House some followers of the Catholic Worker co-founder.

These troublemakers shouldn’t be hard to find. No other religious group has a service ministry closer to the Oval Office.

Members of Washington’s Dorothy Day Catholic Worker house of hospitality regularly pull up a van at Lafayette Park facing the White House to distribute sandwiches to the hungry. Instead of a war on poverty, they think there’s a war on poor people.<sup>2</sup>

Shortly before President Bush’s remarks, New York’s Cardinal John O’Connor wrote in a column of March 16, 2000 that the Vatican in Rome had approved his request “to open the Cause for the Beatification and Canonization of Dorothy Day”—that is, to consider whether or not to declare her a Catholic saint.<sup>3</sup>

In a 1993 an essay on gender and wisdom, two researchers exploring their subject selected only one person to examine in detail—Dorothy Day, as “an extraordinary 20<sup>th</sup>-century political reformer and religious figure, whose life demonstrates both her wisdom and the gender-specific struggles that shaped its development.”<sup>4</sup> The relationship of religion to wisdom is complex, and both believers and non-believers can be wise or foolish, but faith can certainly

---

<sup>1</sup> Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Colman McCarthy, “New Fan of Dorothy Day Neglects Her Values—Catholic Worker Movement and George W. Bush,” *National Catholic Reporter*, June 15, 2001, [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m1141/is\\_32\\_37/ai\\_75892794/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1141/is_32_37/ai_75892794/) (All web sites referred to in this essay were current as of July-August 2011. Only that of [cjd.org](http://cjd.org) has

been updated as of August 7, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> For the column, see <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/canonizationtext.cfm?Number=82>. On her possible sainthood, see <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/canonization.cfm> and Jim Forest, *All Is Grace: A Biography of Dorothy Day* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 304-15.

<sup>4</sup> Lucinda Orwoll and W. Andrew Achenbaum, “Gender and the Development of Wisdom,” *Human Development* 36, no. 5 (1993): 274-96.

affect wisdom.<sup>5</sup> In the present essay, after surveying Day's life, we shall look more closely at her developing wisdom and how it was influenced by her being a woman and a Catholic.

## **The Long Life of Dorothy Day, 1897-1980**

### **Childhood and Pre-College Years**

Dorothy Day was born on November 8, 1897 in Brooklyn.<sup>6</sup> Her home was just a few blocks from the famed Brooklyn Bridge, then still an engineering marvel and the world's longest suspension bridge. It was appropriate that it connected Brooklyn with Manhattan because it was in the latter area that much of Dorothy's young adulthood was spent and where she first began the work that would mark her most important legacy. Her parents were John and Grace Day. He was tall, as was Dorothy in adulthood, and was born in Cleveland, Tennessee of Scotch-Irish blood. His work was primarily as a sports writer, and his passion was horse racing. He liked his alcohol and claimed to be an atheist, and Dorothy was never close to him. She was much closer to her mother, who was of English descent and came from upstate New York.

Dorothy was the third child of the couple in less than three years, being preceded by her brothers Donald and Sam, both of whom, like their father, became journalists. Two years after Dorothy's birth, the couple had another child, Della, with whom Dorothy shared a close sisterly bond throughout their lives. More than a decade later, after some miscarriages, the final Day child, John, was born. By that time, 1912, the Day family was living in Chicago.

Previous to the Chicago move, the family had spent two years in and around Oakland California. But then the earthquake of April 1906, which destroyed much of San Francisco, caused enough damage in Oakland to provoke Dorothy's father to seek employment elsewhere. For many months after moving to Chicago he was unable to find a job, and he often sat in the living room of their drab tenement apartment writing—mainly a novel (never published and perhaps never even completed), but also some shorter pieces that earned the family a little money. In Dorothy's autobiographical *From Union Square to Rome* (1938) she described their tenement: “[It] stretched away down the block and there were back porches and paved courtyards with never a touch of green anywhere.”<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> For profiles of both wise believers (e.g. E. F. Schumacher) and non-believers (e.g. Anton Chekhov and Andrei Sakharov), as well as a few essays dealing with the relationship of wisdom and faith, see the links to essays at <http://www.wisdompage.com/profileswis00.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Although I have used Day's own autobiographical remembrances, for her year-to-year life I have relied chiefly on Forest (see above, n. 3) and William Miller, *Dorothy Day: A Biography* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1984). Like Forest, Miller, and most others who have written about her at some length, I have taken the liberty of generally referring to her simply as Dorothy.

<sup>7</sup> Links to the whole book are available at <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=2>. The quoted portion above is from Ch. 2, at <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=202>. These materials and many more quoted on subsequent pages are located at the Dorothy Day Library on the Web at <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/>, where a search engine enables one to search conveniently many of her writings.

This unemployed period brought the Day family its greatest hardship and poverty, but Dorothy's mother's resourcefulness and good spirits mitigated the adversity of the family's condition. She later lovingly described her mother.

My mother had great natural virtues and a delightful temperament that helped her through much hardship and uncertainty. She refused to worry when things were going badly, or when the family had its periods of poverty. There were days when she had to do the family washing, the sheets, blankets, and all, and after a day in the basement laundry, she used to bathe and dress as though she were going out to a dinner party.

She reigned over the supper table as a queen, powdered, perfumed, daintily clothed, all for the benefit of us children. She is still a woman who loves people and uses her charm to please them. She loves life and all the gayeties and frivolities of life; but when through poverty she was deprived of "good times" she made them for herself and got enjoyment from little things. When she felt low she used to go downtown and squander a little money, shopping for a bargain in a hat or a new blouse, never forgetting to bring home some little gift for us all.<sup>8</sup>

Sometime after Dorothy's tenth birthday in November 1907, her father obtained a position as the sports editor of a minor Chicago paper, and soon afterwards the family moved to better housing. By the time her brother John was born in 1912 they had moved a few more times and were now living in a large house, which even contained a library, near Lincoln Park. Dorothy later recalled the house fondly. During the two years after baby John's birth, however, she often had to care for her new brother, including in the early morning hours before she left for school. Before John's birth she had already been helping out in other ways around the house like washing dishes. She relates in a second autobiographical work, *The Long Loneliness*, that such chores helped develop in her an appreciation for the value of work well done.

Her favorite pastime was reading. She later recalled that she had been reading since age four, including children's stories, *The Arabian Nights*, and parts of a Bible she discovered in an attic while living in California. When she was twelve and in Chicago her two favorite writers were Arthur Conan Doyle (creator of Sherlock Holmes) and Rider Haggard (author of *King Solomon's Mines* and other novels of adventure). Her enthusiasm for Sherlock Holmes began a life-long fondness for detective stories. Although her father would not allow "trash" reading in their Chicago house with a library, she occasionally snuck in romances and hid an illustrated copy of Swinburn's erotic long poem "Tristram of Lyonesse." But she mainly read the books her father possessed such as those of Walter Scott, Victor Hugo, Charles Dickens, Robert Louis Stevenson, James Fenimore Cooper, and Edgar Allan Poe. In one of her final columns for *The Catholic Worker*, the paper she edited for almost a half century, she wrote: "All of us were constant readers in our home, and I, myself, liked those books best which were written in the first person, like *David Copperfield*, and the reader was closely identified with the joys and sufferings of hero and heroine."<sup>9</sup> Besides Dickens' *David Copperfield* she also read his *Bleak House* and *Little Dorritt*, and she was moved by Jean Valjean's heroic fight against injustice in Hugo's *Les Miserables*. Other major writers that she read while in high school included Dostoevsky and Ibsen.

---

<sup>8</sup> *From Union Square*, Ch. 3, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=203>.

<sup>9</sup> [Http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=603](http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=603). In her columns Dorothy usually put titles of books, and sometimes other words, in bold type. I have replaced that formatting with the more conventional practice of using italics.

In *From Union Square to Rome* she wrote that about then Thomas “DeQuincey [1785-1859] was my favorite author, and I read everything he wrote that I could get from the library. [Herbert] Spencer was another writer that I tried hard to read. I wanted to read him because I came across references to his work in Jack London's books. Of course I read everything of Jack London's and Upton Sinclair's, and they had much influence on my way of thinking. With it all I still read [John] Wesley, the New Testament and The Imitation of Christ and received great comfort from them.”<sup>10</sup> Among London’s works that especially influenced her were his essays on class conflict and his novels, especially *Marin Eden*, which depicted its hero’s struggle to escape poverty, educate himself, and find meaning, love, and beauty. Sinclair’s *The Jungle* was set in Chicago, and Dorothy visited some of the streets where she imagined his characters might have interacted. She later recalled that like London and Sinclair, she wanted to write books that would convince people of the injustices that existed and contribute toward creating a more just order. About the poor people she came across in these works, she wrote that “from that time on my life was to be linked to theirs, their interests would be mine: I had received a call, a vocation, a direction in life.” She also sympathized with Russian revolutionaries like Peter Kropotkin and Vera Figner, two of many such people who opposed tsarist rule in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In her senior year in high school she wrote a story of such revolutionaries and “the martyrdom of one of them.”<sup>11</sup>

At this time her brother Donald was working on the *The Day Book*, a minor Chicago paper, where Carl Sandburg, the “poet of the people” inspired him “to look on the people as he did, with love and hope of great accomplishment.” Like Sandburg in this period, she was sympathetic with U.S. socialism and greatly admired socialist leader Eugene Debs, whom she considered “a great and noble labor leader of inspired utterance.”<sup>12</sup> Although familiar with the poetry of Swinburne and Sandburg, and translating some Vergil in her Latin class, as well as quoting Tennyson in a letter to a friend, Dorothy’s enthusiasm for poetry does not seem to have been as great as that for prose. Nevertheless, she overstated the case when she recalled that in the mid 1920s, upon meeting the poet Hart Crane, she “knew nothing about poetry.”<sup>13</sup>

As she later looked back at her childhood, she was grateful that there were as of yet so few distractions from reading—like radios that would blare “the news of the world . . . into the home a dozen times a day.” She did remember going to movies on Sunday afternoons, seeing mainly inoffensive “Wild West stories and mystery tales.”<sup>14</sup>

Although her father proclaimed atheism and her mother, although raised Episcopalian, did not go to church either, Dorothy later remembered that as a young girl she had had various religious experiences. After discovering the Bible when still young in California, she later

---

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=203>.

<sup>11</sup> Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness: The Autobiography of Dorothy Day* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 38.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 37. For more on Sandburg, see my “The Wisdom of Carl and Paula Sandburg,” at <http://www.wisdompage.com/SandburgEssay.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Day, *Long Loneliness*, 113.

<sup>14</sup> *Union Square*, Ch. 3, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=203>.

recalled being tremendously excited about her encounter with God. “It was as though life were fuller, richer, more exciting in every way. Here was someone that I had never really known about before and yet felt to be One whom I would never forget, that I would never get away from. The game might grow stale, it might assume new meanings, new aspects, but life would never again be the same. I had made a great discovery.” Also in California there was a little playmate her own age, Naomi, whose family were Methodists, and Dorothy started going to church and Sunday school with them. Dorothy loved the hymn singing at church and also those sung by Naomi’s family at home before they went to sleep for the night. Despite the earlier death of the children’s father, Dorothy thought that the widowed family possessed something her family lacked: “a belief, a faith, and the consequent order and tranquillity that went with that belief.”<sup>15</sup>

After moving to Chicago, Dorothy met her first Catholic. As she later remembered it, she burst in one morning to a friend’s apartment and discovered the little girl’s mother praying on her knees. She told Dorothy that the children had gone to the store and then she continued praying. Dorothy remembered the moment as “a glimpse of supernatural beauty” and as her “first impulse towards Catholicism.” She “felt a warm burst of love” toward the mother, “a feeling of gratitude and happiness” that continued to warm her heart whenever she remembered her. “She had God, and there was beauty and joy in her life.”<sup>16</sup> Dorothy also met another girl, Mary Harrington, who told her about Mary, the mother of Jesus, and “a heaven peopled with saints, and this also was a great comfort.” Once after her friend Mary told her about some saint, Dorothy remembered “the feeling of lofty enthusiasm I had, how my heart seemed almost bursting with desire to take part in such high endeavor. . . . This was one of those occasions when my small heart was enlarged. I could feel it swelling with love and gratitude to such a good God for such a friendship as Mary’s, for conversation such as hers, and I was filled with lofty ambitions to be a saint, a natural striving, a thrilling recognition of the possibilities of spiritual adventure.”<sup>17</sup>

Like the saints, Dorothy wrote, “I, too, wanted to do penance for my own sins and for the sins of the whole world, for I had a keen sense of sin, of natural imperfection and earthliness. I often felt clearly that I was being deliberately evil in my attitudes, just as I clearly recognized truth when I came across it. And the thrill of joy that again and again stirred my heart when I came across spiritual truth and beauty never abated, never left me as I grew older.”<sup>18</sup>

When Dorothy was twelve, an Episcopalian minister came to the Day house and persuaded Dorothy’s mother to send her to a religious class, preparing her for baptism and confirmation. She recalled “being much embarrassed at being baptized, tall, gawky girl” that she was. What she loved most about the Episcopalian services was the singing: When “the choir sang the *Te Deum* or the *Benedicite* my heart melted within me. They expressed pure truth and beauty to me, and for a year or so I never missed Sunday service.”

---

<sup>15</sup> *Union Square*, Ch. 2, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=202>.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* Also <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=559>. Although Dorothy mentions Mary in several of her remembrances, Miller does not mention her, but instead mentions a Lenore Clancey with whom Dorothy had similar experiences. Why the discrepancy is not clear.

Not long afterwards, however, she stopped going to services. Her mother had become interested in Christian Science, and Dorothy thought it was as convincing as the Episcopalian approach. More importantly, the reading of London and Sinclair led her to distrust all churches, though not abandon her belief in God or to cease reading the Christian New Testament.

Quotations from a letter she had written while a senior in high school give insight into her religious feelings by then. “Every day belongs to God and every day we are to serve Him, doing His pleasure.” She loved nearby Lincoln Park in the winter: “So solitary and awful in the truest meaning of the word. God is there. Of course, He is everywhere but under the trees and looking over the wide expanse of lake He communicates himself to me and fills me with a deep quiet peace.” But at other times the letter indicates that she felt sinful, partly because of romantic longings. “It is wrong to think so much about human love. All those feelings and cravings that come to us are sexual desires. We are prone to have them at this age, I suppose, but I think they are impure. It is sensual and God is spiritual. We must harden ourselves to these feelings, for God is love and God is all, so the only love is of God and is spiritual without taint of earthliness. I am afraid I have never really experienced this love or I would never crave the sensual love or the thrill that comes with the meeting of lips.” She also stated, “Poor weak creatures we are, yet God is our Father and God is love, ever-present, ready to enfold us and comfort us and hold us up,” and “I know it seems foolish to try to be so Christ-like—but God says we can—why else His command, ‘Be ye therefore perfect.’”<sup>19</sup>

Although Dorothy had a few schoolgirl crushes, there was very little romance in her life before she went away to the University of Illinois at Urbana, which she did in September 1914. It was only a month after Europe had plunged itself into what became known as the Great War (WWI), but she was only sixteen at the time, her seventeenth birthday not occurring until November. Still, despite her young age, she had won a scholarship.

### **University of Illinois, 1914-1916**

Dorothy attended the University of Illinois for two years, but she was not a good student, at least in a conventional sense. She received mainly Bs and Cs and even failed biology. She had no specific career plans, but was chiefly concerned with broadening her own knowledge, which she did mainly by continuing to read widely. Besides Jack London, whose works she delved into even more deeply, she was especially fond of Russian writers. She read all of Dostoevsky’s writings she could find, as well as works of Tolstoy, Turgenev, Chekhov, and Gorky, and even the lesser known writers Andreev and Artzibashev (probably his novel *Sanine*, translated in 1914 and dealing with sexual themes and individual freedom from traditional moral constraints).<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Day, *Long Loneliness*, 33-34. Much of this passage is also repeated in Dorothy’s novel *The Eleventh Virgin* (1924). Links to all chapters of that novel are available at <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=1>, and the relevant chapter for the above material is at <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=872>.

<sup>20</sup> See my *A History of Russia*, vol. 2, *Since 1855*, 2d ed. (London: Anthem Press, 2004), 163-67, 171-72, for more on the Russian writers mentioned here.



She also continued reading the writings of the Russian anarchist Kropotkin. She later wrote that “the call to my youth was the call of Kropotkin, and the beauty of his prose, the nobility of his phrasing, appealed to my heart.” She quoted a few paragraphs of his to illustrate his call. He advised young people, “Quit the environment in which you are placed,” and work “for the utter destruction of all this injustice, economic, social and political.” She believed then that he was “a saint in his way.”

She recalled how in her pre-college days she had been moved by the lives of saints who cared for “the sick, the maimed, and the leper,” but asked “where were the saints to try to change the social order, not just to minister to the slaves but to do away with slavery?” The religious practices of those she saw around her, however, did not reflect love for the downtrodden, and she “was in love with the masses.” The present-day martyrs she saw were like the “Haymarket martyrs [anarchists] who had been ‘framed’ and put to death [in 1887] in Chicago.” Her young heart was moved by “the so-called Molly Maguires in the coal fields and the Knights of Labor working for the eight-hour day and the cooperative system.” She “thrilled at those unknown women in New England who led the first strikes to liberate the women and children from the cotton mills.” But she estimated that “still only about eight percent of the workers were organized, and the great mass of workers throughout the country were ground down by poverty and insecurity.” For a short period of time, she joined a Socialist group, but their meetings were dull and she soon lost interest in them, though not in the struggle against injustice.<sup>21</sup>

During her first semester she seems to have made no new friends and greatly missed her family, especially her mother, sister, and baby brother. Being younger than most students and contemptuous of fraternities, sororities, and college sports, she did not fit in very well in a period when it was mainly daughters of more affluent parents that even dared dream of going to college. Her passion was books, and partly to afford more of them, as well as earn room and board, she worked at various jobs, including setting tables and washing dishes at a YWCA and later helping with children and household chores in several homes. Besides generally broadening her knowledge, she had one concrete objective her first year, and that was to gain admission to a writers’ club called the “Scribblers.” She did so by apparently submitting a piece describing how her shortage of funds led to a three-day period when all she ate were salted peanuts. She also got an occasional essay published in a small local newspaper.

Dorothy’s initiation to the “Scribblers” led to her greatest university friendship. This was with Rayna Simons, a red-haired student a few years older than her. Dorothy later wrote, “The only benefits those two years at college brought me was my friendship with Rayna and my own sense of complete independence.” Rayna was the daughter of wealthy Jewish parents, and her Jewish boyfriend, Samson Raphaelson, was a prominent “Scribbler.” From the beginning, the three of them became friends. Dorothy later commented about Rayna, “In spite of brilliant scholarship, an outstanding personality, good looks, and wealth, she was not invited to belong to any sorority, and with others of her race she lived in a rooming house on the edge of the campus. It was the first time I came up against anti-Semitism.”<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> *Union Square*, Ch. 4, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=204>.

<sup>22</sup> *Union Square*, Ch. 5, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=205>.

Rayna's *joie de vivre* and truth-seeking were infectious. Dorothy thought that her "joyousness came because she saw always what was noble and beautiful in life and she was happy in it." In *From Union Square to Rome* (1938) Dorothy stated: "The joy and happiness of those days is still with me. We took long walks over the prairie. We picnicked with our books and a phonograph, playing some Beethoven symphony under the limitless sky while the smell of sweet clover filled the air and the meadow larks pierced the quiet with their songs." Sometimes they took books of poetry with them and Rayna read aloud. To both her boyfriend and Dorothy, "she herself was poetry."<sup>23</sup> Dorothy later recalled lines from Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" that she and Rayna read together. Among their favorite poets were John Masefield, and three poets with strong attachments to Illinois, Edgar Lee Masters, Vachel Lindsay, and Carl Sandburg.

In the summer of 1915, Dorothy took Rayna back to Chicago to meet her family, but did not stay long and spent more of the summer at a farm owned by Rayna's father. When they returned to Urbana for the new school year, Rayna insisted that Dorothy move in with her at her rooming house. To the younger Dorothy, Rayna was most generous, not only paying for the room they shared, but also sharing her more plentiful clothes.

In mid 1916, Dorothy's family moved to New York, where her father had taken a new position with the *Morning Telegraph*. Partly for this reason, Dorothy decided to leave the University of Illinois and join her family. After her move, Dorothy only saw Rayna at a few more junctures, when Rayna visited her in New York in the summer of 1917 and then again in 1921, when they were both living in Chicago, Rayna taking postgraduate courses there. Between these two visits, Rayna had married and divorced Raphaelson, who went on to write plays—for example, *The Jazz Singer*, on which the 1927 film was based—and film scripts like *The Shop Around the Corner* (1940).

Less politically inclined than Dorothy when they were both undergraduates, in the 1920s Rayna became an enthusiastic communist and died in Moscow in 1927. Dorothy later read about her friend's death in journalist Vincent Sheean's *Personal History* (1935), where he devoted about one-third of the book to her. Despite Rayna's communist beliefs and Dorothy's later ardent Catholicism, she never ceased admiring her friend's commitment to truth and justice, and she believed Rayna belonged "to the invisible unity of the Church."<sup>24</sup>

## **Back in New York, 1916-1920**

Around the beginning of September 1916, Dorothy obtained a reporter's job with *The New York Call*, a small socialist newspaper. Her father disapproved. He liked neither her politics (wavering between socialism, syndicalism—like that of the militant IWW—and anarchism) nor her working as a reporter. To avoid further conflict and because she wished to live independently, she moved out of the family home. The *Call* office, the Cherry-Street small room she rented from an Orthodox Jewish tailor for three months, and a few subsequent places she lived were on the East Side of Manhattan near the East River. Between her office and her first rented room was a grimy

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

but colorful area of warehouses, stores, saloons, push-cart markets, and tenements in which many Jewish and Italian immigrants lived. To escape the stifling air indoors, people often congregated in front of their buildings, and in the summers their children often slept outside on fire escapes. Dorothy later wrote about the “slum” building where she first resided: “The tenement was only one of the thousands in the city. Laws had been passed twenty-five years before condemning them, still they remained, the owners not much concerned about the misery of the occupants.”<sup>25</sup>

In her small room on Cherry Street her bed was infested with bedbugs. In addition to her books, she “splurged” only for a small phonograph, for which her mother provided fifteen Fritz Kreisler violin records. In the evening, she read by candlelight, but most nights she worked at the *Call* office, often not arriving home through gloomy streets until two or three in the morning. Nevertheless, she was fond of the tailor’s family and appreciated the religiosity, love of learning, and sense of community that the many Jews in the area exhibited. One of the writers for *Call* was Mike Gold (born Itzok Isaac Granich), who was four years older than Dorothy and had grown up in the tenements. They soon became close friends and, according to her biographer Jim Forest, she came to love him.<sup>26</sup> She noted that although he was no longer religious, his family still liked to sing Jewish hymns and Yiddish folk songs. Many an early morning after work, she, Mike, and a few others would discuss literature, life, and politics over coffee and cigarettes—Dorothy was then a heavy smoker.

Her work at the newspaper involved various tasks including covering speeches, demonstrations, strikes, and peace meetings; writing pieces; and interviewing people. Her first series of articles (in December 1916) was about how she was living on \$5.00 a week (the salary of an average working girl). A piece in February 1917 was on Margaret Sanger’s sister’s hunger strike after she was arrested attempting to open a birth-control clinic, a cause then favored by Dorothy. Her paper was against the capitalist system and wished her to emphasize all of its dark sides, but it sometimes bothered her that she had to ignore “the gay and joyful sides of stories” that she came across.<sup>27</sup> She later recalled picketing in behalf of various workers that winter and defended the importance of it as a tool of labors in their fight for justice. The best speaker she heard in behalf of workers was the IWW’s Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. Dorothy also sometimes interviewed people, as she did that winter Leon Trotsky, who was then writing for a New York émigré paper. Later that year he would return to Russia and, along with Lenin, lead the communists in Russia to the takeover of power that they masterminded in November.

Like many socialists in April 1917, she opposed the U.S. entry into World War I. Sensing that the U.S. government was moving closer to declaring war on Germany, which it did on April 6<sup>th</sup>, Dorothy later remembered her activities that March and April.

---

<sup>25</sup> *Union Square*, Ch. 6, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=206>.

<sup>26</sup> Forest, 38. Forest’s book, with its many wonderful illustrations, conveys the best “feel” for Dorothy’s everyday activities, as well as being an excellent overall biography. Forest joined the CW staff in 1961 and worked closely with Dorothy for a while before moving on to other pursuits. He ends his book with a “Personal Remembrance” of her.

<sup>27</sup> *Union Square*, Ch. 7, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=207>.

By the beginning of March that year students at Columbia became very active in the peace movement and I worked with them, and not only in my role as a reporter. We attended meetings, got out leaflets, and had hundreds of stickers printed protesting the outbreak of war that was imminent. At night we walked together up and down Fifth Avenue, in the subways, and in the department store district and put the stickers on windows and sides of houses. . . .

The week before April first we chartered a Chinatown bus and drove down to . . . Washington stopping at Jersey City, Bayonne, Newark, Elizabeth, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and many other cities and towns on the way, holding street meetings and sometimes meetings in rented halls.<sup>28</sup>

In Baltimore, opponents to this traveling peace group caused a ruckus, and the police intervened. Despite having her newspaper card pinned to her coat, she was struck by a policeman's club, breaking two of her ribs. After war was declared, she worked with the Anti-Conscription League in New York, attempting to dissuade men from registering for the draft, which was instituted in mid May. She soon went to work full-time for the League and quit her job at the *Call*. Not long afterwards, the monthly journal *The Masses* lured her away by offering her a job as an assistant editor.

In November 1917, Dorothy and dozens of other women spent several weeks in jail and in rural workhouse cells for picketing in front of the White House in behalf of women's suffrage. For part of this time they engaged in a hunger strike. There was a certain irony in her imprisonment because she distrusted the U.S. political system to such a degree that the right to vote didn't really seem that important to her. As she later expressed it: "The cause for which we were in jail seemed utterly unimportant. I had not much interest in the vote, and it seemed to me our protest should have been not for ourselves but for all those thousands of prisoners throughout the country, victims of a materialistic system. They were enduring punishment which would not cure them nor deter them from future crimes, and they were being punished by men not much better than themselves, indeed, far worse in some cases."<sup>29</sup>

Dorothy's association with the *The Masses* in 1917 and 1918 brought her into the midst of a talented group of the leading radical writers and editors of her day, including Max Eastman and Floyd Dell. She later recalled that "most of the artists and writers lived in real poverty, and when some friends of the magazine offered some of us on the staff an apartment in Greenwich Village for the summer [of 1917], we very joyfully accepted and lived in bourgeois comfort for the next five months."<sup>30</sup> In 1913, one of its soon-to-be editors, John (Jack) Reed wrote that "the broad purpose of *The Masses* is a social one: to everlastingly attack old systems, old morals, old prejudices—the whole weight of outworn thought that dead men have saddled up us—and to set up new ones in their places."<sup>31</sup> Her former employer, the newspaper *Call*, had referred to Reed as

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Daniel Aaron, *Writers on the Left* (New York: Avon Books, 1961), 39. This book offers a solid overview of the journals, editors, and contributors that Dorothy associated with in this period of her life and beyond into the 1920s. See also Ross Wetzsteon, *Republic of Dreams: Greenwich Village: The American Bohemia, 1910-1960* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 48-49.

“the greatest reporter in America.”<sup>32</sup> He became a mythic figure in American radicalism—in 1981, he was the central figure in director-actor Warren Beatty’s Academy-Award-winning film *Reds*.

Before Dorothy came to know him he had reported on labor battles in the United States, the Mexican Revolution while a war correspondent riding with Pancho Villa and his men, and on World War I from the Balkans. Not long after Dorothy met him, he was off to Russia, where he covered the Communist Revolution in late 1917. He sent articles back to *The Masses*, but the editors of the journal had meanwhile been indicted for conspiring against the draft and banned it from being mailed out. In early 1918 Reed’s articles appeared instead in a successor journal *The Liberator*, for which Dorothy began working after the banning of *The Masses*.

After Reed returned to New York in the spring of that year, he worked on transforming his articles into a book. In 1919, it appeared and subsequently became a classic account of the Communist takeover entitled *Ten Days That Shook the World*. That same year he was one of the chief founders of the Communist Labor Party when he and others were expelled from the Socialist Party of America. In late 1919, indicted for sedition amidst the U.S. Big Red Scare of that year, he was back in Russia, and died of typhus the following year. He was given a hero’s funeral in Moscow and buried near the Kremlin wall. A half-century later in 1971 on a trip to Russia, Dorothy was moved by the sight of his grave. In one of her autobiographical accounts she remembered him this way: “He was big, hearty Harvard graduate. . . . Wherever there was excitement, wherever life was lived at high tension, there he was, writing, speaking, recording the moment, and heightening its intensity for everyone else.”<sup>33</sup>

Reed, however, was not as close to Dorothy as several others associated with *The Masses* and/or *The Liberator*. One was her earlier New York friend Mike Gold. In the summer of 1917, when her college friend Rayna came to visit her from Chicago, she spent many nights with Rayna, Gold, and others out on the New York streets, and Dorothy sometimes invited people sleeping on park benches back to the Greenwich-Village apartment, where they could get a better night’s sleep. Gold thought such invitations reflected her “religious instinct.” They were both then reading Tolstoy and sympathized with his call for “a Christianity that dispensed with a church and a priesthood.”<sup>34</sup> They both also placed great hopes in the revolution then going on in Russia, and hoped it would help liberate the poor and unfortunates in Russia and beyond. Before the year was out, however, Gold and some others had gone to Mexico to avoid being drafted to fight in World War I, a war in which they thought the United States should not participate.

By January 1921, he was back in New York, where he became *The Liberator*’s co-editor, as well as a contributor, along with the Jamaican-born poet Claude McKay. He remained a true-believer in the Marxist vision for the rest of his life. Dorothy saw him again in Chicago, where *The Liberator* relocated and where she worked for a while in the early 1920s, and then again frequently in the late 1920s after buying a beach cottage on Staten Island. Two of his brothers,

---

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Robert A. Rosenstone, *Romantic Revolutionary: A Biography of John Reed* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 326.

<sup>33</sup> *Long Loneliness*, 68.

<sup>34</sup> Day, *Union Square*, Ch. 7, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=207>.

also communists, owned a place nearby on the beach, and he often came to visit them. Dorothy spent many hours with Mike and other members of his family.

In 1926, he was a co-founder of still another journal, the *New Masses*; in 1930, saw his book *Jews Without Money* achieve great success; and in 1933 began writing a column for the American Communist Party's *Daily Worker*, a task he continued until near the end of his life in 1967. Although Dorothy's life went in a different direction after she converted to Catholicism in late 1927, and Gold eventually moved out of New York, lived in France and, in the last decade of his life, in California, the two remained friends for the rest of his life. After his death she wrote a fond column about him entitled "Mike Gold: Goodbye Old Comrade." A decade later she wrote a column about Cesar Chavez, comparing him to Gold. Later, when analyzing the wisdom of her political views, we will look more closely at her attitude toward both communists and protestors like Chavez.

Among their many other interests, both Reed and Gold were interested in the theater and wrote some plays. They shared this interest with another man of their generation who would later become America's leading dramatist, Eugene O'Neill. Reed and O'Neill were good friends, and in the summer of 1916 were instrumental in establishing the Provincetown Players, while summering at Cape Cod in Provincetown Massachusetts—for a while they were also rivals for the affections of the same woman, Louise Bryant, who later married Reed. (In the film *Reds*, Diane Keaton plays her, with Beatty as Reed, and Jack Nicolson as O'Neill).

Since many of those associated with the new theater group lived in Greenwich Village, they also established a playhouse there. It was beneath the floor where Dorothy and some of the other staff of *The Masses* lived in the summer of 1917. It was probably Gold, whose plays were sometimes performed by the Players, who introduced Dorothy to O'Neill. And in the cold winter of 1917-1918 Dorothy, who had moved to less comfortable, poorly heated quarters, passed a great deal of time with O'Neill and Gold. She later recalled spending many a night with them at an old saloon, The Golden Swan, referred to by regulars as "Hell Hole." She particularly recalled one evening that she described as follows: "It was on one of these cold, bitter winter evenings that I first heard *The Hound of Heaven*, that magnificent poem of Francis Thompson. Gene [O'Neill] could recite all of it, and he used to sit there, looking dour and black, his head sunk on his chest, sighing, "And now my heart is as a broken fount wherein tear-drippings stagnate." It is one of those poems that awakens the soul, recalls to it the fact that God is its destiny. The idea of this pursuit fascinated me, the inevitableness of it, the recurrence of it, made me feel that inevitably I would have to pause in the mad rush of living to remember my first beginning and last end."<sup>35</sup>

Agnes Boulton, who later became O'Neill's wife, described another night in the saloon when Dorothy arrived with two men she had met on the steps of a church where she had gone to pray. After ordering whiskeys for the three of them, she sang the folk song "Frankie and Johnny," while O'Neill looked on with admiration. Sometimes, during that cold winter, an often drunken O'Neill would return with her to her room on the East Side, where Dorothy would put him to bed, and then get in with him under the covers, while embracing him for mutual warmth. O'Neill

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

would sometimes then ask her: “Dorothy, do you want to surrender your virginity?” According to Dorothy, she ignored this question.<sup>36</sup>

In his biography of Day, William Miller contends that O’Neill shared several characteristics of other men to whom Dorothy was attracted.<sup>37</sup> Like some of the others, he also exuded an air of romance: he had travelled around the country with his stage-actor father, gone to Princeton, spent years at sea and in ports as a seaman, drank a great deal, attempted suicide, remained for months in a tuberculosis sanatorium, and attended Harvard, before finally settling in with the Provincetown Players and writing a series of one-act sea plays. His first full-length play, *Beyond the Horizon*, did not appear until 1920. He was also a decade older than Dorothy, who was still barely twenty when she first met him.

But O’Neill’s affections were soon claimed by Agnes Boulton, and he married her in the spring of 1918. In that same season, Dorothy began a nurse’s training program in Brooklyn. Her jobs with leftist papers and journals had reflected two of her aspirations—to write and to work in behalf of the unfortunates in society. But she had still felt dissatisfied. She believed her life had been too undisciplined and the USA’s entry into World War I had damped down some of the earlier radical hopes. To Dorothy’s dismay, many U.S. socialists supported the war effort. Helping others as a nurse now seemed like a practical way to serve others and at the same time introduce more order and discipline into her life.

She worked hard that year. Since many nurses had enlisted for war work, the nurse trainees had their hands full working as well as learning. As Dorothy later wrote: “We had to change each bed every day, bathe all our patients, rub them down with alcohol, dress bed sores, give out the medicines, attend demonstrations, and generally assist in the irrigations and injections, tappings for spinal and lung fluid, and all the other treatments for patients in the medical and receiving wards. I had my complete medical training during that year, but I had no experience on the surgical wards except a few months with fracture and tonsil cases.”<sup>38</sup> The hospital also led her to appreciate the habit of sustained work for others that disregarded fatigue, a practice that would serve her well later in life.

Again, however, she felt dissatisfied. In her *From Union Square to Rome* she indicates she was looking for intellectual stimulation, and so she began spending more time in the heart of New York. She also began writing again in her spare time and later stated that it was her desire to write that led her to give up her nursing. But the actual sequence of events that led her to leave the hospital is more complicated and involves a hospital orderly who became her lover. His name was Lionel Moise, and she mentions him in neither of her two main autobiographical accounts. But she did write a novel, *The Eleventh Virgin* (1924), which biographers believe depicted her relationship with him in a thinly disguised format.<sup>39</sup>

Although a hospital orderly when she met him, Lionel Moise had previously been a newspaper man who had worked in various cities from Los Angeles to New York, and he was

---

<sup>36</sup> Miller, 108-110.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>38</sup> Day, *Union Square*, Ch. 8, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=208>.

<sup>39</sup> See, e.g., Miller, 124-42; links to the novel at <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=1>.

good enough to have impressed the young Ernest Hemingway when they both worked for the *Kansas City Star*. Like Mike Gold, he was Jewish. Like O'Neill, he was about a decade older than Dorothy, had travelled a great deal, was a hard-drinker, and had once been a seaman. If he were around today, he would be described as a macho kind of guy, even a male chauvinist. He often treated Dorothy shabbily, but she kept coming back to him. Among other things, he told her that if she ever became pregnant he would leave her. When she did, she chose Lionel rather than a baby. She had an abortion. But when she got out of the hospital she discovered that he had left town.

Still searching for love, she met a literary promoter named Berkeley Tobey, who was another unreliable and older (by sixteen years) man. In either 1920 or 1921, she married him, and the couple left for Europe in 1921. In this sense Dorothy, still the aspiring writer, acted like so many other American writers who went to Europe in these postwar years. After crossing the Atlantic, and stopping in London and Paris, the couple spent most of the remaining year on the Italian island of Capri. She worked there on her novel, *The Eleventh Virgin*.

### **Chicago, New Orleans, Staten Island, a Daughter, and Conversion, 1921-1927**

By the time Dorothy and her husband returned to New York after about eight months in Europe, she realized that she had made a mistake marrying on the rebound. She decided to leave, and subsequently divorce, her husband and reunite with Lionel Moise. Since he was then in Chicago, that is where she went, but in 1923 their rocky relationship ended. Exactly why is not clear. In the two years Dorothy spent in Chicago, she held many jobs, as a proofreading and library helper, cashier in a restaurant, clerk in a Montgomery Ward's, model for art classes, and as a newspaper courtroom reporter. As a reporter she got to know several other newspeople including Ben Hecht, who was then working with poet and film critic Carl Sandburg and others on the *Chicago Daily News*. One of the final jobs she held was once again with *The Liberator*, which by now had moved to Chicago and become a communist journal. Her main duties were secretarial, but she also wrote a book review of Floyd Dell's *Janet March*. In it she praised Dell's heroine for her liberated attitude towards life and sex.

In her later life as a radical Catholic activist, Dorothy was often reluctant to talk about her earlier bohemian life style and views, but there was one experience she was quite open about—being thrown into a Chicago jail during this Chicago period. Psychiatrist Robert Coles, who first met Dorothy while a medical student in 1952, recalls that “she would often hark back to that prison stay in the conversations I had with her.”<sup>40</sup> She also devoted many pages to it in her autobiographical writings.

She and another woman she had befriended were arrested one summer night for being at an IWW house on what she believed were trumped up charges by authorities conducting raids on radicals. She was put into a cell into which about twenty women ended up that night, many of them prostitutes. She felt shame and disgust and remembered the words of one of her hero's, Socialist presidential candidate Eugene Debs, who stated, “While there is a lower class, I am of it, and while there is a criminal element, I am of it, and while there is a soul in prison, I am not

---

<sup>40</sup> Robert Coles, *Dorothy Day: A Radical Devotion* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co, 1987), 4.



free.”<sup>41</sup> Like Tolstoy, whose writing about prisons she had read, she also believed that the punishment of criminals in an unjust system, like she believed existed in the United States, was futile. Before her transfer to a county jail, she and others in her cell were examined for venereal diseases. Altogether she only spent a few days locked up, but she never forgot the kindness of the prostitutes whom she met there. The experience left her with a more empathetic, though realistic, appreciation of prisoners and prostitutes, though she continued to abhor the practice of prostitution itself.

While still in Chicago Dorothy’s sister, Della, came to live with her, and in the late fall of 1923, after a short time back in New York, the sisters decided to go to New Orleans and settled in the French Quarter. For some months she worked as a reporter on the *New Orleans Item*. Among other stories she reported on the taxi dance halls, where men paid to dance with women hired for that purpose. She even briefly worked as a dancer in order to get an inside feel for the pieces she wrote. But in April 1924 her novel *The Eleventh Virgin* appeared. A review in the *New York Times* was more critical than not, finding it “just one more adolescent novel.”<sup>42</sup> And Dorothy agreed later that it was a bad book, but biographers have found it useful for what it told them about Dorothy in her painful New York days with Lionel Moise. And she did gain a few thousand dollars from it when film rights to it were sold, though no film based on it ever appeared. Since a 1924 dollar was worth \$12.88 in 2011, this payment was not paltry.

Upon learning of the money she had gained she recalled, with a touch of irony, that her “reaction was that of many other radicals—now I could at last have a home of my own and a quiet spot off in the country where there would be time for study and writing and that small measure of security necessary for that work.”<sup>43</sup> Not long after returning to New York in early 1924 she bought a fisherman’s cottage on Raritan Bay on Staten Island. And it was her friend Peggy Cowley who urged her to do so.

Peggy was the wife of Malcolm Cowley, then a minor poet, but later one of the chief chroniclers, especially in his *Exile’s Return* (1934), of the generation of Hemingway and Fitzgerald. Like them, he had lived in Paris for a while and had returned to New York, along with Peggy, shortly before Dorothy herself had arrived from New Orleans. Dorothy had known Peggy (nee Baird) earlier in New York, when they were both friends with Mike Gold and Eugene O’Neill. Peggy was a free-spirited artist who believed in free love and was rumored to have had sex with O’Neill. It was she who had talked Dorothy into going to Washington to protest in November 1917, and was jailed along with Dorothy and others.

During this period Dorothy also came to know some of Cowley’s friends and fellow literary personalities. The list included critic Kenneth Burke, poets Hart Crane and Allen Tate, and novelist John Dos Passos. It was a brother of Burke’s wife, Lily, who soon became the new man in Dorothy’s life. His name was Forster Batterham. Her most satisfying times with him were spent at the Staten Island beach cottage they shared during the mid and late 1920s. Since he usually worked at various jobs in the city, it was mainly weekends that they spent together.

---

<sup>41</sup> Day, *Union Square*, Ch. 9, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=209>.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Miller, 163.

<sup>43</sup> Day, *Union Square*, Ch. 9, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=209>.

In her *The Long Loneliness* she wrote, “The man I loved, with whom I entered into a common-law marriage, was an anarchist, an Englishman by descent.”<sup>44</sup> (Although his parents were born in England, he was from North Carolina.) In some ways, he was like her previous lover, Lionel Moise, but gentler and more soft-spoken. In 1928, after important changes had developed in their relationship, she wrote to him about his insistence on maintaining his principles and independence. Moreover, she added: “You would never marry even when I begged you to some years ago. And you always held yourself somewhat aloof from me. . . . After every quarrel you fought against coming back to me and never did unless I went after you.”<sup>45</sup>

She recalled, “I loved him in every way, as a wife, as a mother even. I loved him for all he knew and pitied him for all he didn’t know. I loved him for the odds and ends I had to fish out of his sweater pockets and for the sand and shells he brought in with his fishing. I loved his lean cold body as he got into bed smelling of the sea and I loved his integrity and stubborn pride.” She made big breakfasts for him which he digested while reading *The New York Times*. Although he was an atheist, as well as an anarchist, she thought “he was creature of utter sincerity.” She noted that “he worked as little as possible, he shared in all the expenses of the house, but he never spent any money if he could help it. He hated social life.”<sup>46</sup>

But one of his good qualities, and one that Dorothy appreciated, was that “he loved nature with a sensuous passion”—she credited him with awakening her to some of nature’s small delights. He loved to fish and was an excellent fisherman; he and Dorothy maintained a garden; and he took a keen interest in astronomy. She wrote that “he had all of the love of the English for the outdoors in all weather. He used to insist on walks no matter how cold or how rainy the day, and this dragging me away from my books, from my lethargy, into the country, made me begin to breathe. If breath is life, then I was beginning to be full of it because of him. I was filling my lungs with it, walking on the beach, resting on the pier beside him while he fished, rowing with him in the calm bay, walking through the fields and woods—a new experience entirely for me, one which brought me to life, and filled me with joy.”<sup>47</sup>

She described her beach setting as follows:

Farther up and down the beach, away from our tiny bay, the waves roll in from the ocean, crashing dull and ominous on the sands, but there by the house, except during storms, the waves are gentle and playful. I wander every afternoon up and down the beach for miles, collecting mussels. . . . The little house I have furnished very simply with a driftwood stove in one corner, plenty of books, comfortable chairs and couches, and my writing table in the window where I can look out at the water all day. On the walls hang the fruits of my collecting—horseshoe crabs, spider crabs, the shell of a huge sea turtle, whelks' cocoons, hanging like false curls, several mounted fish heads, boards covered with starfish, sea horses, pipe and file fish, all picked up in little pools at low tide.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> *Long Loneliness*, 113.

<sup>45</sup> Dorothy Day, *All the Way to Heaven: The Selected Letters of Dorothy Day*, ed. Robert Ellsberg (Milwaukee: Marquette Univ Pr, 2010), 20 (hereafter *Letters*).

<sup>46</sup> *Long Loneliness*, 120, 148.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-15, 120, 135.

<sup>48</sup> Day, *Union Square*, Ch. 10, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=210>.

She also wrote about the international mix of her neighbors: a Belgian couple, an Italian woman who rented out rooms in the summer, a grocer and a hardware man who were Irish, a widow of German descent, and a family of Russian Jewish emigrants with whom she became especially friendly. There was also the property of Mike Gold's brothers, and within two miles the Cowleys had also bought a place. And not far away was a "tiny shack" kept by "a beachcomber and fisherman" who was "a friend of the entire neighborhood." Dorothy wrote that outside his cabin on the sand he kept a chair just for her.<sup>49</sup> Her sister Della was also a frequent guest. With all of her old and new friends so close, there were parties and much socializing, in addition to quieter moments with Forster or by herself just enjoying the nature of beach life.

During this period she continued writing, earned a little money free lancing, but never again got another book of fiction published. For a time, she also helped out a real estate broker in the area of her beach property.

The intimacy she and Forster experienced, and perhaps his often being absent during the week, led her to desire a child. She later wrote that "no matter how much one was loved or one loved, that love was lonely without a child. It was incomplete," and "my home . . . was not a home without one." After her earlier abortion she had feared that she could no longer have children. So when she discovered in June 1925 that she was pregnant, she was overjoyed.<sup>50</sup> One major problem, however, was that Forster did not share her enthusiasm, though he does not seem to have been as adamantly against her having a child as Lionel Moise had been.

After she informed him of her condition they continued to live together, and in September, while visiting her mother in Miami, she wrote to him that her desire for him was painful. "It is a ravishing hunger which makes me want you more than anything in the world and makes me feel as though I could barely exist until I saw you again." After mentioning that he had insinuated things to her in a letter that tormented her, she added, "I have never wanted you as much as I have ever since I left, from the first week on, although I've thought before that my desires were almost too strong to be borne."<sup>51</sup>

After she returned from Florida that fall, they sometimes quarreled. Among the reasons she later cited, three that were especially significant were his resentment about the expectant child, religion, and her moving into an apartment in the city in December 1925. Della moved in with her to help her during her final months of pregnancy. Dorothy latter commented that "it was good to be there, close to friends, close to a church where I could stop and pray. . . . A woman does not want to be alone at such a time. . . . God pity the woman who does not feel the fear, the awe, and the joy of bringing a child into the world."<sup>52</sup>

Although we shall examine thoroughly Dorothy's religious beliefs later, here it is necessary to state that she had manifested religious inclinations for some time. Besides those that appeared sporadically before she returned to New York in 1916, there were subsequently

---

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> *Long Loneliness*, 136.

<sup>51</sup> *Letters*, 14, 15.

<sup>52</sup> Day, *Union Square*, Ch. 11, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=211>.

occasional trips to Catholic churches to pray or observe services and Catholic acquaintances who impressed her in various cities, and there was reading of books like the Bible and *The Imitation of Christ*. And even before she began to move closer to converting to Catholicism there had been the type of religious instincts Mike Gold had observed in her in 1917, at a time that both her and Mike sympathized with Tolstoy's call for "a Christianity that dispensed with a church and a priesthood."

By the time her baby, Tamar Teresa, was born on March 4, 1926, Dorothy had decided to have her baptized in the Catholic Church. "I knew that I was not going to have her floundering through many years as I had done, doubting and hesitating, undisciplined and amoral. I felt it was the greatest thing I could do for a child. For myself, I prayed for the gift of faith. I was sure, yet not sure. I postponed the day of decision." The reason she postponed it was that "becoming a Catholic would mean facing life alone, and I clung to family life. It was hard to contemplate giving up a mate in order that my child and I could become members of the Church. Fred [Forster] would have nothing to do with religion or with me if I embraced it. So I waited."<sup>53</sup> As she stated in another passage: "It is impossible to talk to him about religion or faith. A wall immediately separates us. The very love of Nature and study of her secrets which is bringing me to faith, separates him from religion." He complained that their love for each other was not enough for her, that she was "never satisfied."<sup>54</sup> To him, her religious belief was just a form of escapism.

Nevertheless, Dorothy went ahead and had Tamar baptized in July 1927. First, however, Dorothy herself had to agree to some religious instruction provided by an old nun, Sister Aloysia, from a nearby Catholic home for unwed mothers. Despite Forster's hostility to religion, the baptism did not lead to an immediate break between him and Dorothy. He still returned to the beach cottage on weekends, and even provided the food for a celebration there after the baptism. Despite his opposition to having a child, he grew fond of Tamar, though at the same time being jealous that he had to share a place in Dorothy's heart with her. But Dorothy's decision to turn Catholic—she was baptized in December—meant, according to her new thinking, that he either had to marry her or end their sexual relationship. "To become Catholic meant for me to give up a mate with whom I was much in love. It got to the point where it was the simple question of whether I chose God or man."<sup>55</sup>

### **Tamar, Forster, and the Searching Catholic, 1928-1932**

For the first five years following her conversion, Dorothy's life centered on Tamar and reconciling her life with her new faith. She moved about during these years, dividing her time between her beach property on Staten Island, apartments in the city, going out to California and then Mexico (in the fall of 1929 and early 1930), and staying with family and friends in New Jersey and with her mother in Florida. She remained seriously committed to writing as a career, but did not make much money doing it. On January 1932 she wrote that she "sent ten stories out

---

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. The quoted words in this paragraph are repeated almost exactly in *Long Loneliness*, 136-37.

<sup>54</sup> *Long Loneliness*, 134.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 140.

on New Year's day and six of them have come back."<sup>56</sup> Less than a week later, she mentioned that she just finished an article on Easter in Mexico—she had left there in mid 1930—and was close to finishing a novelette about an American woman who has an affair in Mexico. Later in 1932, she worked on a social novel set in the Depression that would have its character deal with such conflicting loyalties as religion and communism. Occasionally, she got articles published, as she did in two Catholic magazines, *Commonweal* and *America*, writing about Mexico.<sup>57</sup>

Her temporary move to California had come at the invitation of a film studio that had liked a play she had sent to them and asked her to come out and write film dialogue and review novels for potential film scripts. But the job proved unsatisfactory—"life in this place broadens the fanny and narrows the mind"—and the Depression soon ended it.<sup>58</sup> Her choice of writing as a career is hardly surprising given her love of literature and her many literary friends—in addition to those already mentioned, she was also friendly with writer Katherine Anne Porter, to whom she wrote at least a few letters during this period. But at times she must have felt like a character from one of the favorite novels of her youth, Jack London's *Martin Eden*, who went through a period of being inundated with returned manuscripts and rejection letters and found it extremely difficult to earn enough to support himself.

Contrary to much previous research and to the fact that she spent little time in these years with Forster, she did not abandon hope that he might marry her, at least until the end of 1932. Her letters to him recently published by Robert Ellsberg make this very clear. From March 1928 until December 1932, she wrote more than thirty letters to Forster. Time and again, she expresses her love for him and her wish that he marry her.

Sampling of some passages convey her feelings. In March 1929, she declared to him that he would be involving himself in nothing if he married her. Although he might have to watch her go to church on Sundays and on several saints' days, she maintained she was not obsessed with religion and would not have books or pictures around their cottage that would upset him. Six months later she wrote: "Well, perhaps someday I can bulldoze you into marrying me. I certainly don't want to ever marry anybody else. Do I have to be condemned to celibacy all my days, just because of your pig-headedness? Damn it, do I have to remind you that Tamar needs a father?" In January, 1932 she asked him from Florida (where she was staying with her mother), "Aren't we ever going to be together again, sweetheart? . . . What do you say you marry me when I come up in the spring. . . ?" And on 10 December 1932:

Sex is not at all taboo with me except outside of marriage. I am as free and unsuppressed as I ever was about it. . . .

You think all this is only hard on you. But I am suffering too. The ache in my heart is intolerable at times, and sometimes for days I can feel your lips upon me, waking and sleeping. It is because I love you so much that I want you to marry me. I want to be in your arms every night, as I used to be, and be with you always. I always loved you more than you did me. That is why I made up with you so many times, and went after you after we had had some quarrel. We always differed on principle, and now that I am getting

---

<sup>56</sup> *Letters*, 42.

<sup>57</sup> Articles by Dorothy's in *Commonweal*, including some from Mexico, can be found in her *Writings from Commonweal*, ed. Patrick Jordan (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002).

<sup>58</sup> *Letters*, 29.

older I cannot any longer always give way to you just because flesh has such power over me.

She ends this letter, however, admitting that she has finally given up hope that he would change, and the editor of her letters states that this was the last she wrote to him “for many years.”<sup>59</sup>

Although it took her years to abandon this hope, daughter Tamar and her religion remained more important to her. About a year after Tamar’s birth, Dorothy described that event in a piece that Mike Gold’s *New Masses* published—when she was in Mexico in 1929, the artist Diego Rivera told her that it “was reprinted all over the Soviet Union, in many languages.”<sup>60</sup> She wrote the article because her “joy was so great” she wanted to share her joy “with the world,” and she “was glad to write it for a workers’ magazine because it was a joy all women know no matter what their grief at poverty, unemployment, and class war.”<sup>61</sup>

In her many letters to Forster in the late 1920s and early 1930s, she often mentions Tamar and expresses gratitude for the money he occasionally sends her to help support their daughter. The picture Dorothy presents is one of a happy, loving child, with “an angelic disposition.” Dorothy tells him of her little friends, illnesses—most of them minor, except she did contract malaria in Mexico—starting school, and learning to read. But she also frequently mentions Tamar’s affection for her missing father; for example, in March 1929, “The baby speaks of you often, and only the other day she gave me a sweet fervent kiss and said ‘Forster kisses you like that.’” Or six months later, “She talks about you all the time.” In November 1929, Dorothy sent him a poem that Tamar had spoken about him; and in December, Dorothy wrote that Tamar “is always writing a letter to you, but it is so formless yet, I don’t send her scribbles.” Two years later, on Christmas day, 1931, a letter from Dorothy tells him that Tamar wants “her fadder” to come to Florida “and fish with her.”<sup>62</sup>

Judging from her letters, Forster sometimes urged her to renew their old intimate relations, but she refused, sex now being “taboo” for her “outside of marriage.” In *The Long Loneliness*, she writes that after her California job ended she would have gone back to New York hungering “too much to return to Forster,” but New York therefore represented for her “an occasion of sin.”<sup>63</sup> Like many American Catholics in that era, she took the concept of sin, especially sexual sins, seriously. What else her new faith meant to her we shall explore more fully later.

Here it is necessary only to make a few more observations. One is that to her own mind, she had come to embrace Catholicism not as a form of escapism but as an extension of her joy. She later wrote: “It was all very well to love God in His works, in the beauty of His creation, which was crowned for me by the birth of my child. Forster had made the physical world come

---

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 25, 28, 44, 47, 48. In 1959-60, however, Dorothy helped care for Forster’s dying partner of three decades, and on occasion thereafter they corresponded or met, for example when she visited him in a hospital in 1973. By the last decade of her life, their friendship was stronger than it had been for many decades.

<sup>60</sup> The piece, “Having a Baby—A Christmas Story,” was later reprinted in *The Catholic Worker* (December 1977), <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=583>.

<sup>61</sup> Day, *Union Square*, Ch. 11, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=211>.

<sup>62</sup> *Letters*, 25, 27, 30, 32, 34, 40.

<sup>63</sup> *Long Loneliness*, 158.

alive for me and had awakened in my heart a flood of gratitude. The final object of this love and gratitude was God. No human creature could receive or contain so vast a floor of love and joy as I often felt after the birth of my child. With this came the need to worship, to adore.”<sup>64</sup>

She realized that many people said that they did not need a church or joining with others in order to praise God, but she added that “My very experience as a radical, my whole make-up, led me to want to associate myself with others, with the masses, in loving and praising God,” and that the Catholic Church “held the allegiance of the masses of people in all the cities” where she had lived.<sup>65</sup> She also knew that the Catholic hierarchy had often “lined up with property, with the wealthy, with the state, with capitalism, with all the forces of reaction,” and she “was just as much against capitalism and imperialism as ever.” In fact, in the winter after her conversion and before going to California she worked for the Anti-Imperialist League, which she thought of as “a Communist affiliate” helping Sandino’s forces in Nicaragua, who fought against U.S. Marines.<sup>66</sup>

A final point to keep in mind in regard to her Catholicism is that despite maintaining many of her radical views and her stress on social justice, she was also a Catholic traditionalist in many ways. She greatly valued the Catholic sacraments, prayer, and going to mass; revered Mary, the mother of Jesus, and some of the saints; and held fast to traditional Catholic teachings on subjects such as birth control and abortion.<sup>67</sup>

In November and December of 1932, we see this mix of radicalism and Catholic traditionalism when she went to Washington D. C. to cover a “Hunger March” for the Catholic magazines *Commonweal* and *America* and upon returning to New York met Peter Maurin, with whom she began the Catholic Worker (hereafter CW) movement. One of the organizers of the march was Mike Gold’s brother George (Granich), who like Mike was still a communist.

In this period between Franklin Roosevelt’s election and inauguration, with the country still deep in the Depression, Dorothy’s sympathies were clearly with those of the marchers, who were delayed by police for days from entering the capital by what Dorothy thought of as fear of the “reds.” After watching the protesters march down the D. C. streets carrying signs and banners and calling for work, unemployment insurance, old-age pensions (Social Security was still a few years away), and relief for mothers and children, she later wrote that she felt “joy and pride” in watching them, but also “a bitterness.” The latter emotion stemmed from her regret that the leadership of her new Catholic faith was AWOL—“Where was the Catholic leadership in the gathering of bands of men and women together, for the actual works of mercy that the comrades had always made part of their technique in reaching the workers?”<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. Writing of the Catholicism of the masses she was apparently thinking of all the immigrants and children of immigrants who flooded major U.S. cities in the early decades of the twentieth century. On her conversion stemming from her joy, see also Coles, 42-43, where he recounts a 1973 conversation with her on this point.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>67</sup> On her devotion to prayer, the Mass, sacraments, and saints, see Forest, 322-27.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 164-65. See also her account in the Foreword to her book *House of Hospitality*, reprinted at <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=435>.

After witnessing the march on December 8, Dorothy went to the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in the capital. It was a fitting time because according to the Catholic religious calendar it was the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, one of the church's most important holy days and one on which they celebrated Mary being conceived without the stain of Original Sin. In *The Long Loneliness* Dorothy wrote, "There I offered up a special prayer, a prayer which came with tears and with anguish, that some way would open up for me to use what talents I possessed for my fellow workers, for the poor." And she ends that part of her book by writing, "And when I returned to New York, I found Peter Maurin—Peter the French peasant, whose spirit and ideas will dominate the rest of this book as they will dominate the rest of my life."<sup>69</sup>

### **Peter Maurin and the Origins of the Catholic Worker Movement**

By most standards Peter Maurin was a strange man, one who was always preaching his ideas and almost as frequently being brushed off, especially by those put off by anyone looking like a bum or panhandler. As Dorothy wrote, "it might have been his shabbiness, it might have been his thick accent, that prevented him from getting a hearing." And, "he did not bathe. In the summer, or when he was ill, there were times when it was hard to be in the same room with him." To some, he seemed one of those crackpots preaching a new social order. Dorothy had met many such individuals.<sup>70</sup> The misery and turmoil of the Great Depression brought them pouring forth. The editor of *Commonweal* had thought that Maurin might want to talk to her, so when she got back to her New York apartment from D.C., there he was in her kitchen along with her younger brother, John, and his wife, Tessa, who were then staying with her and Tamar.

Dorothy's first impression of Peter "was of a short, broad-shouldered workingman with a high, broad head covered with graying hair [he was twenty years older than her and had never married]. His face was weatherbeaten, he had warm grey eyes and a wide, pleasant mouth. The collar of his shirt was dirty, but he had tried to dress up by wearing a tie and a suit which looked as though he had slept in it. (As I found out afterward, indeed he had.)" He "was one of those people who talked you deaf, dumb and blind, who each time he saw you began his conversation just where he had left off at the previous meeting, and never stopped unless you begged for rest, and that was not for long. He was irrepressible and he was incapable of taking offense."<sup>71</sup> She also wrote, "Peter often gave the impression of being a dangerous and unbalanced radical when

---

<sup>69</sup> *Long Loneliness*, 166.

<sup>70</sup> Dorothy Day, *Loaves and Fishes* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 13, 105; "Peter Maurin 1877-1977," *The Catholic Worker* (May 1977), <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=256>. For a convenient overview of Maurin, see Mark and Louise Zwick, "Peter Maurin, Saint and Scholar of the Catholic Worker," <http://cjd.org/1996/08/01/peter-maurin-saint-and-scholar-of-the-catholic-worker-2/>. Michele Teresa Aronica's *Beyond Charismatic Leadership: The New York Catholic Worker Movement* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1987), Ch. 2, also provides a good background of Maurin before he met Dorothy's.

<sup>71</sup> "Peter Maurin," at <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=256>.



he began ‘indoctrinating’ someone.”<sup>72</sup> Yet, Dorothy later described him as “a genius, a saint, an agitator, a writer, a lecturer, a poor man and a shabby tramp.”<sup>73</sup>

He was of French peasant background. Born in southern France in 1877 of a very large family, he remained on the land until his middle teens. Subsequently, he attended and taught at Christian Brothers’ schools and joined that Catholic religious order which stressed simplicity, piety, and helping the poor. While still in the order, he also served briefly in the army. After the French government acted to limit the role of the Catholic Church in French education, he left the order in the early twentieth century and associated himself in Paris with Le Sillon, a Catholic lay movement that reacted against what it perceived as the state’s repression of religion. It was also influenced by Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891), in which the pope had called on Catholics to help alleviate the misery of workers.<sup>74</sup>

The Le Sillon group and the paper it published took up that call, and also encouraged priests and the laity to become more concerned with social injustices. Although Peter left the group after it took on a more political hue, and it was criticized by the papacy in 1910, the concerns of Le Sillon with the plight of workers remained with him for the rest of his life. But he told Dorothy, “I did not like the idea of revolution. I did not like the French Revolution, nor the English Revolution. I did not wish to work to perpetuate the proletariat so I never became a member of a union. Besides I was an unskilled worker. I was always interested in the land and men’s life on the land.” That’s why, he told her, he left France and went to Canada in 1909, where he farmed as a homesteader for two years before he gave up on it. And she surmised that “probably it was the sight of the poverty of Paris slums, and the thought of his peasant background, and the reading of Prince Kropotkin, that first led Peter to think of moving to Canada to settle on the land.”<sup>75</sup> In fact, before leaving France he had read Kropotkin’s *Fields, Factories and Workshops* and *Mutual Aid*, and went to the south of France to examine small-craft industries, which Kropotkin thought could fit in well with farming.

After homesteading in Canada, he worked as a manual laborer at all sorts of jobs there until 1911, when he came to the United States, where he continued such labor and was once arrested for vagrancy. Dorothy reported that he “worked in steel mills, coal mines, lumber camps, on railroads. He has dug ditches and sewers, and worked as janitor in city tenements. . . . He has taught French, and has always continued studying. Always he was an agitator, speaking on street corners and in public squares, indoctrinating the men with whom he came in contact in lodging houses, coffee shops and along the wayside.”<sup>76</sup> In the mid 1920s he settled in upstate New York. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, he worked in that area as a handyman at a Catholic

---

<sup>72</sup> *Long Loneliness*, 172.

<sup>73</sup> "Background for Peter Maurin," *The Catholic Worker* (October 1944), <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=405>.

<sup>74</sup> For more on Le Sillon, see <http://www.sillon.net/home>.

<sup>75</sup> *Long Loneliness*, 177-78.

<sup>76</sup> See her Forward in her *House of Hospitality* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1939), reprinted at <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=435>.

summer camp in exchange for room and board. It was during this period that he began writing his *Easy Essays*, many of which later appeared in the *Catholic Worker* paper started by him and Dorothy.<sup>77</sup>

That first night in December 1932 when he met Dorothy at her apartment, she was tired after an eight-hour bus ride from Washington, and she was not especially receptive to Peter's enthusiasms and long-windedness. But she allowed him to return the next day—he often stayed nights in New York City at a cheap hotel. He outlined to her the common work he thought they should pursue: the establishment of houses of hospitality, round-table discussions, and farming communes, as well as a newspaper to popularize their efforts. By the end of 1933 all but the farm communes, which came into being later in the 1930s, had been established, and Dorothy was writing a regular column for their monthly newspaper, of which 100,000 copies were printed.

Underlying all this work was a sort of a radical Christian anarchistic philosophy that Peter had worked out and with which he thought Dorothy would sympathize, as in general she did. He also told her that there was much that she had to learn, especially about the history of Catholic thought and action, and he set out to instruct her. And because Dorothy realized there was truth in his assessment of her scant Catholic knowledge, because she was still an enthusiastic convert, and because she shared many of his sympathies about helping poor people and reconciling one's faith with one's actions, she proved a receptive listener. She later wrote that "he was a man twenty years older than I and infinitely wiser."<sup>78</sup> But she was by no means just his passive instrument. When it came to the newspaper they founded, *The Catholic Worker*, she knew that she was the more experienced journalist, and from the beginning it was she who dominated it, including deciding on its name as opposed to the *Catholic Radical*, which he preferred. She was also more practical, possessed greater social and leadership skills, and often left New York temporarily, as she did in 1936 and again in 1937, to support union workers.<sup>79</sup> She became the dynamo of the CW movement, while he was more its elder sage.

### **Foundations of the CW Movement: The French, the Saints, and the Popes**

Perhaps the greatest intellectual gift Peter Maurin provided in the 1930s was introducing Dorothy to various aspects of the long Catholic tradition, especially in Europe. Although she already had books on saints like Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena, he knew much more about the saints and the encyclicals of the popes. She wrote, "But it was not with the social encyclicals of the Popes that Peter began my indoctrination. It was with the prophets of Israel and the fathers of the church. It was also with Pius XI's encyclical [*Rite expiates*] on St. Francis of Assisi. "'Here is the way,' he seemed to shout, 'but,' sadly, 'since men are what they are, and want a plan, all right, here are plans.' and then out came the social encyclicals of Leo XIII, Pius XI, and now latterly, Pius XII."<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> They are available at <http://www.catholicworker.org/roundtable/easyessays.cfm>.

<sup>78</sup> *Long Loneliness*, 175.

<sup>79</sup> See Forest, 137-41, for some of her union-supporting activities in these years, both in New York and out of state.

<sup>80</sup> "Background for Peter Maurin," <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=405>.

Part of this Catholic tradition was the spirit of the French Catholic renaissance that began shortly after 1900. Peter was exposed to it while in Paris associating with Le Sillon and continued to be influenced by it after leaving France. The renaissance owed a strong debt to the French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941). Against the ruling emphasis on a scientific, positivist approach to reality, he had stressed intuition and “‘higher’ spiritual and moral values.”<sup>81</sup> He once wrote that “the great mystic transcends individuality and extends divine action,” and that such action “would be the highest form of wisdom, of which philosophy could only be considered an approximation.”<sup>82</sup> The historian H. Stuart Hughes summed up his influence in France by writing, “After 1905 the educated youth of France became militantly ‘Bergsonian.’”<sup>83</sup>

It was primarily through the next two generations of French thinkers, who were influenced by Bergson but not reluctant to go their separate ways, that the spirit of this French renaissance reached Peter and eventually Dorothy. Two men who attended Bergson’s lectures were the essayist and poet Charles Peguy (1873-1914) and his younger friend, the philosopher Jacques Maritain (1882–1973). At about the same time Peter was living in Paris and associated with Le Sillon, Peguy and Maritain announced their adherence to Catholicism. During the 1930s Peter told Dorothy about these thinkers, as well as two other friends of Maritain, the writer and ardent Catholic Léon Bloy (1846-1917) and the Russian émigré philosopher, living in interwar Paris, Nicholas Berdyaev (1874-1948).

In the 1930s Peter and Dorothy met Maritain and his wife Raissa in New York, and he came on a few occasions to speak to the Catholic Workers and praised their work. Peter often translated his spoken words and some of his writings for the Catholic Workers and their newspaper. Dorothy also read his book *True Humanism* carefully, and in the late 1930s recommended it and his *Freedom in the Modern World* to others. During World War II, the Maritains lived in New York before he was appointed French ambassador to the Vatican in 1944. The historian Hughes wrote, “What *True Humanism* set out to do was to suggest how the heroic and saintly values of the Middle Ages could be translated into terms applicable to the contemporary world.” After being influenced by Bergson as a young man, Maritain turned to the thinking of the medieval philosopher St. Thomas of Aquinas, and for the next half a century “became the most prominent exponent of contemporary Thomism.” Maritain attempted to use the thinking of Aquinas, as well as papal encyclicals dealing with workers, as a basis for developing a social and political philosophy that treated humans as free persons and not just tools of capitalist or communist systems. Hughes maintained that all Maritain’s “subsequent volumes of polemic and public philosophy were footnotes to or expansions on the themes that *True Humanism* had announced.”<sup>84</sup>

---

<sup>81</sup> H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890-1930* (New York: Vintage Books, 1958), 118.

<sup>82</sup> Quoted in Lawrence D. Kritzman, Brian J. Reilly, and Malcolm DeBevoise, *The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century French Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

<sup>83</sup> Hughes, 341.

<sup>84</sup> H. Stuart Hughes, *The Obstructed Path; French Social Thought in the Years of Desperation, 1930-1960* (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1969), 73, 76.

One Thomistic idea Maritain often mentioned was the necessity of working for the common good. Both Peter and Dorothy often reiterated this idea, for example when Dorothy wrote in January 1939: “It is all the workers that we are trying to reach, all the leaders, whether they are Communist or Catholic. We are out to convert others to our point of view, to work for a pluralist order where Agnostics, as well as Catholics, Protestants and Jews, can work for the common good.”<sup>85</sup> In a September 1963 column she recalled that “one of the first books Peter used to discourse on . . . was *The Thomistic Doctrine of the Common Good*.”<sup>86</sup>

Another Maritain idea that that Peter and Dorothy adopted was that “pure means” had to be used to reach one’s goals. In September 1975, Dorothy wrote: “It is a lesson for us all in the peace movement that gentle pressure, constant hard work, a faithful, straightforward—one might even say respectful—adherence to the Scriptural command to love our opponents and to exercise the virtue of hope even when all seems hopeless, offer a great example of the pure means to achieve our ends. Jacques Maritain impressed this use of pure means upon us as in the earliest days of the *Catholic Worker*.”<sup>87</sup> Unlike many Christians, including Maritain, who thought war against Hitler was justified, Dorothy believed that it was a violation of the need to use “pure means” (see below on “Pacifism” in the second part of this essay).

In the 1940s, Dorothy was also greatly moved by Raissa Maritain’s memoirs, which dealt with Bergson’s influence, the Maritains’ friendships with Peguy, Bloy, and others, and the couple’s joint conversion and subsequent spiritual development.<sup>88</sup> For both Maritains, spirituality, contemplation, prayer, and their Catholic rituals were an important basis for their philosophy of life and actions.

But Peter was even more influenced by Emmanuel Mounier (1905-1950), a young friend of Maritain’s who in the early 1930s took up Peguy’s legacy. Dorothy later wrote that a favorite source of Peter’s was Mounier’s *The Personalist Manifesto*, some of which Peter translated for *The Catholic Worker* before persuading a priest at St. John’s Abbey in Minnesota to translate the whole book for publication in 1938. Two modern-day Catholic Workers and editors have written. “The *Catholic Worker* is incomprehensible without an understanding of the influence of the great thought and movements going on in France, and especially the ideas of Mounier.”<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=339>. For the Maritains’ influence on Maurin and Day, see Mark and Louise Zwick, *The Catholic Worker Movement: Intellectual and Spiritual Origins* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), Ch. 10.

<sup>86</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=806>.

<sup>87</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=556>.

<sup>88</sup> A search of Dorothy’s writings mentioning one or both of the Maritains yields more than 40 hits at <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/search.cfm>. On Raissa Maritain’s combined book, *Adventures in Grace*, and *We Have Been Friends Together* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1961), see Dorothy’s *Catholic Worker* columns of February 1942 and July-August 1945 at <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=380> and <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=413>.

<sup>89</sup> Mark and Louise Zwick, “Roots of the Catholic Worker Movement: Emmanuel Mounier, Personalism, and the Catholic Worker Movement,” <http://cjd.org/1999/08/01/emmanuel-mounier-personalism-and-the-catholic-worker-movement/>. A fuller treatment of the same topic can be found in their *Catholic Worker Movement*, Ch. 6.

Witnessing the crisis of capitalism as evidenced by the Great Depression, in 1932 Mounier founded the journal *Esprit*, “which until his premature death in 1950 served as the most persuasive voice of the French Catholic Left.”<sup>90</sup> He thought of his personalism philosophy primarily as an approach or “set of attitudes” that emphasized personal responsibility and placed the individual person before any material or ideological considerations, but yet also stressed the importance of love and community. Although Mounier disliked the term “moralist,” he was one who maintained a consistent set of values, but as a moralist seeker of truth rather than a dogmatist. Although he valued medieval life, he also recognized that the Renaissance which followed it had helped liberate the human personality. Subsequently, however, he thought the Western world had overemphasized individualism, money-making, and abstract rationalism to the detriment of community, the welfare of all, and a more integral approach to knowledge and life.<sup>91</sup> His main criticism of capitalism was that it was flawed by the priority it placed on profit, subordinating individuals to production and consumption. He believed that “profit recognizes no human criterion and no limits . . . and remains indifferent equally to economic well-being as such and to the good of the person it contacts.” He also criticized modern Christianity for being too allied to capitalist values. On a personal level, Mounier advocated simplicity and a contempt for material attachments that restricted one’s true freedom.<sup>92</sup>

Peter and Dorothy followed Mounier’s example in criticizing individualism and capitalism, but also communism and fascism, and in calling for a revolution of the spirit which would transform society. “The Catholic Worker movement, like the French personalist movement, sought to bring together the Catholic faith, contemplation and self-purification with social action and work, especially in response to the economic and spiritual crisis of the time.” And “like those gathered around *Esprit*, the early Catholic Workers were, for the most part, Catholic, but were open to others who shared their commitment to the primacy of the spiritual and to living out the social doctrine of the Church expressed in papal encyclicals.”<sup>93</sup>

Dorothy often mentioned Mounier’s “Personalist and Communitarian Revolution” and explained how Peter interpreted this non-violent revolution: “His [Peter’s] whole message was that everything began with one’s self. He termed his message a personalist one, and was much averse to the word socialist, since it had always been associated with the idea of political action, the action of the city or the state. He wanted us all to be what we wanted the other fellow to be. If every man became poor there would not be any destitute, he said. If everyone became better, everyone would be better off. He wanted us all ‘to quit passing the buck.’”<sup>94</sup> But as influenced as Peter was by Mounier, he also saw other personalist examples in earlier times. Dorothy noted that “Peter is always getting back to Saint Francis of Assisi, who was most truly the ‘great

---

<sup>90</sup> Hughes, *Obstructed Path*, 97.

<sup>91</sup> Roy Pierce, *Contemporary French Political Thought* (London: Oxford U.P., 1966), 49-52 .

<sup>92</sup> Zwick and Zwick at <http://cjd.org/1999/08/01/emmanuel-mounier-personalism-and-the-catholic-worker-movement/>, quoting and analyzing Mounier’s writings and their impact on the CW movement.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> “Peter’s Program,” *The Catholic Worker*, May 1955, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=176>.

personalist.’ In his poverty, rich; in renouncing all, possessing all; generous, giving out of his heart, sowing generously and reaping generously, humble and asking when in need, possessing freedom and all joy.”<sup>95</sup> In June 1971, she added that “one begins where one is, with one’s own neighbors and their problems. The Personalist and communitarian revolution is everywhere.” And in September 1976, “Land trusts, credit unions, cooperatives, decentralization, a redistribution of land . . . this is the Personalist and Communitarian Revolution.”<sup>96</sup>

Besides the Frenchmen already mentioned, by the late 1930s Dorothy was also recommending books by “the two most influential Catholic novelists of the interwar years,” Georges Bernanos and Francois Mauriac.<sup>97</sup> She also sometimes mentioned the Parisian-born Catholic philosopher Etienne Gilson and often referred to the French Catholic poet and diplomat Paul Claudel, and frequently quoted him as stating that “youth demands the heroic.” After World War II, she referred to French theologians like the Jesuits Henri de Lubac and Jean Danielou (both of whom eventually were made Cardinals) and Cardinal Emmanuel Suhard, who as archbishop of Paris in the 1940s sponsored the Worker-Priest movement by which priests went to work in factories in order to better understand workers’ plight and win them over to Catholic principles. She was also fond of the writings of the French priest and paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin, who espoused an evolutionary Christian optimism and whose works became very popular in France and beyond among Catholic intellectuals. The French saint Therese of Lisieux (1873-1897), as we shall see below, was also one of her favorites.

But she also cited favorably the atheistic French writer Albert Camus, especially from his novel *The Plague*, and in 1967 thanked the monk Thomas Merton for sending her his “Albert Camus and the Church,” which she called a “wonderful article.”<sup>98</sup> Although Merton’s praise for Camus was mixed with regret that Camus could not bring himself to accept God, the essay was full of admiration for Camus’s integrity and courage in facing a cruel world. Dorothy had printed it in the December 1966 issue of *The Catholic Worker*.

The French Catholic influences reinforced those of the papal encyclicals and lives of saints like Francis of Assisi that Peter Maurin emphasized and both of which continued to resonate with Dorothy for the rest of her life. These lines from Dorothy’s May 1947 column are an example: “He [Peter] introduced to us Leon Bloy, the pilgrim of the absolute, and that great and terrible line of his, which converted the Maritains, “*There is only one unhappiness, and that is—NOT TO BE ONE OF THE SAINTS.*” He showed us how Pope Pius XI called our attention in his encyclical on St. Francis de Sales, to the fact that we are all called to be saints, layman and religious, that this is our goal, union with God.” She added, “Often people ask us what is the

---

<sup>95</sup> “Peter the Materialist,” *The Catholic Worker*, Sept. 1945, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=152>.

<sup>96</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=510> and <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=572>.

<sup>97</sup> Hughes, *Obstructed Path*, 121; <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=448>.

<sup>98</sup> *Letters*, 329. A detailed list of the Merton-Day correspondence can be found at <http://www.mertoncenter.org/Research/Correspondence/z.asp?id=460>. I have written more on the relationship of Day and Merton in my essay “Wisdom from Russia: The Perspectives of Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton,” <http://www.wisdompage.com/WisdomFromRussia.pdf>.

keynote of Peter's message, and one could say at once, without hesitation, POVERTY. It is what sets him apart, it is what distinguishes him from the great mass of the teachers of the day.” In one of his *Easy Essays* he wrote, “For a Christian, voluntary poverty is the ideal as exemplified by Saint Francis of Assisi.”<sup>99</sup>

Even before meeting Peter, she had thought about the subject of poverty. Before her conversion, she recounted reading lines from “a book of essays of William James” that she thought applied to her lover Forster.

Poverty is indeed the strenuous life—without brass bands or uniforms or hysteric popular applause or lies or circumlocutions; and when one sees the way in which wealth-getting enters as an ideal into the very bone and marrow of our generation, one wonders whether a revival of the belief that poverty is a worthy religious vocation may not be the transformation of military courage, and the spiritual reform which our time stands most in need of.

Among us English-speaking peoples especially do the praises of poverty need once more to be boldly sung. We have grown literally afraid to be poor. We despise anyone who elects to be poor in order to simplify and save his inner life. If he does not join the general scramble, we deem him spiritless and lacking in ambition. We have lost the power even of imagining what the ancient idealization of poverty could have meant: the liberation from material attachments, the unbribed soul, the manlier indifference, the paying our way by what we are not by what we have, the right to fling away our life at any moment irresponsibly—the more athletic trim, in short, the fighting shape.

These lines, minus a few minor alterations made by Dorothy, are found in the agnostic James’s *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), a book which Dorothy credited, even before meeting Peter, with introducing her to the sixteenth-century mystics St. Teresa of Avila and her contemporary St. John of the Cross. Following the above lines, James wrote: “When we of the so-called better classes are scared as men were never scared in history at material ugliness and hardship; when we put off marriage until our house can be artistic, and quake at the thought of having a child without a bank-account and doomed to manual labor, it is time for thinking men to protest against so unmanly and irreligious a state of opinion.”<sup>100</sup>

After meeting Peter, Dorothy realized that voluntary poverty was an important lesson taught by many saints, but even more important was the love they displayed for others. In her September 1945 column Dorothy wrote that “unless we are trying to put the social ideas of the Gospel into practice, we are not showing our love for our neighbor.” She quoted the New Testament’s St. John, “How can we love God Whom we have not seen, unless we love our brother whom we do see.” And she stated that Peter “brings to us quotations and books and ideas that, by stimulating the mind to know, will encourage the heart to love.”<sup>101</sup>

---

<sup>99</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=155> (capitalization and italics are as in her column); <http://www.catholicworker.org/roundtable/easyessays.cfm>.

<sup>100</sup> *Long Loneliness*, 118-19, 140-41; <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=211>; cf. James’s words at [http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/wjames/ch14\\_15.html](http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/wjames/ch14_15.html). For the popularity of James among European thinkers, including Bergson, see Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*, 112-13. For more on Dorothy’s thoughts about voluntary poverty, see her Feb. 1945 column on the subject at <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=150>.

<sup>101</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=152>. See below’s section on “Wisdom, Love, and Other Values.”

Before Dorothy met Peter she had read St. Augustine and, as we have already seen, she had read about the lives of St. Teresa of Avila and St. Catherine of Siena. She even gave the middle name of Teresa to Tamar after the saint, and she would continue to think about and frequently mention all three saints in future years. For example, in a 1971 column she wrote, “St. Augustine has some good advice about voluntary poverty which enables us all to do the works of mercy. ‘Find out how much God has given you, and from it take what you need; the remainder which you do not require is needed by others. The superfluities of the rich are the necessities of the poor. Those who retain what is superfluous possess the goods of others.’”<sup>102</sup> The two female saints were especially dear to her heart, and the Zwicks’ book on the CW movement (see fn. 82) contains separate chapters on the importance of each of these saints to Dorothy. It also contains a chapter on the significance of Therese of Lisieux (1873-1897) to Dorothy, who thought the saint was important enough to write a biography of her, published in 1961. What Dorothy valued most about this saint who died in France the same year Dorothy was born was her stress on the “little way.” This meant to Dorothy changing the world by starting with little acts of love that would ripple outward. In a 1965 column she elaborated.

When a mother, a housewife, asks what she can do, one can only point to the way of St. Therese, that little way, so much misunderstood and so much despised. She did all for the love of God, even to putting up with the irritation in herself caused by the proximity of a nervous nun. She began with working for peace in her own heart, and willing to love where love was difficult, and so she grew in love, and increased the sum total of love in the world, not to speak of peace.

[Cardinal] Newman wrote: “Let us but raise the level of religion in our hearts, and it will rise in the world. He who attempts to set up God’s kingdom in his heart, furthers it in the world.” And this goes for the priest, too, wherever he is, whether he deals with the problem of war or with poverty. He may write and speak, but he needs to study the little way, which is all that is available to the poor, and the only alternative to the mass approach of the State. Missionaries throughout the world recognize this little way of cooperatives and credit unions, small industry, village commune and cottage economy. And not only missionaries. Down in our own South, in the Delta regions among the striking farmers of Mississippi, this “little way” is being practiced and should be studied.<sup>103</sup>

Also important to Dorothy were the “Desert Fathers,” mainly Egyptian hermits, monks, and nuns of the third and fourth centuries of the Christian era.<sup>104</sup> Even before meeting Peter, she had read about some of them, including in Anatole France’s novel *Thais*, a fictional account of the former courtesan Thais who repented and lived as a nun in the Egyptian desert. But Peter encouraged her to read their writings, and in a 1943 column she mentioned her “reading and rereading” of Helen Waddell’s translation *The Desert Fathers*. In April 1957 Dorothy stated that she was again reading Waddell’s translation and that the Fathers’ “every action showed a standard of values which turned the world upside down. It was their humility, their gentleness, their heart-breaking courtesy that was the seal of their sanctity.”<sup>105</sup> Later on, after Thomas

---

<sup>102</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=514>.

<sup>103</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=248>.

<sup>104</sup> Zwick and Zwick, *The Catholic Worker Movement*, 47-50; see also the Zwicks’ “Dorothy Day and the Light from the East: Eastern Christianity, Fathers of the Desert, Dostoevsky,” <http://cjd.org/2000/06/01/dorothy-day-and-the-light-from-the-east-eastern-christianity-fathers-of-the-desert-dostoevsky/>.

<sup>105</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=392>; <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=720>.



Merton's *Wisdom of the Desert* (1961) appeared, she praised his work, which was also primarily a translation of the Desert Fathers' writings.

Her reading of the wisdom of the Desert Fathers heightened her appreciation for the whole monastic tradition, east and west—and of monks of her day like Thomas Merton. It is true that she did not examine the lives of the Desert Fathers and saints with the same exactitude that a professional historian might, but she also was not blind to their faults. Pacifist and anti-colonialist that she was, she wrote in a column of July/August 1961 about Cuba that

St. Catherine of Sienna preached a Crusade, saying that it was better to go fight the heathen and regain the holy land, than for the Italian cities to be fighting among themselves. And on the other hand our Lord said through her, "I have left myself in the midst of you, that what you do for these, I will count as done for writings of myself." And in this she was thinking of the poor.

And St. Teresa of Avila prayed that before her nuns became rich and lived in fine buildings, the walls would fall upon them and crush them. Yet she accepted money from her brothers who went to the New World to make their fortunes. Those fortunes were made by robbing the native population, enslaving them, even wiping them out completely (after baptizing them and anointing them first perhaps.) Hard not to be cynical, hard not to judge. Fr. John J. Hugo said that one could go to hell imitating the imperfections of the saints.<sup>106</sup>

She also wrote, "There are, of course, the lives of the saints, but they are too often written as though they were not in this world. We have seldom been given the saints as they really were, as they affected the lives of their times. We get them generally, only in their own writings. But instead of that strong meat we are too generally given the pap of hagiographical writing."<sup>107</sup>

### **Foundations of the CW Movement: The Distributists and Russian Writers**

Two other strong influences on the CW movement were two others, one English and the other Russian. The English one was Distributism, and a present-day web site devoted to it describes it as follows: "Distributivism, also known as Distributism, is an economic theory formulated by Hilaire Belloc and G. K. Chesterton largely in response to the principles of Social Justice laid down by Leo XIII in his encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. Its key tenet is that ownership of the means of production should be as widespread as possible rather than being concentrated in the hands of a few owners (Capitalism) or in the hands of state bureaucrats (Socialism). Belloc did not believe that he was developing a new economic theory, but rather expounding an old and widespread one against the novelties of both Capitalism and Socialism."<sup>108</sup>

In 1947 Dorothy wrote that, in addition to recent papal encyclicals, "to form our minds, Peter brought us things to read, Chesterton and Belloc and Gill and Cobbett and Father Vincent McNabb." The oldest of the group was radical English journalist William Cobbett (1763-1835), whom she earlier referred to as the forerunner of the Distributist program.<sup>109</sup> The other four men

---

<sup>106</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=246>.

<sup>107</sup> From her 1948 book *On Pilgrimage*, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=480>.

<sup>108</sup> <http://distributist.blogspot.com/2007/08/introduction-to-distributism.html>.

<sup>109</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=155>; and earlier, March 1945, column, at <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=408>.

flourished in early twentieth-century England, were Catholic by birth or conversion, and sometimes interacted with one or more of the other three. G. K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc were primarily writers whom Dorothy had read before meeting Peter, but without much enthusiasm. Although Eric Gill and McNabb also wrote, the first was primarily a sculptor, and the second an Irish-born Dominican priest and theologian. Dorothy often mentioned the four men and quoted from them in her writings. She cited the converts Chesterton and Gill most often, in 1944 referred to McNabb as “the greatest apostle of all,” and recalled in 1945 that she had once had dinner with Belloc and a few others on one of his trips to New York.<sup>110</sup>

At least one reliable source on the CW movement has stated that its economic philosophy was Distributism.<sup>111</sup> In one of her autobiographical accounts she described this philosophy without titling it: “As Peter pointed out, ours was a long-range program, looking for ownership by the workers of the means of production, the abolition of the assembly line, decentralized factories, the restoration of crafts and ownership of property. This meant, of course, an accent on the agrarian and rural aspects of our economy and a changing emphasis from the city to the land.”<sup>112</sup>

In 1948, Dorothy wrote three articles on Distributism. In the first one she recommended some books by Belloc and Chesterton and stated that “the principles of Distributism have been more or less implicit in much that we have written for a long time.” She maintained that “the aim of Distributism is family ownership of land, workshops, stores, transport, trades, professions, and so on.” She also mentioned that her son-in-law, David Hennessy, had “one of the best libraries in the country” on Distributism and in addition to his farming operated a mail-order business sending out Distributist materials. In her second article, she quoted Pope Pius XII’s words that what people “can and ought to strive for *is a more just distribution of wealth.*” And she declared the need for people to have “part ownership in workshops and stores and factories.” She insisted that Distributism did not mean that everyone should farm or live in the country, but that machines and cities should be on a scale appropriate to humans and she criticized assembly lines and cities of ten million people for failing to meet that test.<sup>113</sup>

In the third article, she quoted one of the pope’s statements that “the Church wants some limit set to the dwarfing of man himself in these days through the emergence and dominance of the machine and the continued expansion of large scale industry.” And from Pius XII she quoted the line, “Small and medium holdings in agriculture, in the arts and trades, in commerce and industry, should be guaranteed and promoted.” Then she furnished a long quote from a French worker-priest, part of which states that “the wage earner is not a free man . . . but a factor of production which has been hired and will be exploited to the maximum, not even directed by a

---

<sup>110</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=223>; <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=412>.

<sup>111</sup> Mark and Louise Zwick, “G. K. Chesterton and Dorothy Day on Economics: Neither Socialism nor Capitalism,” <http://cjd.org/2001/10/01/g-k-chesterton-and-dorothy-day-on-economicsneither-socialism-nor-capitalism-distributism/>. A more thorough account of this topic can be found in the Zwicks’ *Catholic Worker Movement*, Ch. 9.

<sup>112</sup> *Long Loneliness*, 220-21.

<sup>113</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=159>; <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=160>.

human feeling of efficiency but rather solely by the profit of money. Capitalism distills today more than ever, in the consciences of the workers the feeling of being pawns and the urge to revolt.” Dorothy then related how the worker-priest believed that many workers resented the Catholic Church because they believed it had “exploited them and lined up with the capitalist.” She defended her Distributionist views and criticisms of “ruthless industrialism” because she witnessed on a regular basis “its thousands of refugees . . . the homeless, the hungry, the crippled, the maimed,” and saw “the lack of sympathy and understanding, the lack of Christian charity accorded them . . . to most they represent the loafers and the bums . . . who daily suffer the ugly reality of industrial capitalism and its fruits.”<sup>114</sup>

In subsequent years she often returned to her Distributionist views. In October 1954, she wrote an article, “Distributism Versus Capitalism,” defending the former and criticizing the latter. In July/August 1956 she argued in another article, “Distributism Is Not Dead,” that “it [Distributism] needs to be constantly rewritten, re-assessed, restated, with the wisdom and clear-sightedness of a Chesterton who by his paradoxes, made us see our lives and our problems in the light of Faith.”<sup>115</sup>

Although Dorothy owed much to Peter Maurin for the religious intellectual sources he familiarized her with, one religious influence was already present before she met Peter and continued to be important to her for the remainder of her life. It was that of Russian writers, especially Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and the anarchist Kropotkin. Peter, on the other hand, was much less familiar with most of them. Dorothy recalled that “he did not read . . . Dostoevsky.”<sup>116</sup>

In her biographical work of 1938, she wrote that Dostoevsky “had a profound influence on my life, on my way of thinking, and that reading him and Tolstoy in college made her “cling to a faith in God.”<sup>117</sup> Later on in September 1971, as she was preparing for a trip to Russia, she wrote, “From my high school years, I have been fascinated by Russia, and it was the books of Tolstoi, Dostoyevsky, Turgenev and Chekhov which did much to bring about my conversion.”<sup>118</sup>

In 1941 Dorothy made a new “dear friend” who deepened and widened her knowledge of the Russians. She was Helene Iswolsky, the daughter of the last Czarist Russian ambassador to France, who came to the United States following the German occupation of Paris during World War II. Among Iswolsky’s endeavors was beginning an ecumenical group called the Third Hour, where Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants met to discuss ecumenical ideas—like Day, Iswolsky had become a Catholic herself in the 1920s. It was a remarkable group that included the poet W.

---

<sup>114</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=161>.

<sup>115</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=244>.

<sup>116</sup> Dorothy Day, *Loaves and Fishes*, 105. For an excellent treatment of the influence of Dostoevsky and other Russian writers on Dorothy’s, see Mark and Louise Zwick, “Dorothy Day and the Light,” <http://cjd.org/2000/06/01/dorothy-day-and-the-light-from-the-east-eastern-christianity-fathers-of-the-desert-dostoevsky/> and the Zwicks’ *Catholic Worker Movement*, Ch. 13.

<sup>117</sup> *From Union Square*, Chs. 2 & 4, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=202>; <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=204>.

<sup>118</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=511>. Russian spellings often vary according to systems of transliteration. In quoted material, I have left the spellings as quoted.

H. Auden and the theologian Ursula Niebuhr, wife of the more famous Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. Dorothy spoke at many of their meetings.

In Dorothy's January 1976 column, written soon after her friend's death, she recalled that, "My own love for Russian literature—Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov—drew me to Helene at once."<sup>119</sup> In an earlier October 1949 column, Dorothy had noted that during the previous month Helene had been at the CW farm in Newburgh, New York "giving a course" on Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and the Russian philosopher and poet Vladimir Soloviev, whom Dorothy referred to as "the three great Russians." She wrote that "these three men wrote of the struggle of man towards God and to all of them the golden key which opened the doors of prisons and led out of darkness was the key of love. To listen to such talks is not only to learn more of Christ, but to learn to love the Russians who are truly Christ-bearers in their sufferings and poverty."<sup>120</sup>

Helene had once said to Dorothy that Soloviev "is the prophet of ecumenism, and indeed of everything good in Russia."<sup>121</sup> Although Dorothy appreciated his ecumenism and friendship with Dostoevsky (who was not so ecumenical), what she valued most about him were his insights on love. A year before Iswolsky's "course," in a 1948 column, she had quoted extensively from his *The Meaning of Love*, but we will postpone more comment about her quotes until later in this essay when we examine her views on love, which she considered the highest of the wisdom values.

Helene and Dorothy also shared an appreciation of the Russian monastic and mystical tradition. In the 1950s and again in 1962, Dorothy wrote favorably of G. P. Fedotov's *A Treasury of Russian Spirituality*, which included *The Pilgrim* (sometimes rendered *The Way of a Pilgrim*). In 1954 Dorothy recommended this mid-nineteenth century anonymous work as a spiritual classic comparable to the medieval *Imitation of Christ*, which she had read even before converting to Catholicism.<sup>122</sup>

In June 1973, Dorothy wrote in her diary, "Dostoevsky influenced my youth and gave me the insights for today (such work as ours). But Chekhov's stories and letters are a never-failing inspiration now."<sup>123</sup> In her old age, the profoundly religious Dorothy appreciated his writings and life more than ever, which was somewhat ironical in that he died at an early age, 44, and considered himself a non-believer. But she valued the great compassion and love of this doctor-writer and realized that one could be Christ-like without adhering to any formal religion.

In her old age, Dorothy also greatly valued two twentieth-century Russian novelists Boris Pasternak, author of *Doctor Zhivago*, and Alexander Solzhenitsyn, author of several novels that

---

<sup>119</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=566>.

<sup>120</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=474>.

<sup>121</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=515>.

<sup>122</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=883>.

<sup>123</sup> Dorothy Day, *The Duty of Delight: The Diaries of Dorothy Day*, ed. Robert Ellsberg (Milwaukee: Marquette Univ Pr, 2008), 534 (hereafter *Diaries*).

she cherished. In a March/April 1977 column she referred to the latter as “one of the greatest writers of our day,” and ranked him up there with Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Chekhov.<sup>124</sup>

### **From Depression to War**

The beginning of the CW movement in 1933 coincided with the beginning of Franklin Roosevelt’s administration, the highlights of which were his steps to deal with the Depression and then to fight World War II. While Roosevelt took the type of big “New-Deal” steps exemplified by the beginning of Social Security and establishment of unemployment compensation, Dorothy stressed more the “little way” of St. Therese, believing it to suggest that each individual should do what he or she could on a personal level to help others. As a self-professed anarchist, Dorothy was also distrustful of big government (see below, the section on “Pacifism, Society, and Politics”).

Most typical of her approach was the CW establishment of Hospitality Houses. The idea of creating them came from Dorothy’s CW co-founder, Peter Maurin, and he outlined his thoughts in early issues of the CW paper. He believed that those in need, whether called beggars, bums or panhandlers, “should be given food, clothing and shelter by those who are able to give it.” He stated that such hospitality was still practiced in Muslim countries, but was no longer “taught nor practiced in Christian countries.” He thought that Catholic homes should have a hospitality room to shelter the needy and that “the remaining needy members of the parish should be given shelter in a Parish Home.” Moreover, “furniture, clothing and food should be sent to the needy members of the Parish from the Parish House of Hospitality,” which could also offer Catholic instruction, reading rooms, round-table discussions, and vocational training for the unemployed.<sup>125</sup>

It was not the parishes, however, that established such houses, but Peter and Dorothy, who offered food, shelter, and clothing without attempts to proselytize, to needy persons regardless of religious beliefs. The co-founders started out slowly in New York, establishing separate houses for needy men and women during CW’s first year. Items such as beds, blankets, and sheets came from donations. To solicit them, Dorothy became the CW’s chief fund raiser, relying not only on donations from both laypersons and clergy, but also occasionally—when not needed for her own or daughter Tamar’s modest needs—her own income from sources such as her royalties and lecture payments. She willingly embraced voluntary poverty, never paid income taxes, and was happy to use her meager earnings to assist others.

The example that she, Peter, and the volunteers set attracted others around the country, and CW hospitality houses in other cities sprung up, such as in Boston, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Pittsburg, Detroit, Chicago, San Francisco, and Houma, Louisiana. Dorothy herself indicated that the number of needy living in these houses varied greatly. The number of houses and locations fluctuated, but one source indicates that by World War II, there were 30 of them nationwide, as

---

<sup>124</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=577>. I have written much more on Dorothy’s appreciation for Russian literature, philosophy, and religion in my essay “Wisdom from Russia,” at <http://www.wisdompage.com/WisdomFromRussia.pdf>.

<sup>125</sup> From Day’s *House of Hospitality*, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=435>.

well as one in England.<sup>126</sup> In addition, by the late 1930s Dorothy estimated that some 5,000 people a day were being fed by CW houses, with over 1,000 in New York alone coming each morning for breakfast. Mention of providing food in soup lines was frequent in her writings. In addition to helping out at the CW houses, volunteers performed other services, with some of them selling the CW paper on the streets for a penny a copy.

While Dorothy always credited Peter Maurin with being a co-founder of the CW movement, it was she who always directed the organization. In the mid and late 1940s, he suffered from dementia and retreated even more into the background before his death in 1949. She, on the other hand, was a one woman dynamo: running the monthly paper, fund raising, cooking, cleaning, caring for the sick, demonstrating, picketing (often in behalf of striking workers), hosting visitors, and traveling around the country—usually by bus or train—visiting CW houses and speaking to clergy and laypersons, workers and unemployed, students and professors. In addition she helped various other needy people, outside of the CW houses, find clothes and shelter. All the while, the circulation of the *Catholic Worker* kept increasing, accompanied by new subscriptions from countries as far away as India, China, and Australia. By 1936, 150,000 copies a month were printed, but Dorothy's pacifist stance regarding the Spanish Civil War, which started that year, angered some readers, both on the Left and the Right, and circulation dipped somewhat—her pacifist stand during World War II led to even more of a decline in support for her efforts, and about half of the CW hospitality houses closed during the war.

In a column in 1942, responding to a journalist who asserted that her Catholic Workers were pacifist sentimentalists and afraid of suffering, Dorothy provided a graphic description of some aspects of CW daily life:

But let those who talk of softness, of sentimentality, come to live with us in cold, unheated houses in the slums. Let them come to live with the criminal, the unbalanced, the drunken, the degraded, the pervert. (It is not decent poor, it is not the decent sinner who was the recipient of Christ's love.) Let them live with rats, with vermin, bedbugs, roaches, lice (I could describe the several kinds of body lice).

Let their flesh be mortified by cold, by dirt, by vermin; let their eyes be mortified by the sight of bodily excretions, diseased limbs, eyes, noses, mouths.

Let their noses be mortified by the smells of sewage, decay and rotten flesh. Yes, and the smell of the sweat, blood and tears spoken of so blithely by Mr. Churchill, and so widely and bravely quoted by comfortable people.

Let their ears be mortified by harsh and screaming voices, by the constant coming and going of people living herded together with no privacy. (There is no privacy in tenements just as there is none in concentration camps.)<sup>127</sup>

Before World War II, however, the types of CW organizations had increased with the establishment of several farming communes. The first to arise, in 1935, was a mere “garden commune” attached to a big rented house on Staten Island. Next, in 1936, came Maryfarm near Easton, Pennsylvania, which was given up in 1947, replaced by a new farm near Newburgh, New York, which in turn (in 1950) was replaced by the Peter Maurin Farm on Staten Island. That farm lasted until sometime around the beginning of 1964, when it was sold and a new one bought at

---

<sup>126</sup> Miller, 284.

<sup>127</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=390>.

Tivoli, about 60 miles north of New York City on the banks of the Hudson River. Only in 1979, a year before her death, was the farm moved once again, this time to Marlboro, also in the Hudson Valley.

The communes were not, however, as successful as Dorothy had hoped. In this sense they were similar to many earlier and later failed “utopian communes.” In a February 1944 column on farming communes in the *Catholic Worker* Dorothy confessed that the farm in Pennsylvania was not a success. She wrote, “But to raise the food it was necessary to work, and those who were boss-minded and job-minded and were used to the cities, had a hard time adjusting themselves to work at the land's pace, and at the hours required by the seasons. The more people there were around, the less got done. Some cooked, washed dishes, carpentered, worked in the garden and tended the animals. But none worked hard enough.” She indicated that disagreements about food and lack of poor organization and leadership were also responsible for the farm’s failures.<sup>128</sup> Nevertheless, over the years, the farms did serve a useful function as sort of rural houses of hospitality, and the nature-loving Dorothy did enjoy being closer to nature than she was in her New York City locations.

The Pennsylvania farm (Maryfarm) also brought into daughter Tamar’s life her future husband. Prior to establishing the farm in 1936, Tamar had spent some time apart from her mother, sometimes at a Catholic boarding school on Staten Island and in the summers sometimes under the care of other Catholic Workers. Not especially interested in formal education, she was rather shy and loved nature, animals, and the outdoors. She spent most of her summers after the purchase of Maryfarm being cared for by a couple who resided there, except for when Dorothy was able to leave New York or get a break from her frequent travels and join her for a while. In the years 1939 to 1944, when Tamar turned eighteen, she spent her academic years at schools in Rhode Island, Canada, Rhode Island again, and then Farmingdale, New York, learning handicrafts, domestic arts, and farming skills. By the time she attended the Farmingdale State School of Applied Agriculture, she had already fallen in love with one of the young men, David Hennessy, who had come to live and work at Maryfarm. But Dorothy made her promise that she would not marry until she turned eighteen. Because of Dorothy’s doubts about the value of conventional high schools, as well as Tamar’s interests and her probable future farming life, Dorothy thought the agricultural school was the most sensible choice for Tamar’s education.

At the same time that Tamar began attending the school (October 1943), Dorothy took a leave from her active CW life and settled nearby for six months on property owned by Dominican nuns. Although she saw Tamar frequently, and on weekends often took a train to visit her nearby ailing mother, a widow since 1939, who herself would die in late 1945, Dorothy thought of this period as sort of a spiritual retreat.

Tamar and David Hennessy were married at Maryfarm in April 1944, soon after her eighteenth birthday. A year later, with the couple still at Maryfarm, Tamar had her first baby, Rebecca. Dorothy was a grandmother for the first time, but not the last—eight more would follow. It was not until 1947 that the young family moved to a farm in West Virginia.

---

<sup>128</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=149>. Forest, 144-151, refers to some of these and other problems on the earlier farms.

Although we shall examine Dorothy's pacifism in more detail later, a few words are appropriate here about it. During World War I she had opposed that war largely because she believed it reflected a capitalist conflict that harmed the common people. After her conversion to Catholicism in the late 1920s she opposed wars, like Tolstoy before her, because she thought they were contrary to the spirit of the gospels. A month after Pearl Harbor, in a letter printed in the *Catholic Worker* and sent to all CW houses and farms, she wrote: "We are still pacifists. Our manifesto is the Sermon on the Mount, which means that we will try to be peacemakers. Speaking for many of our conscientious objectors, we will not participate in armed warfare or in making munitions, or by buying government bonds to prosecute the war, or in urging others to these efforts." But she added, "We love our country and we love our President," and "we will try daily, hourly, to pray for an end to the war." She also recognized that many Catholics, including many CW volunteers, would disagree with her absolute pacifism, but hoped "that there will be mutual charity and forbearance among us all."<sup>129</sup>

In April 1942, she wrote in her monthly column that "Mrs. Sheed is quoted to have said that I have split the House of Hospitality movement from top to bottom by 'my' pacifism." But Dorothy pointed out that some of the CW houses had closed because of insufficient help or financial problems. Although most young CW men disagreed with her absolute pacifism and some had been drafted, others spent some time in prison, in rural work camps, or performed wartime service as medics. She reported that "twenty-eight houses are still running, eight not under our auspices," and that the *Catholic Worker* circulation stood at 75,000. And she added that "the work suffers far more by the withdrawal of support, both in work and in money, from those who claim we are helping the *undeserving* poor, than it does from our pacifism." Nevertheless, in May 1945 Dorothy admitted that "since the war, and our pacifist stand, our circulation has dropped to 50,500."<sup>130</sup>

Her June 1942 column, written after witnessing "some of the concentration camps where the Japanese, men, women and children are being held," was entitled "Grave Injustice Done Japanese on West Coast." In September 1945 she gave her paper's critical response to the Hiroshima bombing, saying that President Truman was "not a son of God, brother of Christ, brother of the Japanese, jubilating as he did" over the success of the atomic bomb. She referred to the "vaporized" Japanese—scattered, men, women and babies, to the four winds, over the seven seas. Perhaps we will breathe their dust into our nostrils, feel them in the fog of New York on our faces, feel them in the rain on the hills of Easton."<sup>131</sup>

## The Cold War Years

The last thirty-five years of Dorothy's life, from the end of World War II until her death in 1980, continued to be intertwined with a reinvigorated CW movement of which she remained the

---

<sup>129</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=868>.

<sup>130</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=381>; last sentence quoted from Miller, 377. Mrs. Sheed, nee Ward, was the wife of Frank Sheed; Sheed and Ward had published Day's *Hospitality House* book.

<sup>131</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=218>; <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=554>.



driving force and most visible symbol. The newspaper, which in March 1969 Dorothy announced would be published nine times a year instead of the previous eleven, and the hospitality houses continued at the core of the movement. But the various CW farms and Dorothy's other activities, from writing books and extensive traveling and speaking to demonstrating and being jailed, also played a part and she often mentioned them in her regular column.

These years included the McCarthy anti-communist "witch hunts," the Cold-War tensions and arms race, racial and civil rights conflicts, the anti-establishment radicalism of the 1960s, the reform movement in the Catholic Church associated with Vatican II, and the U.S. engagement in Vietnam, which helped usher in the anti-war movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Dorothy's mix of Catholic traditionalism and radicalism, which she brought to the CW movement, spoke to all of these issues and her radical stances often preceded the popularity of such causes as the 1960s civil right struggles and anti-war demonstrations.

In her June 1953 column she wrote that she considered the McCarthy investigations, "a manifestation of evil, and giving birth to fear and repression in the world." She noted the tendency of people to look for scapegoats. "During the depression it was the international Jewish bankers. Now it is the communist." Because of McCarthyism, "The teacher is afraid to speak of interracial justice, of peace, of social justice these days, for fear he may be considered subversive. Loyalty oaths are beginning to be required at some state universities before a speaker can give an address to the students." In her own case, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover wrote that she "is a very erratic and irresponsible person. She has engaged in activities which strongly suggest that she is consciously or unconsciously being used by communist groups."<sup>132</sup>

During the Cold War she continued to speak out against wars. She decried continued war preparations and the development of new weapons like the H-Bomb. Beginning in June 1955 she was arrested every year for the rest of the 1950s for her annual refusal to take part in air raid drills mandated by the city of New York. Her actions leading to her first arrest for this offense were typical. She and her fellow resisters went to a park and sat on benches shortly before the alarm sirens sounded. After the sirens went off and they refused to move, they were loaded into a police van and taken to jail. In 1955 and 1958 she received a suspended sentence, but in the other three years she spent days or weeks in jail, the most being in 1957 when she was sentenced to 30 days in the city's Women's House of Detention.

Dorothy's militancy in the 1950s was strongly encouraged by a fellow non-violent anarchist and pacifist, Ammon Hennacy, who had spent two years in prison (1917-1919) after refusing conscription and trying to subvert the conscription law. He later moved to Milwaukee, became associated with the CW Hospitality House there, and met Dorothy in 1938 on one of her stops in that city. By 1949, now separated from his wife, he had worked as a farm laborer in several states and was then living in Phoenix; he had also become infatuated with Dorothy—he once told her that he was always in love with some woman. But in letters to him early that year she discouraged any thoughts he might be having about sex with her and told him that she

---

<sup>132</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=171>; Robert Ellsberg, "Dorothy Day: Lecture on Centenary," <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/canonizationtext.cfm?Number=33>, provides the Hoover quote. On the FBI and IRS concern with Dorothy, see Forest, 268-72.

intended to remain celibate. “When one is celibate, one is celibate. There is no playing around with sex.”<sup>133</sup>

At the end of that year, on a trip out West, she stopped in Phoenix and apparently inspired him further because early the next year he was visiting her in New York, and in 1952 he came to live and work there at the CW Hospitality House, where he remained for eight years. In her 1952 autobiographic *The Long Loneliness* she mentioned the many articles he had written for *The Catholic Worker* and that “he epitomizes the positive pacifist.” Although much more critical and suspicious of Catholic authorities than was Dorothy, he finally answered her prayers by converting to Catholicism in late 1952. It was he who in 1955 organized the CW protest against the civil defense drill. In her July/August 1957 column Dorothy referred to him as the CW’s “only one chronic picketer.”<sup>134</sup> Dorothy greatly admired his energy, gregarious enthusiasm, and willingness to fast, pray, picket, sell *The Catholic Worker* on the street corners, and even go to jail for the Christian pacifism and anarchism, a la Tolstoy, that he so ardently advocated.

In January 1961, however, he left New York to settle in Salt Lake City with another worker from the New York CW house, a woman young enough to be his granddaughter. In that city he established a Hospitality House named after Joe Hill, the IWW activist and songwriter found guilty (falsely, so said his supporters) of murder and executed in Utah in 1915. Although the woman who came to Utah with Hennacy soon left him, he remained and in 1965 married an artist, also considerably younger than himself. In 1968, in a new edition of his autobiography, he explained why he left the Catholic Church soon before that. Despite his leaving the church so dear to her, Dorothy attended his funeral in January 1970 in Salt Lake City and in the February issue of *The Catholic Worker* paid tribute to him. She wrote of his “great warmth,” hopefulness, and love of people. She credited him with broadening at an early stage the CW ecumenical view, pointing out that “he was interested . . . in all religious points of view if they resulted in a real effort to conform one's life to one's profession of faith,” and that even before his conversion to Catholicism he was “the most ascetic, the most hard-working, the most devoted to the poor and the oppressed” of anyone she had met. In regard to his “life of hard work and voluntary poverty. . . he outshone everyone. . . He claimed nothing as his own, nothing but the clothes on his back.” She noted that his death was typical of his life—he suffered a heart attack while protesting the execution of two convicted murders, and he died a week later.<sup>135</sup>

In pursuit of peace and better understanding of other peoples Dorothy made several foreign trips during these years, most significantly to Cuba in 1962; trips to Rome in 1963 and 1965 (she was also there in 1967); a trip to various countries, including Australia, India, Tanzania, Rome, and England in 1970; to the USSR and Eastern Europe in 1971; and to England and Northern Ireland (beset by clashes between Catholics and Protestants) in 1973. In a 1962 column about her Cuban trip, she wrote of the “needs of coexistence with communism which

---

<sup>133</sup> *Letters*, 168. On Hennacy, see also Forest, 196-201, 261-62.

<sup>134</sup> *Long Loneliness*, 265-66; <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=724>.

<sup>135</sup> [Http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=192](http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=192); Dorothy also wrote favorably of him four years later, see her column at <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=537>. For more on Hennacy, see the *Anarchist Encyclopedia* entry on him at <http://recollectionbooks.com/bleed/Encyclopedia/HennacyAmmon.htm>.

will never be overcome by troops or embargoes, but only with the most true and strong love of brother, which is the only way we have of showing our love of God.”<sup>136</sup> In her diary (April 1973), she decried the wars in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, but was happy that her fellow citizens were “more and more becoming world-conscious, conscious of our fellow man, Chinese, Russians, Malaysians, Indo-Chinese, etc.” And she was happy that young people were increasingly studying Eastern religions.<sup>137</sup>

What strikes one about her reports regarding her trips to Cuba in September-October 1962 (shortly before the Cuban Missile Crisis in late October) and the USSR and Eastern Europe in 1971 was her desire to view these countries in a way that would contribute to peace. This desire predisposed her to accentuate the positive, to see what was good about the societies she witnessed, without actively seeking to discover all the blemishes. She was neither the first nor last of well-intentioned Westerners to visit Marxist countries and be shown only what the governments of those countries wanted her to see. Especially before Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985 in the USSR, government-provided tour guides in the USSR and Eastern Europe attempted to show tourists the best of their countries and hide the worst, to create as favorable an impression as possible. Her three-week tour to Warsaw, Leningrad, Moscow; Sofia (and a few other places in Bulgaria), and Budapest was arranged (in the West) to promote “Enduring Peace.” In Warsaw her group was shown a film entitled *Poland Reborn*, which showed the Nazi destruction of Warsaw and then its loving postwar reconstruction. In Moscow Soviet authorities arranged for her group to meet with a “Soviet Peace Committee at the House of Friendship.” It is not difficult to imagine why someone as peace-loving and critical of U.S. militarism as was Dorothy might sympathize with groups such as the Soviet Peace Committee.

She did however recognize that “there were restrictions as to travel. There is a saying in Moscow embassies that there are two dictatorships and the second is that of Intourist [the chief Soviet Tour Agency through which trips were arranged].” And her great love of the officially discredited writer Solzhenitsyn (who later immigrated to the United States and remained until 1994) did lead her to protest his treatment. Still, she praised her designated guides and expressed no suspicion that one of their tasks was to present as rosy a picture as possible of Soviet life.

In her earlier 1962 trip to Cuba, she was also shown aspects of Cuban life that were meant to impress her, such as a collective farm. She found much to applaud on the island: the “great transformation” that was making more land, education, and medical care available to the common people; better housing than she expected; and religious freedom—“among the Catholics I met there was complete freedom of speech and there was criticism as well as praise of the regime.” She told a young man at the ministry of Foreign Relations that she would “like to write to President John Kennedy and ask him to voluntarily relinquish it [the U.S. Naval base at Guantanamo], as a great and unprecedented gesture of good will, which would have tremendous moral effect on the entire world.”<sup>138</sup>

---

<sup>136</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=795>. In all, Dorothy wrote four columns about her trip to Cuba and they are indicated in her first column, which can be found at <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=793>.

<sup>137</sup> *Diaries*, 529.

<sup>138</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=796>.

Even though her assessment of life in Marxist countries was not balanced and objective, she was correct in pointing to some real gains in areas such as increased literacy and more widespread health care. But she overestimated the amount of religious freedom and failed to see many of the defects of the Marxist systems. Even her leading biographer, who was very sympathetic to her, wrote about her Cuban columns that “the problem she never fully addressed” was “the problem of freedom.”<sup>139</sup> This was ironic because, as this same biographer notes, she knew well and agreed with Dostoevsky’s Grand Inquisitor passage in *The Brothers Karamazov*, which depicted Jesus as being on the side of freedom and opposed to giving it up in exchange for more material comfort.

In her columns in May and June 1963 she explained that she and “fifty or more women from all countries, of all religious affiliations, and many without a particular belief,” had come to Rome to thank Pope John XXIII for his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth), which Dorothy greatly admired.<sup>140</sup> She also was enthusiastic about the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), which the pope had called into secession the year before to enable Catholicism to better relate to the world of its day. She returned to Rome two years later, after Pope John XXIII’s death but before Vatican II had ended, as a representative of the peace group PAX (later renamed PAX Christi and still in existence), in an attempt to get the council to take a strong stand against war and militarism. While in Rome, she fasted, prayed, met with bishops, theologians, activist laypersons, and friends.<sup>141</sup>

As she described it in an October 1970 column, her trip to Australia, India, Tanzania, Rome, and England in 1970 came about as a result of two Catholic priests sending her and a friend (Eileen Egan) round-trip tickets to Australia. They told Dorothy that many decades earlier they had been in the United States, met her, and received great hospitality in various CW houses and at a CW farm as they traveled across the country. One of the priests now ran a farming commune in Australia, and there was also an Australian *Catholic Worker* paper and a house of hospitality. Although the trip was not directly a “peace trip” like her two previous ones to Rome, she did meet with peace leaders in Australia and discuss peacemaking attitudes; and at the end of her trip, about six weeks later in London, she attended a PAX Conference and addressed a group in London at the War Resisters International.

Altogether, she spent three weeks in Australia observing life on the farming commune and speaking and meeting with people at such places as schools and seminaries in Sidney and Melbourne. In Calcutta, she and Eileen Egan, who was also a friend of Mother Teresa, spent some time with the famous nun amidst her charitable endeavors—in 1979, just months before she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, Mother Teresa came to the CW House in New York to visit Dorothy. In Tanzania, Dorothy was impressed with the efforts of its president, Julius Nyerere. “Here is a leader who is engaged in a peaceable revolution, socializing or nationalizing the land, and the schools and hospitals which were started by the [Catholic] Maryknoll order. I

---

<sup>139</sup> Miller, 471.

<sup>140</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=804>.

<sup>141</sup> See her October 1965 column, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=832>, for a description of her activities.

delight in this remarkable and peaceable happening.” She compared him to Cesar Chavez (see below), Mrs. Martin Luther King, “and others who have the vision and the integrity which enlightens our minds and brings us bright hope for the future. God is with them.”<sup>142</sup>

During the 1960s, as resistance to the U.S escalation of the war in Vietnam increased, Dorothy worked along with many others, including her friend by correspondence, the monk Thomas Merton, to oppose and protest the war. In April 1967, for example, she participated in New York in what she called (in her May column) “the greatest mass meeting and march in American history.” This nonviolent demonstration against the Vietnam War was led by Martin Luther King and pediatrician Benjamin Spock. The following year Dorothy defended the motives and moral commitment, if not always the tactics, of those like the priest brothers Daniel and Philip Berrigan, who were part of the Catonsville Nine. That group was convicted of burning draft files in Maryland in May 1968. Dorothy wrote to both brothers telling them how much she admired them. In her column of October 1968 she said about the Catonsville Nine, as well as the Milwaukee Fourteen (one of whom was her later biographer Jim Forest), who performed a similar act, that “these men, priests and laymen, have offered themselves as a living sacrifice, as hostages. Next to life itself, man’s freedom is his most precious possession, and they have offered that, as well as the prayer and fasting they have done behind bars, for these others.”<sup>143</sup>

Earlier in 1968, in her April column, Dorothy lamented the assassination of Martin Luther King, whom she referred to as “a man of the deepest and most profound spiritual insights.” Her paper had spoken out against racial injustice since its inception in the early 1930s. Since mid 1935 its masthead had contained a picture of Jesus embracing a black worker and a white worker clasping hands. She had also long spoken out against segregation. While it was still widespread in the South in 1957, she went down for a few weeks to help out in Koinonia, an interracial farming community in Americus, Georgia. The community had done well until it was discovered that it had attempted to help some young black men get into a white college. In Dorothy’s words, as she remembered it in the same April 1968 issue where she had lamented the death of Dr. King, “this precipitated a real reign of terror.” Some of the community members’ property “was dynamited and completely destroyed in the middle of the night. Community members were shot at, some of the houses were burnt down, marauders cut the wire that fenced in the cattle and threw torches into the hay barn, setting fire to the hay. They were boycotted, couldn't buy oil for their tractors or cars, couldn't buy seed or fertilizer, couldn't get insurance on their cars or houses.” When Dorothy entered a store with some of the community members to buy seeds, she was called a “nigger-lover” and a “northern Communist whore.” One night (actually about 2 AM) she was in a car with another woman on the lookout for community opponents who might try to do more harm to the community. While on guard they were shot at from another car that hurried down the road with its lights off.<sup>144</sup>

---

<sup>142</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=504>; see also her *Diaries*, 482-86

<sup>143</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=849>; <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=889>; see also her column of December 1970, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=505>, where she indicates why she does not support the destruction of property during protests.

<sup>144</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=252>; <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=253>.

In the summer of 1963, she picketed and spoke in behalf of civil rights in Danville, Virginia, telling her listeners that she “had come to the conclusion that basic to peace was this struggle of the colored for education, job opportunity, health, and recognition as men.”<sup>145</sup> A decade later, she suffered the last of her numerous protest arrests, this time for “unlawful assembly,” in the midst of picketing in behalf of the itinerant Mexican workers of the United Farm Workers led by her friend Cesar Chavez.

As busy as she always seemed to be with the monthly paper, the CW houses and farms, travelling and speaking, and supporting her various causes from pacifism to civil rights, it seems almost an oxymoron to speak of the private Dorothy Day. Even most of her friends, and she had many, were people connected with her work and causes. And her place of residence, when not traveling, was usually just a room in the CW hospitality house in New York, or on one of the CW farms. As we shall see later, however, she also had an intensive private life that included prayer, contemplation, extensive reading, and listening to classical music, especially opera.

In her September 1950 column, when the CW New York house was moved, she described what life had been like there for fourteen years. “I climbed up to the fifth floor of the old tenement at 115 Mott Street. . . . It has been pretty bad at times. The old walk up, cold water tenement, vermin ridden, cold, damp and drafty in winter and dirty and noisy all summer, with cries of children, gossiping women, quarrelling neighbors, juke boxes, blocked traffic, grinding garbage trucks, factory machinery. . . . heaped up garbage in the streets.”<sup>146</sup> After the move from Mott Street, the CW New York house was located in several different places during Dorothy’s remaining three decades, twice at different locations on Chrystie Street. In a March/April 1967 column, Dorothy reported that at their Chrystie location during the previous year they had “served meals to 109,500 guests, men and women,” including CW volunteers.<sup>147</sup>

For most of the 1960s, when the CW house was on Chrystie Street, Dorothy and several other women lived in small, cheap CW-rented apartments on the Lower East Side. Having adopted voluntary poverty, whether at “home” or on the road, she attempted to live as cheaply as possible. Her last several years before her death in November 1980 were spent mainly in her room at the CW’s New York Maryhouse (on E. Third St., which had been bought in the mid 70s to house homeless women), which was just a few blocks from the main CW (St. Joseph’s) hospitality house. By the summer of 1976 about forty-five women were living at Maryhouse.

Before her health began to seriously decline (she suffered a heart attack in August 1976), she also spent considerable time at the CW farm at Tivoli about 90 miles from New York City. When bought in 1964 it contained a large mansion and two other buildings sitting on 25 acres overlooking the Hudson River and in the distance beyond the Catskill Mountains—the following year more adjacent property was added. Although Dorothy’s intention was that some real farming would be done there, what occurred on the land was more in the nature of gardening.

But the Tivoli property served several other useful purposes. It became a rural hospitality house, where an assortment of people spent considerable time, including several of Dorothy’s

---

<sup>145</sup> From her column of July/August 1963, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=805>.

<sup>146</sup> [Http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=614](http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=614).

<sup>147</sup> [Http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=251](http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=251).

aged friends, some city alcoholics encouraged to gain sobriety in this more idyllic setting, and eventually many young people filled with the anti-establishment spirit of the times. Annual summer peace conferences were also held there. In 1966, for example, about two hundred people attended. In addition classes on such topics as civil disobedience were taught. There were also many children at the “farm” during at least parts of the year because it made its swimming pool available to the area’s children, and in 1967 opened a day-care center for pre-school children of migrant families who came to neighboring areas to harvest apples. Such a concern for poor children was nothing new. From time to time in her columns as early as the summer of 1935 she mentioned having some poor children from Harlem spend time at CW Staten Island properties. Her July/August 1968 column captures some of her feelings about helping the children at Tivoli.

And since the day-care center for the migrant and local agricultural workers in the district began in July (and will continue until November first) these little children have participated in the recreation program for the village. It is a joy to see all the little ones lined up at the shallow end of the pool waiting for their individual instruction in swimming. There are thirty-two children from ten months old up to eight years, and they begin to arrive at seven in the morning. The casino, which was built by Mr. Mastrion, the former owner of the property when he was using it for a vacation spot for families, and the swimming pool, certainly have proved a blessing to the community as well as to us. One end of the casino was made into a chapel for the farm so that we would be close to the Blessed Sacrament winter and summer, and every night the rosary and compline are said there, and all our friends and benefactors are remembered. Every Wednesday morning, one of the Marist fathers come from their novitiate nearby to offer Mass for us.<sup>148</sup>

For Dorothy, who loved nature’s beauties, Tivoli also offered much on a personal level. In her February 1968 column she told her readers, “I am at Tivoli as I begin to write this. My room faces the [Hudson] river and I get up every now and then to see a ship pass by.” In September 1974, she wrote while at Tivoli, “A beautiful calm, quiet day. How beautiful silence is. How beautiful all nature around us.” Two years later, after her heart attack, she told her CW readers, “My orders were—bed rest for four weeks here at Tivoli. I am sitting outside to write this (after the fourth week) in the sun, and with healing beauty all around me.”<sup>149</sup> In addition, her daughter, Tamar, as well as some of Tamar’s children and grandchildren sometimes came to Tivoli for visits.

By the 1970s, however, Dorothy was often troubled by the “new morality,” of the counter-cultural youth who settled in at Tivoli for various periods. Most of them did not share her traditional Catholic values, and she found their casual attitude toward sex especially distressing (see below, for more on her attitude toward love and sex). Already in a 1969 letter she complained of their LSD and marijuana use while at Tivoli.<sup>150</sup>

After Tamar moved to a farm in West Virginia with her husband and child in the late 1940s, Dorothy kept in close touch with her, sometimes going to stay with her and her family, as she did for several months at the beginning of 1948. During that time Tamar had another baby, and in succeeding years many more would come for a total of nine. In March 1966 Dorothy told her CW readers, “This last weekend I have been visiting with my daughter Tamar and my seven

---

<sup>148</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=887>.

<sup>149</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=862>; <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=543>; <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=574>.

<sup>150</sup> Miller, 501-06; *Letters*, 358, 425.

grandchildren who are at home. (The oldest two are away in nursing school and at the State university.)<sup>151</sup>

Although Tamar's husband, David, shared Dorothy's enthusiasm for Distributism (see above) and for a while, in addition to farming, operated a mail-order business sending out Distributist materials, he and Tamar had a difficult time providing for their growing family. In 1951, having left West Virginia, the family lived for months at the CW's Staten Island farm before David found a factory job in nearby Rossville and the family moved there. They lived there, with Dorothy seeing them often, until they moved to an old farm in Perkinsville, Vermont in 1957, where Dorothy visited them whenever possible. In 1964, not long after setting up the Tivoli property, Dorothy went to Perkinsville for four months to watch the children while Tamar attended a practical nursing school. By this time Tamar and David had separated, and she needed a job that would furnish more income for her large family.<sup>152</sup>

Strong-minded woman that she was, Dorothy sometimes criticized Tamar, and sometimes the shy daughter's feelings were hurt. But Dorothy was also sensitive to Tamar's difficulties and often helped her out, including financially, by sending her some of her own payments for her non-CW writings.

Although concern about Tamar's family produced considerable anxiety for her, it also brought her much joy, as she told her readers in her January 1970 column. "This has been a time of much feasting and great joy, the return of a grandson from Vietnam, a happy holiday in Vermont, snowed in for a week." As was often her way, lover of literature that she was, she compared her experience to a literary scene—Tolstoy's depiction of a "joyous home community at Christmastime, in *War and Peace*." But toward the end of her column, after depicting a "story of a happy Christmas, a picture of family life, of a house overrun with children and young people, cats and dogs, celebrating a midwinter festival in the midst of ice and snow," she added a passage with a more somber note, indicating that in this her family, "as in all families, there are grave differences of opinion, or points of view . . . . There is always an unspoken agreement . . . not to dispute, not to argue, but to find points of agreement and concordance, if possible, rather than the painful differences, religious and political. What a mystery each one is to another. . . . We can only try to share each others' joys and sufferings and to grow in love and understanding. Not to judge, but to pray to understand."<sup>153</sup>

One of the "grave differences" that she alluded to was the fact that her grandson Eric, home from Vietnam, did not share her pacifist views. More importantly to her, Tamar and her children were no longer practicing Catholics, "finding nothing there to have any meaning for their lives." Nevertheless, she was able to put such differences aside and rejoice in her family. Just months before her death, for example, she told the readers of her June 1980 column, "Today,

---

<sup>151</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=249>.

<sup>152</sup> See <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=821>, where Dorothy's column of January 1965 provides more details of her stay.

<sup>153</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=498>. Her reflections on family life also call to mind the opening sentence—"All happy families resemble one another, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way."—of another favorite Tolstoy novel of hers, *Anna Karenina*.



my granddaughter Susie, her husband Jack McMurry and my three beautiful great-grandchildren, Tanya, Kachina and Charlotte Rose, stopped by for a visit.”<sup>154</sup>

Dorothy also remained close to her sister, Della. As she told her readers in May 1980, soon after Della’s death, she was her “closest friend and confidante.” Dorothy also recalled that her sister once worked for birth-control pioneer Margaret Sanger, whom Dorothy once interviewed in her days as a reporter, and Della herself became a strong birth-control advocate. After she reprimanded Dorothy once for not discouraging Tamar from having so many children, Dorothy stormed out before they agreed—as she said earlier about her relationship with Tamar and her family—“not to dispute, not to argue, but to find points of agreement and concordance.”<sup>155</sup> (See below, for more on Dorothy’s views on birth control.)

### **Dorothy Day’s Wisdom**

Not all people grow wiser as they grow older, but Dorothy did. This was especially evident after she gave up her hope that Forster Batterham would marry her and with Peter Maurin began the CW movement in 1933. From that time on she began emphasizing dispensing love rather than seeking it. She never wrote much of wisdom, but it is clear that she came to value it and in many ways became a wise woman. We have already seen that one of the things she admired about Peter Maurin when she got to know him was that she thought he was “infinitely wiser” than her. Among her brief mentions of wisdom are the following:

To seek for wisdom is to seek for God. The more we know of the natural world around us, in science as well as in philosophy, the more we know of God. [October 1962]

It is one thing not to judge others, and it is still another thing to expect men and women to live according to right reason, to seek wisdom and live by it. [September 1963]

Love, like wisdom, is the most active of all active things, according to the Book of Wisdom. [December 1970]<sup>156</sup>

Her view of wisdom seems to have been similar to that of the monk Thomas Merton, who wrote more extensively on the topic and sometimes contributed to her paper. He recognized a “Christian wisdom” that was higher than “natural wisdom,” but did not believe that the two types of wisdom were contrary to each other. “*Sapientia* is the Latin word for ‘wisdom.’ And wisdom in the classic, as well as the Biblical, tradition is something quite definite. It is the highest level of cognition. It goes beyond *scientia*, which is systematic knowledge, beyond *intellectus*, which

---

<sup>154</sup> Miller, 491-92. See also a late 1975 letter in *Letters*, 426, in which she writes, “None of my grandchildren practice their faith—only one married in the Church.” That same year she also wrote of having 11 great-grandchildren; <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=605>.

<sup>155</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=603>.

<sup>156</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=795>; <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=806>; <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=505>.

is intuitive understanding. . . . It embraces the entire scope of man's life and all its meaning. It grasps the ultimate truths. . . . Wisdom is not only speculative, but also practical: that is to say, it is 'lived.' And unless one 'lives' it, one cannot 'have' it."<sup>157</sup>

Merton's view of wisdom was akin to that of Aristotle, who defined two types of wisdom, theoretical and practical. Merton also referred to "wisdom based on love." And he was sympathetic with Shakespeare's type of wisdom, about which one scholar wrote, "Wisdom for Shakespeare has far more to do with the heart than the head," with "a true and faithful heart, radiant with love, care, and devotion, brimming with compassion and forgiveness." Merton's view of wisdom is also compatible with a more recent interpretation of it by psychologist Robert Sternberg who wrote, "People are wise to the extent that they use their intelligence to seek a common good. They do so by balancing, in their courses of action, their own interests with those of others and those of larger entities, like their school, their community, their country, even God."<sup>158</sup> Merton's view also recognizes, as do those of many other wisdom researchers, that wisdom involves not only thought and behavior, but also feeling.<sup>159</sup> Dorothy thought highly of Merton's writings, and he admired her for her many concrete acts of compassion. She was a living embodiment of wisdom based on love.

## Wisdom, Religion, and Catholicism

Dorothy's mature views and behavior were strongly affected by her Catholicism, but also by her unique personality. In his book on wisdom, Harold Bloom has written, "Christians who believe, Muslims who submit, Jews who trust—all in or to God's will—have their own criteria for wisdom, yet each needs to realize those norms individually if the words of God are to enlighten or comfort. Secularists take on a different kind of responsibility, and their turn to wisdom literature sometimes is considerably more wistful or anguished, depending on temperament."<sup>160</sup> His statement suggests that wise people can be found among both believers of different faiths and non-believers, and that is the position taken here and in my essays on believers such as W. H. Auden and E. F. Schumacher and non-believers like Anton Chekhov and Andrei Sakharov.<sup>161</sup>

---

<sup>157</sup> "Baptism in the Forest: Wisdom and Initiation in William Faulkner," in *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, ed. Patrick Hart (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1985), 98-99.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 108; Alan Nordstrom, "Shakespeare's Take on Human Wisdom," <http://www.wisdompage.com/ShakespeareOnWisdom.pdf>; Robert Sternberg, "It's Not What You Know, but How You Use It: Teaching for Wisdom," <http://www.wisdompage.com/SternbergArticle01.html>. For a good philosophical overview of wisdom, including Aristotle's distinction between two types of it, see <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/wisdom>. Merton's piece "Mark Van Doren," in *A Thomas Merton Reader*, rev. ed. (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1974), 235, states that the Shakespeare course he took at Columbia taught by Van Doren "was the best course I ever had in college. And it did me the most good, in many different ways. It was the only place where I ever heard anything really sensible said about any of the things that were really fundamental— life, death, time, love, sorrow, fear, wisdom, suffering, eternity."

<sup>159</sup> See, e.g., Orwoll and Achenbaum.

<sup>160</sup> *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2004), 1-2.

<sup>161</sup> For links to these online essays, see <http://www.wisdompage.com/profileswis00.html>.

Both philosophy and religion are closely linked to wisdom in various traditions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Judaism. Wisdom scholars generally agree that being a religious believer, as long as one is tolerant and open-minded, is not a hindrance to wisdom, and can indeed promote its values like love and compassion and provide insights that reasoning alone does not furnish.<sup>162</sup> Most atheists, however, regard religious faith as contrary to wisdom, and St. Paul and many Christian thinkers after him agree that in the person of Jesus Christ, “God made foolish the ‘wisdom’ of this world.” But faith and wisdom, or faith and reason, are only irreconcilable if the terms are defined too narrowly. To the extent that religion, or any other system (e.g. Communism or Nazism), becomes dogmatic in a close-minded way, however, it is contrary to humility, an important characteristic of wisdom.

The poet W. H. Auden provides a good example of how a tolerant religiosity can contribute to wisdom. A study of Auden’s Christianity by Arthur Kirsch, a self described “agnostic non-Christian,” states that “Auden was remarkably free of religious prejudice.” Kirsch criticizes “academics and intellectuals who assume that one cannot be a religious and a thinking person at the same time,” and writes that “Auden stands as an eloquent example of the joining of the two, a modern instance of a person in whom thought and faith not only co-existed, but nourished each other. His faith expanded the horizons of his mind as well as his heart, and his formidable intelligence, in turn, probed the nature and limits of his Christian belief.”<sup>163</sup>

Dorothy, like the Protestant Auden, sometimes participated at meetings of the New York ecumenical group called the Third Hour, organized by their mutual friend Helene Iswolsky. In a letter of June 16, 1954, she wrote, “We must always be seeking concordances, rather than differences—that is the basis of the ecumenical movement, which is part of the peace movement.”<sup>164</sup> She also saw much good in some of her former radical friends who remained atheists, and she believed strongly that dialogue contributed to what Peter Maurin called “clarification of thought.” In that sense she was, as are most wise people, a truth-seeker and not a close-minded dogmatist. She also consistently condemned anti-Semitism, and in 1939 was one of the founders of the Committee of Catholics to Fight Anti-Semitism. Thus, although her religion and its dogmas were vitally important to her and gave meaning to her life, she did not condemn those who thought differently.

Her understanding of Catholicism strengthened her wisdom because it emphasized many important wisdom values, especially love and humility; and it provided many channels to help strengthen these values. Among her favorites were sacraments, reading of scripture and lives of saints, and spiritual retreats. In one of her writings on love in her 1948 book *On Pilgrimage* she stated: “While it is true that love sweetens all of life and makes light of pain and suffering and brings us to the happiness we all desire, one must learn to love, and there is no place better than a retreat house to learn such lessons. We must withdraw for a time to renew our strength for the

---

<sup>162</sup> See, e. g., Copthorne Macdonald, *Toward Wisdom*, Ch. 1, at <http://www.wisdompage.com/tw-ch01.html>.

<sup>163</sup> Arthur C. Kirsch, *Auden and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), xi, xix, 176, 179.

<sup>164</sup> *Letters*, 228.

great struggle. . . . Without the use of our spiritual weapons of love, which include prayer and penance and work and poverty and suffering, our future is harsh and ugly to contemplate.”<sup>165</sup>

### **Wisdom, Love, and Other Values**

Wise people live by certain values that are important to them, and one could argue that of these wisdom values love is the most important. Dorothy experienced many types of love, gave the subject considerable thought, and often wrote about it. To her, love was the principle virtue and the chief one she learned from the saints and from reading her favorite Russian authors.<sup>166</sup> Two of her favorite quotes were “Hell is not to love anymore” and “Love is the measure by which we will be judged.”<sup>167</sup>

In a 1958 letter she wrote: “If we could only learn that the only important thing is love, and that we will be judged on love—to keep on loving, and showing that love, and expressing that love, over and over, whether we feel it or not, seventy times seven, to mothers-in-law, to husbands, to children—and to be oblivious of insult, or hurt, or injury—not to see them, not to hear them. It is a hard, hard doctrine. I guess we get what we need in the way of discipline. God can change things in a twinkling of an eye. We have got to pray, to read the Gospel, to get to frequent communion, and not judge, not do anything, but love, love, love.”<sup>168</sup>

A decade earlier, in a column of September 1948, she wrote: “What is God but Love? What is a religion without love?” She also paraphrased a character in Camus’s *The Plague*, “who says that he is tired of hearing about men dying for an idea. He would like to hear about a man dying for love for a change. He goes on to say that men have forgotten how to love, that all they seem to be thinking of these days is learning how to kill. Man, he says, seems to have lost the capacity for love.” More of this column, however, was devoted to thoughts expressed by the Russian philosopher Vladimir Soloviev in his book *The Meaning of Love*. She quoted various passages from it such as, “The true significance of love consists not in the simple experience of this feeling, but what is accomplished by means of it, in the work of love.”<sup>169</sup> In her 1948 book *On Pilgrimage* she wrote, “To love with understanding and without understanding. To love blindly, and to folly. To see only what is lovable. To think only on these things. To see the best in everyone around, their virtues rather than their faults. To see Christ in them.”<sup>170</sup>

---

<sup>165</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=479>. On the importance of retreats to Dorothy, see the Zwicks’ *Catholic Worker Movement*, Ch. 14, “The Famous Retreat,” and Forest, 171-81.

<sup>166</sup> On love as the most important wisdom value, see my “W. H. Auden’s Wisdom, Faith, and Humor,” <http://www.wisdompage.com/WHAudensWisdomFaithandHumor.pdf>. For a list of values associated with wisdom, see Copthorne Macdonald’s “Values that Various People Have Associated with Wisdom,” <http://www.wisdompage.com/valueslists.html>.

<sup>167</sup> Forest, 320.

<sup>168</sup> *Letters*, 245.

<sup>169</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=470>. For more on Dorothy and the Russian thinkers, see my “Wisdom from Russia,” at <http://www.wisdompage.com/WisdomFromRussia.pdf>.

<sup>170</sup> The quote is taken from a new edition of the book (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), as reprinted at <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=486>.

The type of love Dorothy is writing about here is primarily the type of love that Christ spoke of when he said, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” But she was also well aware of another type, the kind of romantic love we refer to when we speaking of “being in love.” Writers such as the Jesuit M. C. D’Arcy, in his *The Mind and Heart of Love*, and Denis De Rougemont, in *Love in the Western World*, deal with both kinds, and Dorothy recommended their books, as well as Soloviev’s, to her readers. De Rougemont refers to the first type as “Agape, or Christian Love” and the second as “Eros, or Boundless Desire,” but he also makes clear that Eros is much more than just romantic love. This “boundless desire” can also be directed at God, can be a manifestation of a mystical longing to be united with the Divine. Thus, love is more complex than first meets the eye, and the great Christian mystics whom Dorothy admired such as St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross manifested both types of love.<sup>171</sup>

As we have seen, when Dorothy was a young woman she went through periods of “being in love,” primarily with Lionel Moise (for whom she had an abortion) and later with Tamar’s father, Forster Batterham, to whom she was still suggesting marriage in early 1932. It was only after meeting Peter Maurin and along with him starting the CW movement in 1933 that the other type of love (agape or charitable love) became her guiding light. But even before then her fondness for writers like Upton Sinclair, Kropotkin, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy and her anarchist/socialist inclinations had brought her to the realization that charitable love as well as compassion and empathy—two other important wisdom values—were important.

In her 1938 autobiographical work, she related how she felt while being in prison in 1917 and later when writing this book:

Solitude and hunger and weariness of spirit—these sharpened my perceptions so that I suffered not only my own sorrow but the sorrows of those about me. I was no longer myself. I was man. I was no longer a young girl, part of a radical movement seeking justice for those oppressed, I was the oppressed. I was that drug addict, screaming and tossing in her cell, beating her head against the wall. I was that shoplifter who for rebellion was sentenced to solitary. I was that woman who had killed her children, who had murdered her lover. . . .

As I read this over, it seems, indeed, over-emotional and an exaggerated statement of the reactions of a young woman in jail. . . . But one who has accepted hardship and poverty . . . lays himself open to this susceptibility to the sufferings of others.<sup>172</sup>

Such empathy led one scholar examining her moral vision to write of her “remarkable empathetic manner,” her “intense and enduring feeling for others,” and that her “feeling of oneness with others . . . may be the key to understanding and assessing her contribution to our understanding of the moral life.”<sup>173</sup>

After personally turning her focus from love for Forster to Christian love, Dorothy continued to think that the two types of love, romantic and Christian, were compatible. In her 1938 autobiographical work she wrote, “It was human love that helped me to understand divine love. Human love at its best, unselfish, glowing, illuminating our days, gives us a glimpse of the

---

<sup>171</sup> For more on the complexity of love, see “Philosophy of Love,” the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* site at <http://www.iep.utm.edu/love>.

<sup>172</sup> *From Union Square*, Ch. 1, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=201>.

<sup>173</sup> June O’Connor, *The Moral Vision of Dorothy Day: A Feminist Perspective* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 59, 95.

love of God for man. Love is the best thing we can know in this life, but it must be sustained by an effort of the will. It is not just an emotion, a warm feeling of gratification. It must lie still and quiet, dull and smoldering, for periods. It grows through suffering and patience and compassion. We must suffer for those we love, we must endure their trials and their sufferings, we must even take upon ourselves the penalties due their sins. Thus we learn to understand the love of God for His creatures. Thus we understand the Crucifixion.”<sup>174</sup>

In this same work she not only indicates that the two types of love mentioned above are compatible, but that our love of God (to her the highest type of love) should not only be displayed in our love of neighbor, but in a passionate, “boundless desire” for God, thus fulfilling both aspects of Jesus’ instruction: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:37-39). Her thinking on being in love with God and its similarity to being in love with a human is expressed in the following paragraphs.

When you love, you are absorbed by the thought of the one you love. It is there always in the background of your thoughts. You live more intensely, you feel more vividly. The sunshine is brighter; beauty and pain are intensified. . . .

You are conscious always of the presence in this world with you of another human being who is bound to you in some strange way, by some spell, so that you are obsessed by the thought of him. But what about God? I wonder am I continually conscious, in the background of my thoughts, of His presence in my life? Am I practicing the presence of God, as the phrase is? Because of God is each task ennobled, each contact vivified, each moment more intense? Is the love of Christ, in other words, driving me on?

When one is in love, one cannot conceive of not being in love. Life seems dull and drab to contemplate without this vital emotion. Can one conceive of life without God, separated from Him? Yes, human love is a good comparison, a good measuring rod. And you will agree with me that the desire for sacrifice comes with love. . . .

Yes, love, great love—and who wishes to be mediocre in love?—brings with it a desire for suffering. The love of God can become so overwhelming that it wishes to do everything for the Beloved, to endure hunger, cold, sleeplessness in an ecstasy of zeal and enthusiasm. There is a love so great that the Beloved is all and oneself nothing, and this realization, leading to humility, a real joyful humility which desires to do the least, the meanest, the hardest as well as the most revolting tasks, to crush the pride of self, to abandon oneself fully, to abandon even the desire for heroism.<sup>175</sup>

A decade later, she again indicated how agape or Christian love could be connected with “being in love.”

Even that relationship which is set off from other loves by that slight change in phraseology (instead of “loving,” one is “in love”) — the very change in terminology, denoting a living in love, a dwelling in love at all times, being bathed in love, so that every waking thought, word, deed, and suffering is permeated by that love — yes, that relationship above all should give us not only a taste of the love of God for us but the kind of love we should have for all.

When you love people, you see all the good in them, all the Christ in them. God sees Christ, His Son, in us and loves us. And so we should see Christ in others, *and nothing else*, and love them. There can never be enough of it. . . .

---

<sup>174</sup> *From Union Square*, Ch. 12, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=212>.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 13, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=213>.

... While it is true that love sweetens all of life and makes light of pain and suffering and brings us to the happiness we all desire, one must learn to love.<sup>176</sup>

She believed that such an intimate love of God made her Christianity more than just a cold formal faith of abstractions, rules, rationalities, and duties, but instead filled it with the warmth and insight, the ability to see the best in the loved one, that could characterize being in love. Such a strong love of God also helped keep alive our love for others. As she wrote in her February 1944 column, “There is a natural love for our fellow human being but that does not endure unless it is animated by the love of God. And even the love of family cannot endure without the love of God.”<sup>177</sup>

In her 1952 autobiography, *The Long Loneliness*, she again linked romantic love with love of God. “I had known Forster a long time before we contracted our common-law relationship, and I have always felt that it was life with him that brought me natural happiness, that brought me to God. His ardent love of creation brought me to the Creator of all things.” The penultimate sentence in that book was, “We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community.”<sup>178</sup> In the decades after leaving Forster her focus had switched from loving a man to loving God and the human community, especially those in the CW Hospitality Houses. She was fond of quoting Jesus’ saying that “what we did for the least of His brothers we did for Him.”

We have seen that in September 1929 Dorothy wrote to Forster, “Do I have to be condemned to celibacy all my days, just because of your pig-headedness?” And in 1966 she wrote with sympathy about the “unwilling celibate,” such as widows, widowers, and prisoners. But she concluded that “to offer the suffering of celibacy, temporary or permanent, to the Lord is to make use, in the best possible way, of man's greatest joy.”<sup>179</sup> For more than three decades before this she had no longer been among the *unwilling* celibate (because of Forster’s “pig-headedness”) but had chosen to remain celibate, at first because she thought sex outside of marriage was wrong, but later because she seems to have believed that celibacy helped her love more people in a non-sexual way. In her September 1950 column, she noted that “when Gandhi began his celibate life he began to grow also in love for all those around him.”<sup>180</sup>

Still, she retained her positive attitude, within their proper context, toward romantic love and sex. In *The Long Loneliness*, she recalled: “I had known enough of love to know that a good healthy family life was as near to heaven as one could get in this life. There was another sample of heaven, of the enjoyment of God. The very sexual act itself was used again and again in Scripture as a figure of the beatific vision. It was not because I was tired of sex, satiated, disillusioned, that I turned to God. Radical friends used to insinuate this. It was because through

---

<sup>176</sup> This selection is from Day’s *On Pilgrimage*, 1999 ed., as reprinted at <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=479>.

<sup>177</sup> [Http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=149](http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=149).

<sup>178</sup> *Long Loneliness*, 134, 286.

<sup>179</sup> “Reflections during Advent, Part Three: Chastity,” *Ave Maria*, December 10, 1966, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=561>.

<sup>180</sup> [Http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=614](http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=614).

a whole love, both physical and spiritual, I came to know God.”<sup>181</sup> In 1966 she wrote: “Sex, having to do with life itself, affects us, body, mind and soul. . . . The marriage act purged of impurities is the nearest thing to the beatific vision we can know. The intense pleasure and delight of the act itself may be like a sword piercing the heart, but though momentary in itself, it colors the hours and days, people and events, before and after, so that one is apt to feel that one is seeing others as God sees them, loving them as God loves them. . . . Of course sex is good. It is good and beautiful.” She noted that “the entire Book Ten of St. Augustine's *Confessions* . . . sings the beauty of sex and the surpassing beauty of God.”<sup>182</sup>

Nevertheless, despite her praise for sex within marriage, after her conversion she became convinced that it was wrong outside of it. We have seen that she wrote to Forster in December 1932. “Sex is not at all taboo with me except outside of marriage. I am as free and unsuppressed as I ever was about it.” In her 1948 book, *On Pilgrimage*, she quoted from a book of one of her favorite priests, Fr. John J. Hugo: “When the physical union of sex is divorced from the spiritual element of genuine love, as in prostitution, then sexual union is just that: prostitution. But when the union of sex is spiritual as well as physical, as God intended it to be, then it is a noble thing, the consummation and fulfillment of the highest human love, that between man and wife, which is blessed by the Church in the Sacrament of Matrimony. All love is perfected in union; in its fullest sense, it *is* union; so that sexual union, being the climax and consummation of the highest human love, is the very noblest of God’s creatures; there is nothing in all creation which provides a more apt or truer analogy for the contemplation of God.”<sup>183</sup>

Before citing this passage, she criticized the first of the two Kinsey reports (*Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, 1948), about which she had read only a review. “The trouble with the Kinsey report is that it makes people cease to regard themselves as the least of all, as the guiltiest of all, as the saints say we should, and instead we say, ‘I’m as good as he is,’ or ‘He is as bad as I am, in fact much worse.’ . . . We have too many samples of hell, and the Kinsey report is one of them.” Although she stated that she was not going to read the book, she conceded that it needed “to be considered and thought about.”<sup>184</sup>

In her *The Long Loneliness* she tells us that even in her youthful pre-conversion days she was “revolted” by the practice of sexual promiscuity.<sup>185</sup> In her belief that sex should be confined to marriage, she also ruled out homosexual sex, which she regarded as abnormal. She had witnessed lesbian relationships in prison and same-sex relationships sometimes developed in CW hospitality houses, but once discovering them, she would not permit openly gay couples to continue residing in the houses. Her paper did, however, maintain (in 1952) that “society has

---

<sup>181</sup> *Long Loneliness*, 140.

<sup>182</sup> “Reflections during Advent,” <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=561>.

<sup>183</sup> [Http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=479](http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=479).

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> *Long Loneliness*, 60.



been very unfair” toward homosexuals.<sup>186</sup> In short, her attitude was to criticize homosexuality, but counsel love and compassion toward homosexuals themselves.

Dorothy also maintained a traditional Catholic attitude toward birth control and abortion. In 1962, she noted that such issues, as well as overpopulation and euthanasia, often came up when she spoke at non-Catholic colleges and universities and that the question of human control over the life of others was extremely important. To understand the official Catholic position (and hers) on birth control measures such as the use of condoms is difficult for many people today, especially environmentalists concerned about all the environmental problems brought on by a global population that has increased more than fourfold since 1900. The Catholic stand on abortion is easier to comprehend even if one does not share its absolutist position on it. But Dorothy was at least consistent. She was against killing, whether in war, capital punishment, or abortion, which she considered a form of genocide, no “ifs, ands or buts.” As she wrote in her December 1972 column in an open letter to Fr. Dan Berrigan, the anti-war activist, “When it comes to divorce, birth control, abortion, I must write in this way. The teaching of Christ, the Word, must be upheld. Held up though one would think that it is completely beyond us—out of our reach, impossible to follow. I believe Christ is our Truth and is with us always.”<sup>187</sup>

Although some wise people today might criticize some of her beliefs about the issues mentioned here, a number of points should be considered regarding her wisdom. First, no one is wise all the time and in regard to all matters. Second, like all of us, she was influenced by her times and the dominant culture or subculture she accepted (in her case, Catholicism). Third her beliefs, as we have seen, did not prevent her from tolerating others who disagreed, like her sister, Della, with whom she differed about birth control. “Not to dispute, not to argue, but to find points of agreement and concordance,” remained her preferred approach.

## Personality and Gender

In assessing Dorothy’s wisdom, her personality must be considered. Some peoples’ temperaments are more conducive to wisdom than others. It is difficult, for example, to be wise if one is egotistic or too impatient. In his biography of Dorothy, whom he had great admiration for, Miller occasionally mentions some negative traits. “Dorothy could be abrupt,” and “one of the very characteristic things about Dorothy over her entire life was the impulsive way in which she sometimes made far-reaching decisions.” In writing of her “great capacity for passion” in regard to whatever individual, cause, or faith she devoted herself to, Miller even refers to her “ruthlessness.”<sup>188</sup>

---

<sup>186</sup> Quoted in Nancy L. Roberts, *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984), 92; see also Miller, 439-40, and *Letters*, 426, where she expresses her dismay that two “brilliant women” connected to the CW movement announced they are lesbians.

<sup>187</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=526>. It should be noted that neither the Catholic Church nor Dorothy were against all types of birth control, just those they considered “unnatural.” In his 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (available at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_25071968\\_humanae-vitae\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae_en.html)), Pope Paul VI encouraged scientists to find natural ways to facilitate the “proper regulation of births.”

<sup>188</sup> Miller, 185, 188, 195.

But, as her other major biographer, Forest, writes “no one knew her shortcomings better than Dorothy herself.” In a letter of December 1969, she mentions that Tamar was right in criticizing her for being too judgmental in regard to youth. A strong believer in the Catholic practice of “examination of conscience” and going to confession, she also sometimes mentioned her faults to her readers. In her *On Pilgrimage* (1948), she wrote of her “lack of charity, criticism of superiors, of neighbors, of friends and enemies. Idle talk, impatience, lack of self-control and mortification towards self, and of love towards others. Pride and presumption. . . . Self-will, desire not to be corrected, to have one’s own way. The desire in turn to correct others, impatience in thought and speech.” As a result of her strong efforts to become a better person, she became wiser as she aged.<sup>189</sup>

The issue of gender and wisdom is more complex and fraught with difficulties. A few studies of the topic suggest that wise women in Dorothy’s era were stronger in demonstrating the affective traits of compassion, empathy, and sympathy, while wise men stressed more the cognitive qualities of rationality and objectivity. Several wisdom scholars maintain, however, that the wisest people are somewhat androgynous, eventually combining characteristics that are sometimes labeled “feminine” and “masculine.”<sup>190</sup>

Dorothy herself accepted the belief that men and women possessed different characteristics. In her *The Long Loneliness*, commenting on her radical, pre-conversion youth, she wrote that “men who are revolutionaries . . . do not dally on the side as women do, complicating the issue by an emphasis on the personal.” And she added that she was “ready to concede now that men are the single-minded, the pure of heart, in these movements. Women by their very nature are more materialistic, thinking of the home, the children, and of all things needful to them, especially love. And in their constant searching after it, they go against their own best interests.” Later on in this autobiography, she comments about how she felt when she was working in Hollywood in the late 1920s: “I was lonely, deadly lonely. And I was to find out then, as I had found out so many times, over and over again, that women especially are social beings, who are not content with just husband and family, but must have a community, a group, an exchange with others.”<sup>191</sup>

In her book *On Pilgrimage* she wrote:

It would seem to the unthinking that mothers of children, whether of one or a dozen, are intensely preoccupied with creatures; their little ones, food, clothing, shelter, matters that are down to earth and grossly material such as dirty diapers, dishes, cooking, cramming baby mouths with food, etc. Women's bodies, heavy with children, dragged down by children, are a weight like a cross to be carried about. From morning until night they are preoccupied with cares but it is care for others, for the duties God has given them. It is a road once set out upon, from which there is no turning back. Every woman knows that feeling of not being able to escape, of the inevitability of her hour drawing ever nearer. This path of pain is woman's lot. It is her glory and her salvation. She must accept.

---

<sup>189</sup> Forest, 328. *Letters*, 360-61; <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=486>. Orwoll and Achenbaum, 289, also maintain that she “became wiser as she grew older.”

<sup>190</sup> Orwoll and Achenbaum; Monika Ardel, “How Similar Are Wise Men and Women? A Comparison Across Two Age Cohorts,” *Research in Human Development*, 6:1 (2009), 9-26.

<sup>191</sup> *Long Loneliness*, 60, 157-58.

We try to escape, of course, either habitually or occasionally. But we never can. The point I want to make is that a woman can achieve the highest spirituality and union with God through her house and children, through doing her work which leaves her no time for thought of self, for consolation, for prayer, for reading, for what she might consider development. She is being led along the path of growth inevitably. But she needs to be told these things, instructed in these things, for her hope and endurance, so that she may use what prayer she can, to cry out in the darkness of the night.<sup>192</sup>

Later on in the book she added: “Women do love to be active, it is natural to them, they are most happy in doing that for which they are made, when they are cooking and serving others. They are the nourishers, starting with the babies at the breast and from then on their work is to nourish and strengthen and console.” And still later in it, she stated: “It is hard for a woman to be indifferent about little material things. She is a homemaker, a cook; she likes to do material things. So let her do them *for others*, always. Woman’s job is to love.”<sup>193</sup>

In November 1945, just months after the end of World War II, Dorothy wrote a column entitled “An Appeal to Women.” She wrote that “the great need of the human heart is for love, and especially do women's lives seem empty if they are deprived of their own to love,” but she also recognized that due to all the war deaths, there are “not enough men for them to find husbands. Their fate is to go through life single, without a mate and without a home.” To help fill that vacuum she suggested that women consider performing works of mercy.

There is misery of one kind or another all about us. Volunteers are needed in the hospitals to be nurses' aides to help nurse the sick. One of our friends on Welfare Island says that there is great need over there for help. Thousands of patients in mental hospitals sit out their sad and dreary lives with no help. Visiting the prisoner is almost a forgotten work of mercy. . . .

One of our readers, and a most dear friend, has been carrying on the work of sending packages to cold and hungry Europe. She realizes most keenly that the only answer to our present agony is the *personal* application of Christian principles. It is necessary to do the thing one's self. If people are hungry, how can we eat? If they are cold, how can we go clothed and sheltered? . . .

Women most especially need to mortify themselves in regard to dress. If they have a few serviceable and well-made clothes, they will not be always shopping for the multitude of dresses and coats and sweaters which seem necessary to them now to keep up with the well-dressed girl in the office. Clothes should be regarded not only from the standpoint of beauty but of function.

Europe and Asia are cold and hungry. What can we do about it? We may say that there is nothing that we can do, but that is not true. We can send clothes, *personally*; food, *personally*.<sup>194</sup>

Regarding Dorothy’s possession of the important wisdom value of humility, the words of Cardinal O’Connor proposing her for sainthood are relevant here: “Her personal humility was such that she never considered herself to be holier than any other Catholic,” she simply wanted to be “a simple woman living the Gospel.”<sup>195</sup>

Her attitude toward women displeased many feminists, during her times and since. In May 1971, she agreed to speak at South Dakota State University at a gathering discussing

---

<sup>192</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=476>.

<sup>193</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=478>; <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=486>.

<sup>194</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=153>.

<sup>195</sup> O’Connor, at <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/canonizationtext.cfm?Number=82>. See also Forest, 273, 304.

“Rights for Women.” She was introduced as one who had done much “to help downtrodden women,” and as one who “understood a woman's right to choose, and that abortion was very much at the heart of empowering women.” But Dorothy immediately stood up and objected that such a statement misrepresented her views, and she coupled the “dignity of women and the child's right to life.”<sup>196</sup>

Since at least one book, June O'Connor's *The Moral Vision of Dorothy Day: A Feminist Perspective* (1991), is devoted to viewing Dorothy's feminism (or lack thereof), a summation of its conclusions and a few comments on them should be adequate here. The book mentions the “sexist thought patterns she inherited and sustained” and states that Day often conformed “to a conventional patriarchal outlook wherein women were accepted as naturally and instinctively different than men. This assumed difference was regularly identified with inferiority or often enough implied it.” Yet, the author also finds “a hidden feminist dimension to Day's thought.” While recognizing that Dorothy's views on such issues as extramarital sex, lesbianism, and abortion might differ from that of many feminists, O'Connor also suggests that her emphasis on “clarification of thought” and finding common ground or concordance with others concerned with “personal and social transformation” would lead her to dialogue with them. And like Dorothy, O'Connor supports dialogue that “moves beyond the polemical rhetoric and charged labels.”<sup>197</sup> In this sense, Dorothy was similar to one of her favorite writers, the Russian Anton Chekhov, who regarded labels as a superstition hindering people from perceiving deeper realities and truths.

Putting labels aside, Dorothy did support and/or serve as an exemplar for women in a number of ways. One article on her provides the following list:

- the active participation of women in the work force and in the professions;
- support for working mothers;
- the importance of community;
- the intimate connection between diverse social problems like work, gender, class, race, poverty, capitalism and war, as well as the deep connection between the physical and the spiritual;
- attention to human experience as an essential component in the search for truth;
- disregard, in practice, for assigned gender roles in work.<sup>198</sup>

One aspect of religion that Dorothy did not display much interest in, but has intrigued some feminists, is the relationship of Holy Wisdom, perceived in feminine form as Sophia, to God. Two men whom Dorothy greatly admired, the Russian philosopher Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900), and her friend the monk Thomas Merton, who was influenced by Soloviev's

---

<sup>196</sup> Alice Lange, “Dorothy Day on Women's Right to Choose,” *Houston Catholic Worker*, May-June 2008, <http://cjd.org/2008/06/01/dorothy-day-on-womens-right-to-choose/>.

<sup>197</sup> O'Connor, 39, 98-99.

<sup>198</sup> Stephen J. Krupa, “Celebrating Dorothy Day,” *America*, August 27, 2001, [http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article\\_id=1140](http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=1140).

thinking, both placed great stress on it. But Dorothy always took a more practical, hands-on approach to Christianity and was not especially drawn to metaphysical speculations.<sup>199</sup>

In concluding this section, what we can say is that there was a link between her womanhood and her great stress on love, compassion, and empathy. Research indicates that wise women tend to emphasize these affective traits more than wise men, and as O'Connor writes, "Feelings mediated meaning for Dorothy Day." Two wisdom scholars who mentioned women's inclination to stress the affective aspect of wisdom also concluded that "Day knew that her gender informed her identity," that "her genuine sense of humility caused her to defer authority to others in stereotypically 'feminine' ways. Yet, the unique combination of attributes stretched female-related roles of nurturing, of sharing responsibility, and of seeing one's life in universal terms into an exemplary demonstration of her wisdom."<sup>200</sup>

### **Beauty, Nature, Music, Literature, and Transcendence**

Wisdom is partly about integrating into one's life "the three great value spheres" of "the Good, the True, and the Beautiful" or those of "morals, science, and art." The psychologist Abraham Maslow provides more insight into wisdom. He found that the wise people he studied "appreciated the world around them with a sense of awe and wonder." He also wrote about transcendence and the sense of unity it brought to wise people. "Coming to see this unity requires an intuitive shift of vantage point—and ultimately, of identification. The world observed by these people is the same world that everyone else sees; nothing external has changed. But they suddenly see that reality in a new context; they see in the data of life a meaning that wasn't evident before."<sup>201</sup> We have already said much about Dorothy's pursuit of goodness and truth. But we need to say more of her appreciation of beauty, nature, music, and literature, as well as her sense of transcendence.

Her biographer Jim Forest, who knew her well, wrote that "from childhood onward, Dorothy had a marked capacity for awe and a vulnerability to beauty"; that she had "a gift to see not only what is wrong in the world, but to see beauty and to discern signs of hope"; and that she saw it "in places where it was often overlooked." She was fond of St. Augustine's statement that "all beauty is a revelation of God." She gave her atheist lover Forster credit for increasing her love of creation, but then pressed him, "How can there be no God when there are all these beautiful things?" "She was profoundly attentive to beauty and managed to find it in places where it was often overlooked — in nature, in a piece of bread, in the smell of garlic drifting out a tenement window, in flowers blooming in a slum neighborhood, in the battered faces of people

---

<sup>199</sup> For more on Soloviev, Merton, Day, and the concept of Sophia, see my "Wisdom from Russia," at <http://www.wisdompage.com/WisdomFromRussia.pdf>.

<sup>200</sup> O'Connor, 95; Orwoll and Achenbaum, 290.

<sup>201</sup> Copthorne Macdonald, "The Integral Vision: A Brief Introduction," <http://www.wisdompage.com/integralintro.html>, and his Ch. 1 of *Toward Wisdom*, at <http://www.wisdompage.com/tw-ch01.html>. See also Abraham H. Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (Viking Press, 1971), Ch. 21, "Various Meanings of Transcendence."

who had been thrown away by society. Dorothy saw news of the resurrection in grass battling upward toward the sky between blocks of concrete.”<sup>202</sup>

In her September 1974 column she wrote, “The world will be saved by beauty, Dostoevsky wrote. . . . I look back on my childhood and remember beauty. The smell of sweet clover in a vacant lot, a hopeful clump of grass growing up through the cracks of a city pavement. A feather dropped from some pigeon. A stalking cat. Ruskin wrote of ‘the duty of delight,’ and told us to lift up our heads and see the cloud formations in the sky. I have seen sunrises at the foot of a New York street, coming up over the East River. I have always found a strange beauty in the suffering faces which surround us in the city. Black, brown and grey heads bent over those bowls of food” provided by the New York CW hospitality house.<sup>203</sup>

Dorothy often quoted John Ruskin’s phrase about “the duty of delight,” and was well aware of his emphasis on beauty in nature and art. He and fellow Englishman William Morris helped give birth to the English Arts and Crafts movement and influenced the Distributists (Chesterton, Belloc, Gill) who influenced Peter Maurin and Dorothy. Maurin noted that Gill said that “the notion of work has been separated from the notion of art. The notion of the useful has been separated from the notion of the beautiful.”<sup>204</sup> Dorothy wrote that “Maurin used to say that a man should not have to work more than four hours of manual labor a day, and that more hours should be spent in study, in discussion, in doing the things he wants to do. When there is a synthesis of Cult, Culture and Cultivation [a Maurin phrase] there beauty and peace and truth spring up.” In general, Dorothy was sympathetic to juxtaposing the idea of culture to the U.S. capitalist consumer society she struggled against.<sup>205</sup>

Her biographer William Miller notes that when she was living at her beach cottage on Staten Island in the late 1920s a chief theme in her writings was nature. “Then, and throughout her life, it was nature that produced in her the most direct sense of goodness and peace. Nature for her was truly the handiwork of God.”<sup>206</sup> Since she once sent a prisoner on death row a book of the poems of Gerald Manly Hopkins, she was probably familiar with his poem “God’s Grandeur,” which begins with “The World is charged with the grandeur of God,” and goes on to

---

<sup>202</sup> Forest, 15, 321, and his “Personal Reflections Regarding Dorothy Day,” at <http://www.jimandnancyforest.com/2008/04/21/dorothyday/>; Day’s quote is from her *Long Loneliness*, 134.

<sup>203</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=543>. In my essay “Wisdom from Russia,” at <http://www.wisdompage.com/WisdomFromRussia.pdf> I provide more detail on her quotes from Dostoevsky on the importance of beauty.

<sup>204</sup> Dorothy’s friend Robert Ellsberg, who edited her diaries, borrowed the phrase “The Duty of Delight” for the title of them, and in the *Diaries*, 163 n.130, mentions her fondness for the term. The Maurin quote can be found in one of his Easy Essays at <http://www.catholicworker.org/roundtable/easyessays.cfm>.

<sup>205</sup> From Dorothy’s May 1956 column at <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=706>. Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), 328, has written about British thought in the period he covers, “The development of the idea of culture has, throughout, been a criticism of what has been called the bourgeois idea of society.” He also demonstrates how Ruskin, Morris, Chesterton, and Belloc contributed to this criticism. In my *An Age of Progress?: Clashing Twentieth-century Global Forces* (London; New York: Anthem Press, 2008), Ch. 7, “Culture and Social Criticism,” I summarize the findings of Williams and apply some of his insights to other countries including the United States.

<sup>206</sup> Miller, 171.

say that despite all our desecrating of earth, “nature is never spent; / There lives the dearest freshness deep down things.”<sup>207</sup> That also seemed to be her sentiment.

Music appealed to Dorothy from a young age. We have seen how at age twelve when attending Episcopalian services she thought that the choir singing the *Te Deum* or the *Benedicite* “melted” her heart and “expressed pure truth and beauty” to her, and later when first living by herself in New York one of her prize possessions was a phonograph on which she played Fritz Kreisler violin records. In her October/November 1976 column she wrote, “All nature itself sings or has the equivalent of singing. To me the purring of a cat is a form of singing. Even in winter we have bird-song. . . . The beauty of nature which includes the sound waves, the sound of insects, the cicadas in the trees — all were part of my joy in nature that brought me to the Church. I don't think we can overemphasize the importance of song.”<sup>208</sup>

Among her favorite “songs” were the Bible's *Psalms*. She told her readers in June 1978, “One of my favorite readings, morning and evening, is the *Psalms*, and next to that, C.S. Lewis' *Reflections on the Psalms*.”<sup>209</sup> But she was also a great lover of classical music, especially operas. Her biographer Miller writes that on Saturday afternoons in the mid 1930s she usually listened to Metropolitan Opera broadcasts on the radio, and her diary entries in 1980 indicate that she still listened to many operas in this last year of her life.<sup>210</sup> By then her declining health often kept her in her room, and music seemed to bring her more enjoyment than ever.

Among the operas she listened to (sometimes now also seeing them on her television) from February through May were *Salome*, *The Ring*, *Elektra*, *Cavalleria Rusticana*, *Pagliacci*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Parsifal*, and *Tristan and Isolde*. She especially loved Wagner's operas and recalled that she “used to go to standing room for all the Wagner operas in the top balcony of the Metropolitan Opera House—fascinating to look down.” She occasionally made comments on what she listened to, for example, on February 17, she not only listened to much of Wagner's *Ring* cycle, but “read the stories in an opera book.” On the 25<sup>th</sup> she wrote, “Jesus, Joy of Man's Desiring”—Bach—lovely title for lovely music,” and “watched Leonard Bernstein conducting *Romeo and Juliet* on TV—beautiful music, though not as beautiful as Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*.” On March 6 she jotted down, “Wonderful music on radio—Brahms, Wagner, Bruckner.”<sup>211</sup>

After “guitar masses” were introduced in the 1960s, she told her readers (in May 1967), “I do love the guitar Masses, and the Masses where the recorder and the flute are played, and sometimes the glorious and triumphant trumpet. But I do not want them every day, any more than we ever wanted solemn Gregorian Requiem Masses every day. They are for the occasion.

---

<sup>207</sup> See her Sept. 1956 column at <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=710> for interactions with the prisoner on death row and <http://www.bartleby.com/122/7.html> for the poem of Hopkins.

<sup>208</sup> [Http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=574](http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=574).

<sup>209</sup> [Http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=589](http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=589).

<sup>210</sup> Miller, 280.

<sup>211</sup> *Diaries*, 644-49; <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=604>; [www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=605](http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=605). The last two references are to two of her columns, which were little more than transpositions from her diaries, but the *Diaries* as edited by Ellsberg and the two columns contain some variations.

The guitar Masses I have heard from one end of the country to the other are all different and have a special beauty of their own.” She also loved the playing and “heavenly voice” of her friend and fellow war protester the folk guitarist Joan Baez.<sup>212</sup>

But more than music it was reading and literature that were her almost constant companions from a very young age until the last days of her life. Her young friend, admirer, and biographer psychiatrist Robert Coles wrote that “she was an almost feverish reader,” and quotes her on the subject. “When Tamar was young, I was always being tempted by books during our spare time together. . . . I have to close my eyes when I walk by a bookstore and even a library. I could have ‘binges’ of reading, ‘lost weekends’ of reading if I didn’t watch out.” And Dorothy once wrote of Tamar’s resentment being justified during some weeks at their Staten Island Cottage, when she read fourteen books including Tolstoy’s mammoth *War and Peace*.<sup>213</sup>

Earlier in the present essay many of her favorite authors have been mentioned, especially the Russians Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Chekhov, and I have written much more elsewhere on her fondness for Russian literature.<sup>214</sup> In addition to the Russian writers, we have seen how Americans like Upton Sinclair and Jack London influenced her, and she later mentioned enjoying novels by other Americans like Hawthorne, Sinclair Lewis, and Faulkner. We have also seen her liking for French novelists such as Bernanos, Mauriac, and Camus. In Coles’s book on her he emphasizes her appreciation not only for the Russians and Dickens, but also for George Orwell and the Italian novelist Ignazio Silone. The Catholic Norwegian novelist Sigrid Undset, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1928 and whom Dorothy met after she came to New York during World War II, was another favorite. Dorothy first read her historical trilogy *Kristin Lavransdatter* in the late 1920s and again in 1977.

Dorothy also enjoyed mystery stories, which she had said in a December 1976 column “relax and distract” one’s mind.<sup>215</sup> Dorothy Sayers was one of her favorites. She considered her not only a mystery writer but a theologian, scriptural scholar, and philosopher—she also translated Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. In 1973 Dorothy had read her *The Man Born to be King*, which was originally a play-cycle put on by the BBC about the life of Jesus. Two of the books Dorothy mentioned reading in 1980 were by another mystery writer, the Scottish writer Josephine Tey, whom she thought “as good a detective story writer as Dorothy Sayers.”<sup>216</sup> One of the novels was *To Love and Be Wise*. In it one of the characters mentions the quote [from Francis Bacon], “It is impossible to love and be wise.” Although Bacon was referring more to passionate, romantic love than the type of compassionate love Dorothy evidenced, her thoughts and behavior demonstrated that not only could love and wisdom coexist, but that such love was essential for the highest wisdom.

---

<sup>212</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=850>; <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=527>. On Baez, see also Dorothy’s column of September 1973, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=533>.

<sup>213</sup> Coles, 137-38; Miller, 193.

<sup>214</sup> See my “Wisdom from Russia,” at <http://www.wisdompage.com/WisdomFromRussia.pdf>.

<sup>215</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=575>.

<sup>216</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=604>



Three other mystery writers Dorothy mentioned as favorites were Agatha Christie and the authors of “the Boney books and the Rabbi books”<sup>217</sup> The Boney novels were created by Arthur Upfield, and in December 1976 Dorothy had written that his series was “named for the [Australian] aborigine detective, Napoleon Bonaparte, who to my mind, surpasses Sherlock Holmes.”<sup>218</sup> The Rabbi books apparently referred to those of Harry Kemelman that deal with a Conservative Jewish rabbi-detective in Massachusetts. Dorothy had a special sympathy with Jewish people, and in March of 1980 noted that all of Chaim Potok’s novels—mainly dealing with U.S. Orthodox Jews—were “very enlightening” and made her turn to Scripture more and more.<sup>219</sup>

As great as her love was for fiction, she also enjoyed other types of reading and literature. She read biographical works, including at least one life of Gandhi (by Louis Fischer) and lives of saints, and even wrote one herself—on St. Therese of Lisieux. Along with others such as Sts. Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena, and Augustine, St. Therese and Gandhi acted as what we might today call “role models,” whom Dorothy tried to emulate in living a life of spiritual wisdom. We have also seen her appreciation of other religious writings. In addition to papal encyclicals and the writings of Christian thinkers such as Jacques Maritain and Teilhard de Chardin, she enjoyed the writings of the English Catholic historian Christopher Dawson.

We have already noted her fondness for some poetry, for example Francis Thompson’s “The Hound of Heaven” And she was fond of the plays of the man she first heard recite that poem, her friend Eugene O’Neill, America’s best dramatist of the first half of the twentieth century. In her *Diaries*, which run from 1934 to 1980, there are sixteen separate references to him. She mentions his struggles with God, his “black despair,” and her prayers for his soul. According to a young friend of hers who worked for the Catholic Worker, she asked Boston’s Cardinal Cushing to go to O’Neill’s bedside when he was dying in the Sheraton Hotel in Boston in 1953, but he died before that could occur. Her same young friend remembered taking her in 1973 to a Broadway performance of O’Neill’s *Moon for the Misbegotten*, whose character Josie was apparently based on several characters, one of whom was Dorothy. In other years, she saw other O’Neill plays. Her *Diaries* mentions seeing *A Touch of the Poet* in 1959. But in her last couple of years it was mainly on television that she saw them, including *Beyond the Horizon*, *Mourning Becomes Electra* and *Ah, Wilderness* in early 1979, and *The Iceman Cometh* in May 1980. In this last play of his, she remembered the tavern where it was set and a few of the people upon whom O’Neill based his characters.<sup>220</sup>

---

<sup>217</sup> July 1979 column, at <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=260>.

<sup>218</sup> [Http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/reprint.cfm?TextID=575](http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/reprint.cfm?TextID=575).

<sup>219</sup> [Http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/reprint.cfm?TextID=605](http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/reprint.cfm?TextID=605).

<sup>220</sup> For some mentions of O’Neill see, e.g. her *Diaries*, 211, 566, 591, 648, and diary-like entries in the Jan. and Feb. 1979 and June 1980 *Catholic Worker*, at <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=595>, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=596>, and <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=605>. Her friend Robert Steed’s recollection of going to the O’Neill play with her in 1973 can be found at <http://personalist.livejournal.com/65109.html>. See also Miller, 103-119, 154, 163, 454-56, 458, 511, 515 for various references to O’Neill and his wife Agnes.

While still in good health, she had also enjoyed going to see the plays of Chekhov. In a March 1956 column she told her column readers that her friend Ammon Hennacy had that winter taken her to see three of them: *The Three Sisters*, *The Cherry Orchard*, and *Uncle Vanya*.

Since I have dealt in other essays with some ways that wide and deep immersion into good literature can make people, including Dorothy, wiser, here it should be sufficient to mention just a few other ways it contributed to her wisdom. To begin with, her early reading of writers like Upton Sinclair, Jack London, Dickens, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy helped present an alternative view to that of the dominant American capitalist society and its values. It also contributed to her desire to seek answers to the meaning of life. Maslow has indicated that wise people are “more detached than ordinary from the dictates and expectations of their culture.” And the wisdom scholar (Macdonald) who has pointed this about Maslow adds, “cultural institutions that prompt us to see the world from a having, desiring, possessing, consuming perspective aren't leading us in the direction of wisdom, inner peace, and deeply-felt contentment. Becoming wise requires that we adopt other perspectives, other interpretive frameworks — ones that do reveal truth and encourage movement toward holistic understanding and widespread well-being.”<sup>221</sup>

Reading also helped her develop some of her wisdom values such as empathy, compassion, and love, and she makes this connection clear when writing about such writers as Sinclair, Dickens, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy. Later on, reading helped reinforce her wisdom values. In her December 1961 column she wrote that the “question which Chekhov brings out in all his stories is ‘What is to be done?’ What is life for? Chekhov's conclusion is that we are here to work, to serve our brother, and he was a doctor and wrote on the side in order to support himself through medical school and to support also his father, mother and brothers. . . . Not to be a parasite, not to live off of others, to earn our own living by a life of service, this answered the question for him. And we have too that sureness of an answer—We must try to make that kind of a society in which it is easier for man to be good.”<sup>222</sup>

Maslow and various other scholars have emphasized the importance of self-transcendence for achieving wisdom. Two of them have written of Dorothy's achievement of it, as well as “the sustained generativity of her work”—the psychologist Erik Erikson and his wife Joan emphasized how important it was for older people aspiring to wisdom to be generative or helpful toward younger generations.

Of the many types of transcendence that Maslow wrote about—thirty five in a chapter on “the Various Meanings of Transcendence”—Dorothy manifested many of them including transcendence over time, culture, her own ego, and death. Maslow did not mean to suggest that such transcendence was absolute. The fight against egoism, as Dorothy realized, was a constant one, but more than most people she was able generally to transcend her own ego. And transcendence over death to Maslow simply meant “being reconciled with the

---

<sup>221</sup> In addition to my “Wisdom from Russia,” at <http://www.wisdompage.com/WisdomFromRussia.pdf>, see my “Wisdom and Literature: An Introduction,” at <http://www.wisdompage.com/WisLitIntro.pdf>. Copthorne Macdonald, *Toward Wisdom*, Ch. 1, at <http://www.wisdompage.com/tw-ch01.html>.

<sup>222</sup> [Http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=788](http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=788).

necessity of death,” being able to see one’s own death as just part of the cosmic cycle of life and death and being willing to accept it as such.<sup>223</sup>

Her spirit of generativity, her willingness to guide and help young Catholic Workers and volunteers, is attested to by all the young people who worked with her over the years and later wrote so favorably about her, people such as Jim Forest, Robert Ellsberg, Robert Coles, and William Miller. It is also reflected in her willingness during the late 1970s to cut back on many of her activities and trust the younger people to carry on most of the CW chores. As she told her readers in March/April 1975:

Buddhists teach that a man’s life is divided into three parts: the first part for education and growing up; the second for continued learning, of course, through marriage and, raising a family, involvement with the life of the senses, the mind and spirit; and the third period, the time of withdrawal from responsibility, letting go of the things of life, letting God take over. This is a fragmentary view of the profound teaching of the East. The old saying that man works from sun to sun, but woman’s work is never done is a very true one. St. Teresa wrote of the three interior senses, the memory, the understanding and the will, so even if one withdraws, as I am trying to do from active work, these senses remain active.

I am, however, leaving everything to our generous crowd of young people who do the editing and getting out of the *Catholic Worker*, seeing visitors, doing the work of the houses of hospitality and performing in truth all the works of mercy. Day and evening, and even nights are filled with “unprogrammed” work. One never knows what crisis is going to arise, what emergency is coming up next. Living in our slums is like living in a war-torn area.<sup>224</sup>

## **Pacifism, Society, and Politics**

The relationship of Dorothy’s wisdom to politics is problematic. Her “political wisdom” is not the kind that political philosopher Isaiah Berlin wrote about in his essay “Political Judgment,” where he indicated that Germany’s nineteenth-century statesman Otto von Bismarck possessed it. Berlin believed that those who demonstrated political wisdom were not utopian, but more pragmatic, having a firm grasp of what fit with what, with what was doable. Dorothy’s approach was more akin to two men she admired, Tolstoy and Gandhi, and was based primarily on being true to her principles rather than trying to foresee the specific consequences of her political stances.<sup>225</sup> One ethicist who has written on Dorothy’s ethics states that ethicists usually distinguish between these two types of approaches, which she labels “consequentialist” and “deontologist,” with Dorothy favoring the second type.<sup>226</sup>

For Dorothy politics was not primarily the art of compromise or, as Bismarck said, “the art of the possible.” In a democratic country like ours her approach may not have made her a good president or politician, but she was neither and her political wisdom must be judged more on who she was, a private citizen, albeit one who exerted some political influence. Her role was more akin to that of the Biblical prophets who cried out against the evils of their time, and

---

<sup>223</sup> Maslow, Ch. 21, especially, 269-72.

<sup>224</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=548>.

<sup>225</sup> In Ch. 1, “A Century of Violence,” of my *An Age of Progress? Clashing Twentieth-Century Global Forces* (London: Anthem, 2008), 6-8, I briefly touch on Tolstoy’s pacifist ideas and his influence on Gandhi.

<sup>226</sup> O’Connor, 94-95.

similar to that of her younger friend the monk Thomas Merton, who wrote of the importance of the prophetic function in the modern world.<sup>227</sup> And if one thinks that the wisdom of any actions should be judged at least partly by their likely or even possible results, as I do, then the effects of her pacifism on others, both in her times and later, should also be considered.

Her politics is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in her pacifism, in her opposition to all war and killing. In June 1940, the month that Hitler's armies had completed taking over parts of Western Europe, including France, Dorothy told her CW readers, "'And if we are invaded' is another question asked. We say again that we are opposed to all but the use of non-violent means to resist such an invader." Given such a position it is hardly surprising that she continued to oppose the U.S. entry into World War II even after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. Before, during, after the war, she often quoted passages from the Sermon on the Mount, as she did in December 1950 during the Korean War, "*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who calumniate you. And to him who strikes thee on one cheek, offer the other also; and from him who takes away thy cloak, do not withhold thy tunic also.*"<sup>228</sup>

Her Christian pacifism during World War II stood in sharp contrast to the beliefs of most Americans, including those of most leading Christian theologians like Reinhold Niebuhr. Against the dominant view that the consequences for the world would have been far worse if the United States had not entered the war to defeat Hitler and Japanese militarism, Dorothy contended that whatever the consequences, impure means (killing others) could not be used to obtain a goal, no matter how noble it was purported to be. Her basic position was "that Christ went beyond natural ethics and the Old Dispensation in this matter of force and war and taught nonviolence as *a way of life.*"<sup>229</sup>

Although the Catholic pope took no official position on whether war against Nazi Germany and its Axis partners was morally justified, most Catholic Church leaders in the Allied countries justified the war on the basis of the long-held "just-war" doctrine. As one peace scholar wrote in 1996, "The just-war tradition is the dominant ethical system regarding war in Western civilization."<sup>230</sup> This tradition was developed over a long-period of time with Sts. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, as well as Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), being important contributors. By Dorothy's time it stated that for a war to be justified a number of conditions first had to be met. Among others, it must be for a just cause, such as defense against an invasion; all other means of

---

<sup>227</sup> See my "Wisdom from Russia," at <http://www.wisdompage.com/WisdomFromRussia.pdf> where I also mention Max Weber's view of "prophetic charisma" and how it can be useful in an increasingly rationalized and bureaucratic state.

<sup>228</sup> [Http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=617](http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=617). The passage from the Sermon on the Mount is from Luke 6:27. Forest, *All Is Grace*, 152-63, 242-51, is especially good on Dorothy's anti-war activities, especially in WWII and during the Vietnam War. In 1964-65, with the encouragement of Dorothy and others, he was one of the founders of the Catholic Peace Fellowship, which still exists today.

<sup>229</sup> Quoted in Krupa, "Celebrating Dorothy Day."

<sup>230</sup> Charles Chatfield, "The Catholic Worker in the United States Peace Tradition," in *American Catholic Pacifism: The Influence of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement*, edited by Anne Klejment and Nancy L. Roberts. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), 6.

preventing or ending conflict must have been exhausted; and the expected global benefit of going to war must outweigh the expected evil consequences.<sup>231</sup>

Dorothy, however, was unwilling to accept such a war-is-a-lesser-evil approach that sanctioned what she considered impure means. And even had she accepted the theory, she still would have believed that it did not pass its own test. In June 1940 she wrote: “Theologians have laid down conditions for a just war . . . and many modern writers, clerical and lay, hold that these conditions are impossible of fulfillment in these present times of bombardment of civilians, open cities, the use of poison gas, etc.”<sup>232</sup> Later, with the development of the atomic bomb and other nuclear weapons, she believed that it became even less credible to defend “just wars” in which such weapons might be used.

We have earlier seen that in 1963 and 1965 Dorothy had gone to Rome in the interest of peace, the first time to thank Pope John XXIII for his encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, and the second to help persuade churchmen at Vatican II to take a strong stand against war. Directly or indirectly the pope was probably influenced by Day’s writings and activities in behalf of peace. In his encyclical he wrote, “In this age which boasts of its atomic power, it no longer makes sense to maintain that war is a fit instrument with which to repair the violation of justice.”<sup>233</sup> When she could quote the popes on peace she often did, but prior to John XXIII’s encyclical her church was more ambivalent, with many hierarchs defending “just wars.”

Since Dorothy seldom theorized about wisdom, she seldom linked the concepts of pacifism and wisdom, but there is little doubt that she believed that nonviolence reflected the highest wisdom. About the greatest twentieth-century exponent of nonviolence and pacifism, Gandhi, she wrote in a February 1948 column, “There is no public figure who has more conformed his life to the life of Jesus Christ than Gandhi, there is no man who has carried about him more consistently the aura of divinized humanity.” She also admired Gandhi for not only advocating nonviolence, but spiritual means of *resisting* violence and injustice. Since then many others, including some wisdom scholars, have recognized Gandhi’s wisdom. Macdonald, for example, has mentioned “the wisest of the world’s leaders: Jefferson, Lincoln, and Gandhi.” And Sternberg writes that “wisdom is a way of looking at the world, a vision that we have seen in such leaders as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Teresa, and Nelson Mandela.”<sup>234</sup>

---

<sup>231</sup> Sara Ann Mehlretter, “Dorothy Day, Union Square Speech (6 November 1965),” <http://archive.vod.umd.edu/religion/day1965int.htm>. For an excellent overall introduction to just-war theory, pacifism, and their respective ethical arguments, see “War,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/war/>. For an interesting defense of WWII pacifism, see Nicholson Baker, *Human Smoke: The Beginnings of World War II, the End of Civilization* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008).

<sup>232</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=360>.

<sup>233</sup> The encyclical can be found at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_j-xxiii\\_enc\\_11041963\\_pacem\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem_en.html). Mehlretter, at <http://archive.vod.umd.edu/religion/day1965int.htm>, states that “the efforts of Day and other pacifists prompted Pope John XIII to write the encyclical.”

<sup>234</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=463>; Macdonald, Ch. 1 of *Toward Wisdom*, <http://www.wisdompage.com/tw-ch01.html>; Robert Sternberg, “It’s Not What You Know, but How You Use It: Teaching for Wisdom,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 28, 2002, <http://www.wisdompage.com/SternbergArticle01.html>.

As mentioned earlier, Day's views on wisdom were close to those of Thomas Merton, who wrote much on war and peace, including works that first appeared in Day's paper. In 1964, he provided an Introduction to a collection of Gandhi's writings on nonviolence in which he directly connected it with wisdom. In fact, he began his Introduction by comparing the modern Western world to a "one-eyed giant [who] had science without wisdom . . . wisdom which transcends and unites, wisdom which dwells in body and soul together and which more by means of myth, of rite, of contemplation than by scientific experiment opens the door to a life in which the individual is not lost in the cosmos and in society but found in them. Wisdom which made all life sacred." He went on to state that Gandhi "was able to show men of the West and of the whole world a way to recover their 'right mind' in their own tradition, thus manifesting the fact that there are certain indisputable and essential values—religious, ethical, ascetic, spiritual, and philosophical—which man has everywhere needed and which he has in the past managed to acquire, values without which he cannot live, values which are now in large measure lost to him so that, unequipped to face life in a fully human manner, he now runs the risk of destroying himself entirely." He then went on to analyze Gandhi's concept of nonviolence: "The whole Gandhian concept of nonviolent action . . . is incomprehensible if it is thought to be a means of achieving unity rather than as *the fruit of inner unity already achieved.*" And he concluded that "the only way truly to 'overcome' an enemy is to help him become other than an enemy. This is the kind of wisdom we find in Gandhi. It is the wisdom of the Gospels."<sup>235</sup> We might also observe that Merton is like many modern wisdom scholars in emphasizing the central importance of values (like love and compassion) in developing wisdom.

Although Merton did not label himself a pacifist and was willing to concede that "just wars" might have occurred in the past, in 1962 he wrote to Day that practically speaking all the wars then occurring "were shot through and through with evil, falsity, injustice, and sin."<sup>236</sup> From then until the end of his life in 1968, his position and that of Day were very similar in regard to wars and nonviolence, including their shared abhorrence and condemnation of the war in Vietnam.

As the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on "War" makes clear, the morality of war is a complex question, as is the wisdom or lack thereof of a country going to war under any particular circumstances. Dorothy Day and Reinhold Niebuhr were both wise people in many ways, and yet they differed on the wisdom of the U.S. entering World War II. Perhaps Niebuhr was correct in thinking that greater global evils would have occurred had the United States not helped repel the forces of Hitler and Japanese militarism, but that does not necessarily mean that all the specific U.S. war actions, such as the dropping of the atomic bombs, were wise. And even if we think that war may be justified in some cases, we should have little doubt that wisdom values like love, compassion, empathy, and tolerance are more on the side of peace than war. Although it may be difficult to decide who was wiser about World War II, Day or Niebuhr, it is not difficult to perceive that they were both much wiser than the German General Bernhardt, who wrote a few years before the outbreak of World War I: "War is a biological necessity of the first importance, a regulative element in the life of mankind which cannot be dispensed with,

---

<sup>235</sup> Mahatma Gandhi, *Gandhi on Non-Violence*, ed. Thomas Merton (New York: New Directions, 2007), 1, 4, 6, 15.

<sup>236</sup> Quoted in Jim Forest, *Living with Wisdom: A Life of Thomas Merton* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 167.

since without it an unhealthy development will follow, which excludes every advancement of the race, and therefore all real civilization. . . . It is clear that those intellectual and moral factors which insure superiority in war are also those which render possible a general progressive development. They confer victory because the elements of progress are latent in them. Without war, inferior or decaying races would easily choke the growth of healthy budding elements, and a universal decadence would follow.”<sup>237</sup>

It also seems appropriate to note the long-term effects of Dorothy’s pacifist efforts. One scholar has written that she “was the catalyst for the emergence, organization, and eventual recognition of Catholic pacifism in the United States.”<sup>238</sup> Since her death in 1980, the world has seen many additional wars, including the U.S. involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. If her efforts, including her writings and the encouragement of the peace-promoting writings and actions of Merton and other Catholic clergy, have helped produce more people at least questioning the wisdom of wars, it seems she has provided a wise service.

In April 1954 Dorothy wrote, “When it is said that we disturb people too much by the words pacifism and anarchism, I can only think that people need to be disturbed, that their consciences need to be aroused, that they do indeed need to look into their work, and study new techniques of love and poverty and suffering for each other. Of course the remedies are drastic, but then too the evil is a terrible one and we are all involved, we are all guilty.” Her title for this column was “Are the Leaders Insane?” and she was mainly concerned about the continuing arms race, especially our development of the H-Bomb.<sup>239</sup> But her mention of anarchism reminds us that it, in addition to her pacifism, was her most consistent political position. And almost all objections to her pacifism could also be made against her anarchism, that it was too utopian and unrealistic, especially in twentieth-century America. But again her ethical viewpoint was more concerned with following her principles than with any pragmatic considerations about whether establishing a U.S. anarchism was doable.

Any consideration of the wisdom of her domestic political views must clarify her understanding of anarchism, to which she adhered throughout her mature years. She referred to Kropotkin and Tolstoy, who had influenced her in her youth, as “the modern proponents of anarchism,” as “sincere and peaceful men.” She recognized that the term anarchism was often associated with violence, but she followed Tolstoy’s example in favoring a non-violent anarchism that retained the essential elements of how the term is defined—opposition to a centralized government and the desire to set up “a new order based on free and spontaneous cooperation among individuals, groups, regions and nations.”<sup>240</sup>

As an anarchist, she was critical of U.S. capitalism for many reasons including the materialist, consumer culture it promoted. In October 1954 her column agreed with the statement of the Vatican newspaper *Osservatore Romano* when it wrote:

---

<sup>237</sup> Friedrich von Bernhardi, *Germany and the Next War* (New York, 1914), <http://h-net.org/~german/gtext/kaiserreich/bernhardi.html>.

<sup>238</sup> Chatfield, p. 6.

<sup>239</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=664>.

<sup>240</sup> Day, *Long Loneliness*. 54-55.

Capitalism seizes, confiscates, and dries up wealth, i.e. reduces the numbers of those who may enjoy riches, holds up distribution and defies Divine Providence who has given good things for the use of all men. St. Thomas Aquinas says that man must not consider riches as his own property but as common good. This means that communism itself, as an economic system, apart from its philosophy—is not in contradiction with the nature of Christianity as is capitalism.

Capitalism is intrinsically atheistic. Capitalism is godless, not by nature of a philosophy which it does not profess, but in practice (which is its only philosophy), by its insatiable greed and avarice, its mighty power, its dominion.<sup>241</sup>

The previous year, in June 1953, she summed up for her readers her opposition to the consumer culture of her day and what she would like in its place.

The poor want what they are persuaded to want by advertisements, radio, television. They want radio and television, cars, clothes, cosmetics, cigarettes, good food and drink. They don't want to take over the factories, land, in any decentralist or distributist movement. They don't think it possible. They are more intent on preserving the status quo of our industrial capitalist system. So what they get is capitalism or communism, and we don't want either. We would like to see a country made up of farming communes, agronomic universities, hospices, unions, cooperatives, small units of all those necessary institutions to be preserved, and a doing away with luxury in order to have the essential which is ownership of house and field and job, and the responsibility which goes with that ownership. We wish to abolish the proletariat state, rather than establish the dictatorship of the proletariat, abolish the wage system which provides men with luxuries but not the essentials. And it is good to think of the 'four hour day' of manual labor that Peter Maurin stresses so that we will have time to study and to pray.<sup>242</sup>

In May 1974, after attending an anarchist conference at New York's Hunter College, she wrote, "Because I have been behind bars in police stations, houses of detention, jails and prison farms, whatsoever they are called, eleven times, and have refused to pay Federal income taxes and have never voted, they accept me as an anarchist. And I in turn, can see Christ in them even though they deny Him, because they are giving themselves to working for a better social order for the wretched of the earth."<sup>243</sup>

Her attitude toward anarchist in 1974 was similar to that she had expressed forty years earlier toward communists. "Most Catholics speak of Communists with the bated breath of horror. And yet those poor unfortunate ones who have not the faith to guide them are apt to stand more chance in the eyes of God than those indifferent Catholics who stand by and do nothing for 'the least of them' of whom Christ spoke."<sup>244</sup> This tolerant way of approaching those with whom she differed also fit in with her philosophy expressed earlier: "We must always be seeking concordances, rather than differences."

Her type of anarchism was closely connected to a tradition of Utopian Socialism that began before Marx and still had adherents in her own day. In one of her Catholic Worker columns (April 1956) she mentioned Edmond Wilson's *To the Finland Station* (1940), which devoted some space to utopian communities, including Brook Farm, in the United States, and she

---

<sup>241</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=175>.

<sup>242</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=171>.

<sup>243</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=540>.

<sup>244</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=279>.



indicated that modern-day attempts to create such communities “would have been dear to Peter Maurin's heart.” So too, she stated in 1953, would Martin Buber's book, *Paths in Utopia* (English trans., 1949). Dorothy had long admired this Jewish thinker who considered himself a Utopian Socialist. In a 1968 speech, printed as *Catholic Worker* column in 1978, she stated, “Martin Buber in his *Paths in Utopia* was the only modern writer who held out hope for a modern, voluntary community as a place where men and women could live in love and in the happiness which God intended for them.”<sup>245</sup>

In his book, Buber had traced the history of Utopian Socialism, including a chapter on Kropotkin, as well as its differences with Marxian socialism and concluded with an Epilogue subtitled “An Experiment That Did Not Fail.” In it he wrote:

The socialistic task can only be accomplished to the degree that the new Village Commune, combining the various forms of production and uniting production and consumption, exerts a structural influence on the amorphous urban society. The influence will only make itself felt to the full if, and to the extent that, further technological developments facilitate and actually require the decentralization of industry; but even now a pervasive force is latent in the modern communal village, and it may spread to the towns. It must be emphasized again that the tendency we are dealing with is constructive and topical: it would be romantic and Utopian to want to destroy the towns, as once it was romantic and Utopian to want to destroy the machines, but it is constructive and topical to try to transform the town organically in the closest possible alliance with technological developments and to turn it into an aggregate composed of smaller units. Indeed, many countries to-day show significant beginnings in this respect.

As I see history and the present, there is only one all-out effort to create a Full Co-operative which justifies our speaking of success in the socialistic sense, and that is the Jewish Village Commune in its various forms, as found in Palestine [he refers here to the Palestinian territory before its split in 1948, when Israel became a state].<sup>246</sup>

Being an anarchist opposed on principle to any centralized government meant that Dorothy was against the whole trend toward a stronger and more encompassing federal government that she witnessed from FDR's New Deal to her death shortly before Ronald Reagan became president. In the Forward to her 1938 book *House of Hospitality* she recalled that Peter Maurin had taught “People go to Washington, asking the Federal Government to solve their economic problems. But the Federal Government was never meant to solve men's economic problems. Thomas Jefferson says, ‘The less government there is the better it is.’ If the less government there is, the better it is, the best kind of government is self-government. If the best kind of government is self-government, then the best kind of organization is self-organization.”<sup>247</sup>

In February 1945 she wrote, “We believe that social security legislation, now balled [sic] as a great victory for the poor and for the worker, is a great defeat for Christianity. It is an acceptance of the Idea of force and compulsion. . . . We in our generation have more and more come to consider the state as bountiful Uncle Sam. ‘Uncle Sam will take care of it all. The race question, the labor question, the unemployment question.’ We will all be registered and tabulated

---

<sup>245</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=703>; <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=170>; <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=587>. See <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=615> for her admiration of Buber.

<sup>246</sup> Martin Buber, *Paths in Utopia* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 141.

<sup>247</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=435>.

and employed or put on a dole, and shunted from clinic to birth control clinic. . . . It is the city and the state and the federal government that is robbing them [the people] and pilfering them, too. They are taxed for every bite they eat, every shoddy rag they put on. They are taxed on their jobs, there are deductions for this and that.<sup>248</sup>

If she realized the great misery of the time, and she certainly did, and did not believe that Federal action was the main way of alleviating it and helping people, then

who is to take care of them if the government does not? That is a question in a day when all are turning to the state, and when people are asking, ‘Am I my brother’s keeper?’ Certainly we all should know that it is not the province of the government to practice the works of mercy, or go in for Insurance. Smaller bodies, decentralized groups, should be caring for all such needs.

The first unit of society is the family. The family should look after its own and, in addition, as the early fathers said, “every home should have a Christ room in it, so that hospitality may be practiced.” “The coat that hangs in your closet belongs to the poor.” “If your brother is hungry, it is your responsibility.” . . . But we are all members one of another, so we are obliged in conscience to help each other. The parish is the next unit, and there are local councils of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Then there is the city, and the larger body of charitable groups. And there are the unions, where mutual aid and fraternal charity is also practiced. For those who are not Catholics there are lodges fraternal organizations, where there is a long tradition of charity. But now there is a dependence on the state.<sup>249</sup>

These ideas fit in well with both the French Personalism and English Distributism that influenced her in the 1930s and beyond. In a statement often repeated in recent decades in *The Catholic Worker*, Personalism is described as “a philosophy which regards the freedom and dignity of each person as the basis, focus and goal of all metaphysics and morals.” It goes on to say that “in following such wisdom, we move away from a self-centered individualism toward the good of the other. This is to be done by taking personal responsibility for changing conditions, rather than looking to the state or other institutions to provide impersonal ‘charity.’” This same statement declared that the state’s “power has burgeoned hand in hand with growth in technology, so that military, scientific and corporate interests get the highest priority when concrete political policies are formulated. Because of the sheer size of institutions, we tend towards government by bureaucracy—that is, government by nobody.”<sup>250</sup>

In defending the CW support of Distributism, Dorothy liked to quote Pope Pius XII, as she did in her *On Pilgrimage* (1948), “What you can and ought to strive for is a more just distribution of wealth. This is and this remains a central point in Catholic social doctrine.”<sup>251</sup> She also linked her anarchism with Distributism: “Kropotkin wanted much the same type of social order as Eric Gill, the artist, Father Vincent McNabb, the Dominican street preacher, G. K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc and other distributists advocated.” In 1949 she referred to an anarchist society as one “made up of associations, guilds, unions, communes, parishes—voluntary associations of men, on regional or national lines, where there is a possibility of liberty and

---

<sup>248</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=150>.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> Rosalie Riegle Troester, ed. *Voices From Catholic Worker* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 577-78; reprinted in May 2008 issue of the *Catholic Worker*, <http://www.catholicworker.org/aimsandmeanstext.cfm?Number=5>.

<sup>251</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=481>.

responsibility for all men.”<sup>252</sup> During the 1970s, Dorothy mentioned on several occasions *Small Is Beautiful* (1973), the popular book of the German-English economist E. F. Schumacher. A more recent source wrote that it was “a book which, for a time at least, made distributism the most fashionable economic and political creed in the world.”<sup>253</sup> The editor of Dorothy’s letters wrote that in the 1970s “she welcomed the signs of spiritual renewal and the growing interest in such themes as decentralization, ecology, and the ‘small is beautiful’ philosophy popularized by E. F. Schumacher. All were extensions of what Peter Maurin had taught.”<sup>254</sup>

In the same year that Schumacher’s *Small Is Beautiful* appeared she copied into her journal these words from a letter of William James, whose *The Varieties of Religious Experience* had influenced her many years earlier.

I am against bigness and greatness in all their forms, and with the invisible molecular moral forces that work from individual to individual, stealing in through the crannies of the world like so many soft rootlets, or like the capillary oozing of water, and yet rending the hardest monuments of man’s pride, if you give them time. The bigger the unit you deal with, the hollower, the more brutal, the more mendacious is the life displayed. So I am against all big organizations as such, national ones first and foremost; against all big successes and big results; and in favor of the eternal forces of truth which always work in the individual and immediately unsuccessful way, underdogs always, till history comes, after they are long dead, and puts them on top.<sup>255</sup>

Jim Forest, who knew Dorothy well, wrote, “She was not very interested in politics. I don’t recall her ever expressing strong views either on would-be presidents or presidents-in-office.”<sup>256</sup> She did, on at least a few occasions, send telegrams to presidents such as the one she sent to President Kennedy in June 1963, suggesting that he accompany black students attempting to enroll at the segregated University of Alabama.<sup>257</sup>

But with her critical attitude toward national government, it is not surprising that the little she had to say of the specific actions of U.S. presidents was generally critical. She did give President Franklin Roosevelt credit for doing “all he could to alleviate the misery of the moment by establishing [Federal migrant] camps on the west coast”; but she added, “yet [he] did nothing at all about striking at the roots of the trouble, our industrial capitalistic system which is a cancer on the political body.”<sup>258</sup> She also criticized Roosevelt and his successors for any of their militaristic or war policies. As we have seen, she was especially critical of President Truman for being “jubilant” over the Hiroshima bombing. She criticized President Kennedy for the Bay of

---

<sup>252</sup> *Long Loneliness*, 56; <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=497>.

<sup>253</sup> Joseph Pearce, “The Education of E. F. Schumacher,” <http://distributist.blogspot.com/2007/01/education-of-e-f-schumacher.html>. At this web site there are also many other links to articles on distributism and how it differs from capitalism and many forms of socialism.

<sup>254</sup> *Letters*, 364. For more on Schumacher, see my “The Wisdom of E. F. Schumacher,” <http://www.wisdompage.com/SchumacherEssay.pdf>.

<sup>255</sup> Quoted in Forest, *All Is Grace*, 278.

<sup>256</sup> Forest, at <http://www.jimandnancyforest.com/2008/04/21/dorothyday/>.

<sup>257</sup> *Letters*, 294.

<sup>258</sup> [Http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=680](http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=680).

Pigs invasion and his subsequent policies toward Cuba. Of course, she was also very critical of the waging of war in Vietnam and the rest of Indochina by Presidents Johnson and Nixon.

Toward Johnson's "War on Poverty" she was a bit more ambivalent. She correctly credited Michael Harrington's book *The Other America* with calling national attention to the widespread nature of poverty in America, and she noted that the book "came as a result of his two-year stay with us as one of the editors of the *Catholic Worker*." But she added that "the fundamental solution [to poverty] is the personal response which each of us makes to the message of Jesus Christ. It is the solution which works from the bottom up rather than from the top down." She proclaimed that "each one of us can do something about the problem," and was critical of her own Catholic Church for the scandal of the wealth of the Church."<sup>259</sup>

Yet, she was gracious enough in the summer of 1968 to admit that the chief agency directing the government's War on Poverty, the Office of Economic Opportunity, deserved major credit for helping her the previous year establish her day-care center for migrant families at Tivoli. As she put it, "It is 'holy mother the state' which provides all food and the furnishings for this work, cots and cribs, tables and chairs, playground furniture for the children."<sup>260</sup>

Some of her harshest words were for President Nixon. In her diary on April 27, 1973, after referring to war spreading in Indochina, she wrote, "Mad and senseless, and seemingly headed toward catastrophe with Nixon as president—drunk with power, with seemingly no knowledge of fundamental Christianity in spite of religious services in the White House."<sup>261</sup>

Although critical of John Kennedy's Cuban policies, she seemed a little fonder of the Kennedys than of most political families. She recalled in her 1963 book *Loaves and Fishes*, that in the 1940s (it was actually 1940) the young John Kennedy and his older brother Joe (later killed in World War II) came for a visit to the Hospitality House on Mott Street. She relates what happened then: "Because it is more comfortable to argue over food and drink, we all went over to the Muni . . . an all-night restaurant. . . . We had coffee and cheesecake and talked until the small hours. I remember only that we talked of war and peace and man and the state."<sup>262</sup>

In her column of June 1969 she recounted taking part in a memorial mass for Robert Kennedy, who had been assassinated the previous year. This occurred after she had come to visit Cesar Chavez and support him and his United Farm Worker strikers. She greatly admired Chavez and his non-violent protest activities, and they shared a deep Catholic faith and great regard for Gandhi and his ideas and methods. She mentioned that "Chavez will always remember that [Robert] Kennedy came and broke bread with him as he ended his fast. He considered him a *companero* in a very deep sense. Both Catholics, both devout, it did not seem that the wealth of one made any difference between them."<sup>263</sup>

---

<sup>259</sup> From an article on poverty that first appeared in *Ave Maria*, December 3, 1966, available at <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=560>.

<sup>260</sup> [Http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=887](http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=887).

<sup>261</sup> *Diaries*, 529.

<sup>262</sup> Day, *Loaves and Fishes*, 165.

<sup>263</sup> [Http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=899](http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=899). On Day and Chavez, see also Forest, *All Is Grace*, 252-60.

In July 1975 Robert Kennedy's sister, Eunice Shriver, a great admirer of Dorothy, called her to tell her that her husband, Sargent (first head of the Peace Corps and then of the Office of Economic Opportunity), was going to seek the Democratic nomination for president and asked if Dorothy could support him. Dorothy's comment in her diary was, "I, an anarchist. But 'Pray for him.'" The following April she noted that Mrs. Shriver had offered her "the use of her Hyannisport house in summer. . . . A lovely, unspoiled family of children—I met Bobby Kennedy's and hers at supper. . . . And how brave a family. . . . They have faith—the Faith." In October 1979, she recorded that Mrs. Shriver called her and mentioned that her brother Edward was soon to announce his candidacy for president.<sup>264</sup>

### Conclusion and Legacy

The wisdom of Dorothy Day lies primarily in ordering her life around love, the greatest of the wisdom values. She was fond of quoting from *The Brothers Karamazov*, "Love in practice is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams." But for more than four decades she attempted to practice daily that difficult love in her Catholic Worker activities, helping and speaking out in behalf of society's needy, whether the poor, the sick, the homeless or others. Some non-believers may scoff at her emphasis on prayer, religious retreats, papal encyclicals, and Catholic sacraments and rituals, but they all helped her focus and strengthen her love of her fellow humans. The connection she perceived between her Catholicism and love is illustrated by her statement to other Catholics quoted above, "We have got to pray, to read the Gospel, to get to frequent communion, and not judge, not do anything, but love, love, love."

Like the poet Auden, whose faith expanded his wisdom, Dorothy demonstrated the wisdom value of tolerance.<sup>265</sup> We see this in her appreciation of non-Catholics (for example Gandhi) and even non-believers, like her college friend and later communist, Rayna Simons, and like Camus, some of whose words graced the walls of the CW's new Hospitality House in 1968. Her tolerance was coupled with another important wisdom value—humility. She was humble enough to realize she did not have all the answers and desired to "find points of agreement and concordance, if possible, rather than the painful differences, religious and political. . . . Not to judge, but to pray to understand." Wise people are also truth seekers and like Peter Maurin, whom she thought of as a mentor, she thought that dialogue with those who thought differently led to "clarification of thought," which in turn led to greater truths.

Besides truth, wise people appreciate beauty and achieve transcendence more than others in some of the many ways that Maslow has indicated. As we have seen, Dorothy did both. Finally, as many observers of wisdom from Shakespeare to the present have noted, wisdom involves the head and the heart, thinking and feeling, but also doing. With her extensive reading, traveling, prayer, meditation, writing a monthly column for over four decades, and almost

---

<sup>264</sup> *Diaries*, 550, 557, 639.

<sup>265</sup> On Auden's being "remarkably free of religious prejudice," see Kirsch, xix.

constant concern and help for the unfortunates at the CW hospitality houses and farms, she manifested this integrated wisdom as well as anyone during the twentieth century.

This did not mean that she was always wise or had no imperfections—no human is wise in all matters or all the time. Even many of the saints she most admired had their flaws, and she once wrote “one could go to hell imitating the imperfections of the saints.”<sup>266</sup> Some of her economic and political ideas, like Distributism, may seem utopian, but they are not irrelevant in a country and in a time where and when the disparity in the distribution of income is greater than ever.<sup>267</sup>

More than three decades after her death, her legacy remains impressive. By 2011, according to the Catholic Worker website, “213 Catholic Worker communities remain committed to nonviolence, voluntary poverty, prayer, and hospitality for the homeless, exiled, hungry, and forsaken. Catholic Workers continue to protest injustice, war, racism, and violence of all forms.” Her work and legacy continue to serve as a gentle reminder, to politicians and intellectuals among others, that what matters most is not what we say or how we label ourselves, but what we do. As psychologist Robert Sternberg wrote, “People are wise to the extent that they use their intelligence to seek a common good.” By that measure Dorothy Day was wise indeed.

---

<sup>266</sup> <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=246>.

<sup>267</sup> The ideas of the economist of the 1970s whom she seems to have admired most, E. F. Schumacher, continue to resonate. See, e.g., the program of the international conference on “Responsibility in Economics - The Legacy of E.F. Schumacher,” at <http://www.eurospes.be/page.php?LAN=E&TID=4&ID=1026&FILE=agendadetail>.