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Reconsidering Dorothy Day: The Distinctly American Catholic

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Reconsidering Dorothy Day: The Distinctly American Catholic

by
Emma Stempfer
HIS 490 History Honors Thesis

Department of History
Providence College
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PREAMBLE

Dorothy Day's (1897-1980) life and work fell during a period of rapid social change in America. She lived as a bohemian radical and a self-proclaimed anarchist when she entered the political scene as a journalist for *The Call*, a newspaper affiliated with the Socialist Party of America. Disillusioned with hypocrisy and censorship on far-left socialist media, she explored and deepened her faith. Following conversion to Catholicism, Day founded the *Catholic Worker*. A faithful Catholic, Day criticized the Church. She recognized the failure of organized Christianity to effectively work against the misery that so many were facing. Instead of treating impoverished and immigrant New Yorkers as a faceless mass, she worked to publish stories on as many different individuals as possible, even sometimes for her story, living alongside them for weeks. When aiding the poor directly, her approach was individual-based. She stressed financial freedom, and an individual's right to labor, and espoused an anti-materialist message.

Day gets tremendous attention from Christian writers and publishing houses and much less from secular academics. Writers like Jim Forrest, William Miller, and Terrence Wright praise Day's virtue, her comfort with living a difficult life to help others, her kindness, her understanding, and her effortless balance of political radicalism and deep Catholic faith. To them, Day was sedate. Even for authors like Loughery and Randolph, who read her life through the most secular lens in 2021, her radicalism reads as a punchline, something silly in which she engaged in her early life before she became her true self when she grew to be an old, sage, Catholic mother. Day's biographers tell the story of a young bohemian radical who, in the early 20th century, protested, was arrested, drank, slept around, had an abortion, and eventually turned to Christ in her early thirties beginning a life devoted to the poor and social justice in humble subservience to the Church.

To gain a more robust understanding of Day's life and work, historians must consider evidence that goes beyond a linear progression from radical bohemian to Catholic social activist. My research is informed primarily by her three autobiographies, *From Union Square to Rome*, *Loaves and Fishes*, and *The Long Loneliness* as well as a collection of Day's correspondence to family, friends, and colleagues. Day's ideology was anything but linear. A conversion to Catholicism at thirty transformed Day. But it did not wipe away the kind of woman she was. Day formed her identity during her early years as a radical. Her wariness of power and her acute awareness of injustice were part of who she was before becoming a Catholic.

In Chapter One, "Anarchy and Chaos" I discuss Day's early life, the rebellious nature of her interest in the Christian religion, her enjoyment and adherence to an anti-establishment lifestyle, and her inherent questioning of authority. I tour through her romantic life and discuss her political development and her position as a woman. Chapter Two, "Publishing a Paper" focuses on Day's early years as a Catholic and the founding of the *Catholic Worker* with Peter Maurin. I contrast her pragmatic and active approach to that of Maurin's, which was theological and theoretical. I solidify that she, although under the guidance of Maurin, remained true to her beliefs and did not act solely as his proxy. This is important as many biographers tend to over-emphasize his control. This chapter also considers how Day positioned the *Catholic Worker* in opposition to the *Daily Worker* and resisted censorship by the Catholic Church. Day did not placate opposition; she sought it out. Finally, in Chapter Three, "Anarchy and Peace," I tell the story of the last three decades of Day's life as she reckoned with the changes, economic and cultural, that occurred following WWII. Day's previous anti-government sentiments made a resurgence. In the wake of the McCarthy era, the use of nuclear weapons, and a growing government that sought to have an overbearing presence in the life of the individual, Day continued to push back in her writing.

Day's independent spirit, disdain for government authority, and tenacious hunger for justice make her a distinctly American Catholic. She was unafraid to challenge a social order that threatened justice, and freedom and disregarded the poor, sick, and disadvantaged. Catholic social thought was the bedrock of Day's activism from her conversion in 1927 onwards but her American spirit of individual power and equality between lay and clergy made it so that when she encountered Catholics or Church powers responsible for exploitation she was unrestrained to criticize and demand change. Day's life and writings can only be properly understood if historians consider her not just as a Catholic activist but as an *American Catholic* activist.

CHAPTER ONE
ANARCHY AND CHAOS

“These were the days of the Palmer Red raids when no one was safe.”¹

It was the year 1919, and Chicago police had just raided the International Workers of the World’s (IWW) headquarters on West Madison Street. Dorothy Day and another young woman were woken in the middle of the night by pounding at their bedroom door. The men of the house, the majority of whom were socialists, scattered, ran down the fire escape or jumped out windows. Eventually breaking down the door, four officers in plain clothes told the women to get up and get dressed – they were under arrest for being inmates of a disorderly house.

Without privacy, the women dressed, were handcuffed, and were brought downstairs. They stood on the sidewalk as they awaited the police wagon. Once at the police station, the women were booked and placed in a cell with several other women. Day was not allowed a phone call – but she had no one to call. There are six beds on rusty frames, and by the end of the night, over twenty women populated the cell: drunks, prostitutes, lost children, and socialists like Day.

Late into the night, the hatred the police feel for their detainees was most palpable. They beat the men and sprayed them with water. With the women, the degradation was less violent but no less subtle. Women believed to be prostitutes or who had even been jailed with a prostitute endured demeaning examinations for venereal disease.

Hungry and cold, on this summer night, Dorothy Day intently watched the women inside her cell: their behavior, their sadness, their poverty, and their victimization by the state. Day

¹ Dorothy Day, *From Union Square to Rome* (Silver Spring, MD: Preservation of the Faith Press, 1938), 100.

watched these people who were despised by society and thought, “We all form part of one body, a social body, and how could any limb of that body commit a crime alone?”²

Day’s had a tumultuous time in Chicago. At this moment, she defined herself as a writer and as a radical. She spent her days working on her own short stories and writing for the publication *The Liberator*, a small paper in the city that ran stories about war and economic progressivism. Editors there had strong ties to the Communist Party. Day ran in artist circles and remained genuinely interested in the labor movement, the marches, the protests, and the meetings. It was personalities – her own and the ones of people she met – men she met – that drew her into socialist thinking. These moments of passion for ideology and for revolution were ever-changing, but what she saw in instances like in that jail cell compelled her soul. Day’s growth and time spent as a radical was the springboard for her lifelong effort to resolve as much human suffering as she could.

Childhood and God

Twenty-two years earlier, Dorothy Day was born to John and Grace Day in Brooklyn, New York. Dorothy’s father was a stern conservative from the South. He loved horse racing and worked as a sportswriter for several newspapers in New York.³ Mrs. Day was a warm and loving mother who took the role of homemaking seriously.⁴ Before Day’s eighth birthday, the family moved out west to Oakland, California, so that Mr. Day could further his career in the newspaper industry.⁵

² Day, *From Union Square to Rome*, 104.

³ Jim Forest, *Love is the Measure: A Biography of Dorothy Day* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1986), 4.

⁴ William D. Miller, *Dorothy Day: A Biography* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982), 16.

⁵ John Loughery and Blythe Randolph, *Dorothy Day: The Dissenting Voice of the American Century* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), 12.

Day's rebellious nature suffused how she approached religion during her early childhood. She recognized quickly that religion could be a tool used by communities and individuals. The Days were non-believers and the young Dorothy experienced quiet Sunday dinners with her family.⁶ To speak of one's emotions, of one's inner self, was improper, Mr. Day taught. In her earliest autobiography, *From Union Square to Rome*, Day wrote, "In the family, the name of God was never mentioned, Mother and Father never went to church, none of us children had been baptized, and so to speak of the soul was to speak immodestly, uncovering what might better remain hidden."⁷ For the Days, a person's immortal soul was not of grave concern, but a waste of time and a hindrance to a focused and productive life. Prohibited from speaking about the soul, let alone considering religion, the defiant young Day was independently drawn to a higher power.

Day's earliest exposure to religion came when she discovered an old Bible, tucked away in the attic of the family's Oakland home. Reading to her younger sister from the book, she found that a new personality impressed itself on her. She recalled, "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." God, a concept from which she was kept, became at that moment the most important thing to her. Day only remembered this moment of her childhood following her conversion to Catholicism. In this context, her first encounter with God was significant in a spiritual sense and she placed great emphasis on its cathartic effect on her. It is difficult to assess accurately what went through the mind of the young Dorothy in the attic in 1938. Whether her encounter with the divine in this story sparked a legitimate lifelong relationship with the Christian

⁶ Forest, *Love is the Measure*, 4.

⁷ Day, *Union Square*, 13.

God or it was simply a rebellious venture into something forbidden, Day, guided away from God, found Him on her own, enlivened by His Word.

Day also came to appreciate the role religion played in family and community. She befriended a girl in her neighborhood, Naomi Reed, who came from a family of Methodists. Not much time passed before Day began attending church with the Reeds. When she slept over at Naomi's house, she remembered the "peace, unity, (and) love" that defined the family when Mrs. Reed sang hymns to the children before they went to sleep. Day even appreciated the conviction and the "smugness" she recognized in the Reeds as, "of the saved" who looked down on non-churchgoers as "of the damned." At some point, the young Dorothy cursed at her older brother because of a dispute over ownership of a guinea pig. Mrs. Reed believed this behavior to be unacceptable and forbid Naomi from seeing Day who was "cast into outer darkness."⁸ Though in her writing she claimed she did not honestly believe in all that the Reeds espoused, the ties that faith made, between family, and community interested her.

Day's childhood in California ended abruptly after the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake. Day wrote in detail – more detail than any other event from her childhood – about the earthquake. Initial reports put the death count at seven hundred and a massive fire that followed the earthquake likely quadrupled the number.⁹ Day's town of Oakland was far enough away from the San Andreas Fault line that it did not experience devastation, but the Days' house was in "shambles, dishes broken...chandeliers down, chimneys fallen....cracked from roof to ground."¹⁰ The plant that

⁸ Day, *From Union Square to Rome*, 12-22.

⁹ United States Geological Survey, *Casualties and Damage After the 1906 Earthquake*.

¹⁰ Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness* (New York: HarperCollins, 1952), 21.

printed the newspaper at which Mr. Day worked was left in ashes and he was out of a job.¹¹ Those displaced came from San Francisco by the thousands to Oakland to seek refuge. Day remembered the overwhelming “Christian charity” following the earthquake. She wrote that the people of Oakland gave away every extra garment they possessed. “While the crisis lasted,” Day noted, “people loved each other.”¹² Day saw the Christian motivation to do good for the other. At the same time, she saw that it was only in a moment of crisis. Previously describing the Californians as “clannish,” Day noted that in a time of *crisis*, people's innermost Christian tendencies came to the surface. Christian charity was a rusty tool put into use when people needed clothes and shelter.

Little time passed before John Day decided to move his family out of California and under the cover of a smoke-filled sky, they headed east. Eight-year-old Day, taken away from her warm childhood home and faced with a kind of poverty distinct to early twentieth-century Chicago, awakened to Catholicism. She wrote, “It was in Chicago, where we moved afterward, that I met my first Catholic.” In Chicago, the most compelling imagery of Catholicism for Day was that of Catholics living in poverty. She again connected to religion through a friend. She found “a supernatural beauty” in a friend’s mother, whom she walked in on praying the rosary. She remembered “Mrs. Barrett in her sordid little tenement flat finished her breakfast dishes at ten o’clock in the morning and got down on her knees and prayed to God.” Day wrote in *Union Square* about the compelling beauty and serenity of Mrs. Barrett, but one must note the context in which Day had this important realization: the “sordid” apartment. Day herself faced stark poverty at the time. The beauty of religion, it seems, was only palpable for her in such conditions. For a moment, the beauty of Christianity masked the ugliness of poverty.

¹¹ Loughery and Randolph, *Dorothy Day*, 15.

¹² Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 23.

As Day entered early adolescence, her interest in the works of Jack London and Upton Sinclair replaced her attraction to religion. She became increasingly class-conscious. Walking down North Avenue through the slums, she saw the destitute women and their children. Her imagination working within the worlds of London and Sinclair made her want to write about everything she saw. She felt called to reveal the world's poverty. In this way, she knew that she would be, "play(ing) (her) part."¹³ In *Union Square* and her later autobiography, *The Long Loneliness*, when she described these moments in the city during her teenage years, she often quoted the Bible, most frequently Psalms and the letters of Peter. Many readers might be tempted to take these references to religion as proof that it guided Day to class consciousness, but this was not the case. In her adolescence, she did believe in God, but her Christian faith dwindled. If her morals were right, she thought, what is the purpose of aligning oneself with an institution ripe for corruption? She felt called to be a writer and free to do so outside of organized religion.

Life on her own

In 1914, at the outset of WWI, Day left home for the University of Illinois. Compelled by the freedom from home, war, and poverty – her own and of those around her – Day found herself radicalized. She was thrilled to leave home and her childhood, under the thumb of Mr. Day, behind. In a sense, it was freedom she pursued, not an education. This point is made clear in *The Long Loneliness* where she wrote that the "idea of earning my own living, by my own work, was more thrilling than the idea of an education." She took classes in Latin, English, history, and science. With no aspirations to become a teacher herself, she went to the classes she enjoyed and was only interested in the course material as long as it pleased her. She continued in *The Long Loneliness*, "I led a very shiftless life, doing for the first time exactly what I wanted to do...coming and going

¹³ Day, *From Union Square to Rome*, 24-35.

at whatever hour of the night I pleased. My freedom intoxicated me. I felt it was worth going hungry for.” Strapped for cash, she worked for and lived with a professor and his family, washing dishes and clothes, and preparing dinners. She often worked other jobs but found her critical attitude towards the Bureau of Labor prevented her from finding something long-term. She wrote for the town paper, which brought in little money. Most of her articles were dismissed by the editors because they criticized the “existing order” and the articles that were published on working conditions got her in “hot water.” Day joined a writer’s club and turned in stories about experiencing hunger. She studied in the school library until late into the night and got into bed immediately once she was home because of the cold house. Living on little food and even less money was dangerous, but Day “rejoiced” in that danger.¹⁴ Freedom provided sustenance.

Though Day put herself in precarious positions while at college, she knew that many young women had no choice but to work at the factories in their youth and then marry men who continued to work at those factories until they died. She continued to read works like *The Jungle* by Sinclair, who compellingly described the working conditions of meat packing plants in Chicago.¹⁵ She was drawn to the Russian writers too: Dostoevsky, Artzybasheff, Andreyev, Chekhov and Gorki, who made her feel as if she was strong and enlightened with no other choice but to live a life fighting the oppression of the masses by the capitalist state. Though not always overtly political, these writers expressed a vision of Russia’s weary working-class free from the rule of the Czar. While at school, Day joined the Socialist Party of Urbana, a town near the university. But she found the

¹⁴ Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 41-45.

¹⁵ James Harvey Young, “The Pig That Fell Unto The Privy: Upton Sinclair’s ‘The Jungle’ and the Meat Inspection Amendments of 1906,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 59, no. 4 (1985): 470.

meetings boring and only paid dues for a short period of time.¹⁶ Day was a radical, after all, and never a real party member. Her core concern was with the poor and about how to remedy the injustices she saw on the streets, not about strategizing a revolution.

Day's hyper-awareness of the poor began to drive an irreconcilable wedge between her and bourgeois Christians. Just as religion was used as a tool for the Reed family and Mrs. Barrett, Christianity was being used as a tool by middle-class Christians who could look to Christ for their own salvation, ignoring the needs of the poorest among them. She reflects, "In spite of my studies and my work, I had time to read, and the ugliness of life in a world which professed itself to be Christian appalled me. A Christian culture had provided an infrastructure to care for those struggling, but not for an avenue out of the system in which they struggled." Day was dissatisfied with how a so-called Christian culture responded to pressing problems.

Why was so much done in remedying the evil instead of avoiding it in the first place? There were day nurseries for children, for instance, why didn't fathers get money enough to take care of their families so that the mothers would not have to go out to work? There were hospitals to take care of the sick and infirm, and, of course doctors were doing much to prevent sickness, but what of occupational disease which came from not enough food for the mother and children? What of the disabled workers who received no compensation but only charity for the rest of their lives?¹⁷

Day decided that Christianity was for the weak. It was for those who could not face the havoc that capitalism had wreaked on the human person. She then decided to cut religion out of her life entirely.¹⁸

¹⁶ Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 47.

¹⁷ Day, *From Union Square to Rome*, 39-47.

¹⁸ Day, Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 45. The sentiments Day expressed here in *The Long Loneliness*, are furthered in later articles Day wrote on the founding of the Catholic Worker Movement. She wrote, "Of course, 'the poor we will always have with us' ...But surely He did not intend that there would be quite so many of them. Dorothy Day, "More About Holy Poverty Which is Voluntary Poverty," *Catholic Worker*, February 1, 1945.

Journalism

In late 1916, Dorothy Day began work at *The Call*, a New York daily newspaper directly affiliated with the Socialist Party of America. Itching for revolution, she took on the role of reporter with great seriousness. As her time at *The Call* progressed, she found that the culture of a socialist newspaper was lacking. Factual reporting came second to what she called “the darker side of life.”¹⁹

After dropping out of college, Day, unemployed, walked up and down the streets of New York for five months before interviewing with *The Call*. The paper was not hiring, but she obtained a position anyway - partially because she was a woman and partially because she agreed to a five dollars per week salary. It was Day’s idea and she called it “the \$5 a week diet squad of one.”²⁰ Because so many young women working in factories made only five dollars a week, Day believed that if she lived on such a meager income, and reported in detail how she was affected by it and what it meant for housing, food, and transportation, she “could write from a more radical perspective about the experience for *The Call* because the newspaper tended to focus on “the work of the Socialist in the legislature.”²¹

The diet squad column took off and Day’s voluntary life among the poor deepened her respect and love for those at the bottom of society. She wrote articles entitled, “Dying Man Unable to Carve Turkey if Family Had One, but it Hasn’t: Another Home Has Famished Brood,” “Miss

¹⁹ Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 66. As a reporter for *The Call*, Day attended Socialist meetings and strikes, walked on picket lines and investigated starvation and death in the slums. All the work she was tasked with doing was to build up a narrative against the system. But it was a narrative angled towards legislation and education, projects of the older editorial board, and not towards revolution.

²⁰ Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 52.

²¹ Day, *From Union Square to Rome*, 71.

Young Cares for Homeless Refugee Women in Home without Capital ‘H’,” “Nothing to Pawn but her Body: Police Take That,” and “Call’s Diet Squad Officially Reports System Won’t Work,” and tens more like this. Her articles unapologetically exposed hunger, crime, sex, and the rampant poverty in New York City. She highlighted the ravages of unemployment on the family. A father without work meant a mother who would need to scrounge the streets for food. An article from the fall of 1917 told the story of a mother’s constant anxiety over feeding her children:

Then, after all the kids had gone back to school, she put her old shawl around her head and went out, and whenever there was a potato on the ground, dropped by some careless huckster, or whenever there was a bit of fruit, she picked it up and carried it away underneath her shawl. Then home, before the children returned from school, before her husband came home from his fruitless hunt; then, in the evening, Mike and his wife would sit over the dining room table, that most of the time was so pathetically empty, and reckon up how much they had left of their small savings, and what they could best dispose of at the corner pawnshop. And then, finally, they would crawl into bed, into the same bed that held two of the children and they would lie there, sorrowing at every little moan from the children that they could not feed because prices were too high.²²

Day’s vivid picture here is of a family, whose possessions and savings were so limited, trapped in their situation because of unemployment. It is a tender description of a family in distress. As the family desperately tries to feed their children, they must sell their possessions, letting go of the life they made for themselves. The final sentence describing the family in bed together is the emotional driver of the piece. It is unlikely Day was actually in the bedroom with the family, and the “sorrowing at every little moan from the children” reads as an editorialized line. This plausibly was a description given by the mother Day interviewed. Day latched onto the scene and gave her article a sense of intimacy about the true effects of economic destruction on the family.

Day was a blossoming intellectual drawn to the left’s radical promise of revolution and reform. She wrote in *The Long Loneliness*, “When I read Tolstoi [sic], I was an anarchist. Ferrer

²² Dorothy Day, “There is Not Enough to Eat in the House, and Children are Perforce Sent to School Hungry,” *The Call* (New York), November 26, 1917.

with his schools, Kropotkin with his farming communes, the I.W.W.'s with their solidarity, their unions, these all appealed to me."²³ She witnessed a time of immense change. The structure of society was seemingly reorganizing itself, away from capitalist hierarchy, questioning the authority of the state, and doing away with class altogether. At the heart of this shift was Leon Trotsky, whom Day had the chance to interview in 1917, just months before the Bolshevik Revolution. He condemned parliamentarianism and looked forward to revolution. In her article written on him for *The Call*, she noted that Trotsky's greatest hope and inspiration lay in the awakening of the workers of Europe. She wrote, "From the blind faith, the illusions and phantom hopes of democracy and freedom that were held before their gaze at the beginning of the war, they are slowly imbibing the seeds of revolt, of social unrest, of Socialism."²⁴ The young Day agreed, reflecting in *Union Square*, "I know that everything I wrote, I wrote with the impatience of youth. I was hopeless of gradual change."²⁵ When the Czar did fall in the spring of 1917, Day joined the celebration in Madison Square Garden. She sang "Ei Euchnjem" the workers' hymn of Russia. She was in awe that "The Russian masses, living on one-sixth of the world's surface, had overthrown the Czar."²⁶ For Day, revolution was a distinctly human yearning. She thought a natural desire for liberty, justice, and love could only be fulfilled by a worker's revolution.

As Day's time at *The Call* went on, she was under pressure from her editors to deliver readers narratives to stir up calls for change. Day's commitment to writing about the poor did not

²³ Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 62.

²⁴ Dorothy Day, "Leon Trotzky Asserts Parliamentary Movement Has Been Ripped Apart – Desertion of Party Leaders is a Crime, He Says," *The Call* (New York), January 6, 1917.

²⁵ Day, *From Union Square to Rome*, 73.

²⁶ Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 66.

mean that she was unaware of the hard work, done particularly by women, put into making a home as comfortable as possible. Because of her editors' disapproval, she was forced to omit from her articles "the homely comfort of their well-cooked meals and stress the husband's unemployment" or the "sordidness of the bathless tenement house." In *Union Square*, she reflected on this "over emphasis of human misery and underemphasis of bravery, the courage of human beings enabling them to make the best of their surroundings."²⁷ Her biggest qualm with misreporting came when she was assigned to write on Margaret Sanger and Ethel Byrne's imprisonment. Authorities arrested the sisters for opening a birth control clinic in the slums of Brownsville. Mistreatment of political prisoners was rampant at the time and *The Call* latched on to this narrative. Day's task was to paint Sanger as a martyr, victimized by the New York prison system. Articles like, "Mrs. Sanger Put Near Manic" and "Eight Prisoners Locked in One Cell over Sunday, She Charges. Vermin Plentiful, Punishment Severe - Mrs. Sanger to Investigate" did just that. In her articles, Day labeled Sanger "a model prisoner"²⁸ and emphasized her misery and the dirty conditions of the prison. Byrne, who was sent to Blackwell Island, was the first woman in the United States to go on a hunger strike in prison. Editor's demanded that she "write up these women as martyrs in a holy cause and to paint harrowing pictures of the suffering." Byrne did not strike for very long, and upon her release, Day found her "perfectly well and strong."²⁹ Distorting the truth like this pained Day and although she enjoyed her work, the culture, and in some ways the poverty, she left *The Call* after only two years.

²⁷ Day, *From Union Square to Rome*, 75.

²⁸ Dorothy Day, "Eight Prisoners Locked in One Cell over Sunday, She Charges. Vermin Plentiful, Punishment Severe - Mrs. Sanger to Investigate," *The Call* (New York), February 6, 1917; Dorothy Day, "Mrs. Sanger Put Near Manic," *The Call* (New York), February 12, 1917.

²⁹ Day, *From Union Square to Rome*, 74.

Jail for the first time

Just as she was intoxicated by the freedom she felt when she left home for college, Day was reinvigorated when she left *The Call* in 1919. Now, unshackled from family and employment, she traveled with a group of women to Washington D.C. to picket in front of the White House on behalf of suffragettes. In the early years of the twentieth century, the cause for women's suffrage developed rapidly. The re-election of Woodrow Wilson, who was reluctant if not opposed to women's suffrage, and the official involvement of the United States in WWI signaled to suffragette leaders that it was their time to seek advancement for the cause. Leader Alice Paul and other suffragettes increased their presence in Washington, particularly in front of the White House. Paul's group, the Silent Sentinels, picketed for six months, from January to June of 1917. Six women were arrested on June twenty-sixth on charges of obstructing traffic.³⁰ This arrest did not stifle the women as the police hoped it would. For the next four months, more and more women came to picket, and more women were arrested. The women were not treated like political prisoners. They were denied books and mail, they were forced to work and wear prison clothing. As Day notes in *Union Square*, access to literature, even Marxist literature was not denied to political prisoners under the Czar in Russia. On November tenth, Day headed to Washington D.C. to protest the mistreatment of the prisoners. Many biographers like William Miller or John Loughery and Blythe Randolph leave out the fact that Day was not protesting *with* the suffragettes, but with the League for the Defense of Political Prisoners.³¹ Of course, Day was interested in female enfranchisement, but her fervor to protest came from an alignment with those treated poorly

³⁰ Miller, *Dorothy Day*, 90-91.

³¹ Day, *From Union Square to Rome*, 81.

by the state, and not necessarily with an alignment to the suffragette movement. It was not the call of feminism to which Day was responding, but the call of revolutionary anti-statism.

On the first day of protests, there were small riots and the women were arrested and loaded into a police wagon with their signs of protest hanging out the back.³² The women were released on bail and the judge postponed their sentence. On the second day of protests, the judicial system was less lenient. Authorities arrested the women again, the leaders were sentenced to six months in prison and the rest, including Day, were sentenced to thirty days. They immediately declared a hunger strike.³³ The women were not brought to the city jail but to Occoquan Workhouse where they experienced degradation and borderline torture by the warden, Raymond Whittaker. In what is called by many historians, “The Night of Terror” and a turning point for the women’s suffrage movement in the United States, women were beaten, chained, and kicked.³⁴ The mistreatment of these women was made known to the public and ended up garnering tremendous sympathy for the women. An *The New York Times* article entitled, “Move Militants from the Workhouse,” featured a husband who recounted the treatment of his wife who was imprisoned at Occoquan.³⁵ The treatment of leader Lucy Burns, in particular, raised the ire of Americans sympathetic to the suffragettes.³⁶ Burns, after not properly heeding instructions to lower her voice and to stop communicating with women in different cells, was handcuffed to the bars of her cell with her arms

³² Day, *From Union Square to Rome*, 82.

³³ “Cat-and-Mouse Remedy for Hunger Striking,” *The New York Times* (New York), November 29, 1917.

³⁴ Julia L. Mickenberg, “Suffragettes and Soviets: American Feminists and the Specter of Revolutionary Russia,” *Journal of American History* 100, no. 4, (2014): 1040.

³⁵ “Move Militants from Workhouse,” *The New York Times*, November 25, 1917.

³⁶ Mickenberg, “Suffragettes and Soviets,” 1041.

above her head. She remained like that for several hours before she was thrown onto a bed, still handcuffed with no mattress.³⁷ Her cellmate: Dorothy Day. The two stayed up late into the night talking as Day tried to distract Burns from her aching shoulders.

It was by way of a hunger strike that Day and her fellow political prisoners made their way out of Occoquan. Prison authorities desperately wanted to remain in control of their inmates. So, forty women declaring the hunger strike was cause for concern. They decided to copy the English “Cat and Mouse” approach to hunger strikers whereby hunger-striking women would be imprisoned right up until the point of physical danger and then released.³⁸ Though this tactic prevented the horrible practice of force-feeding, it is an example of the measures taken by government to suppress dissent at this point in American history. The goal was to both minimize the perception that these women were martyrs and to break their spirit, by avoiding any consequences to a hunger strike.

The prisoners were released on November 28th, serving eighteen out of their thirty-day sentence. Following the release of the prisoners, Alice Paul said:

We are put out of jail as we were put into jail, at the whim of the Government. They tried to terrorize and suppress us. They could not, and so freed us. The Administration has found that it dare not imprison American women for asking for a share in the democracy for which we are fighting abroad. Our prisoners in Occoquan were released from that institution last Saturday on the court ruling that they were illegally and lawlessly confined.³⁹

Paul’s words of celebration represent the sentiment of all the women released. When news came out that the women were to be released, a big meal was served to the prisoners, “there were card games and dances in the corridors, some of the girls dancing and the others beating time and

³⁷ Day, *From Union Square to Rome*, 83.

³⁸ “Cat-and-Mouse Remedy for Hunger Striking.”

³⁹ “Suffrage Pickets Freed from Prison,” *The New York Times*, November 28, 1917.

signing.”⁴⁰ Because the demands of the women were met at the direction of the Wilson administration, it was hardly the victory Paul claimed it was. They were still subject to the whims of government. However, that did not change the rebellious milieu in which Day was caught up. What she had learned was that the government could only be trusted to abuse its power but, collective protest could break the stronghold of government on individual prisoners. To Day and her comrades, the hunger strike had worked. It proved to her that government had power over the spirit of individuals as much as it was over their physical bodies. To strip authority of its power over the spirit was a detrimental blow to its tyranny. The notion that one’s spirit must be free is a key component of Day’s ideology on government.

Men

What she saw and who she wrote about influenced Day in her young adult life. She had a mind of her own and was not easily subject to influence. Nevertheless, she did have several long-term romantic partners who deeply affected her. The arc of her romantic life in her early twenties – romance, sex, abortion, marriage, and finally motherhood – was hardly Catholic. But it was her experiences with men that pushed her into the arms of the Church. When Day came back to New York from Washington D.C., she fell into the theater scene when she struck up a relationship with Jewish writer Ilzok Isaac Granich, who went by the pen name “Mike Gold.” Gold was a communist and ran in crowds of like-minded artists. He took Day to the theater where she sat in on rehearsals and workshops. Spending time at the theater, she quickly developed feelings for Eugene O’Neil, an Irish playwright for the Provincetown Playhouse. O’Neil had all the warmth that Gold lacked.⁴¹ The couple took long walks along the water and fell into hours of evening banter. Day and O’Neil

⁴⁰ Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 82.

⁴¹ Loughery and Randolph, *Dorothy Day*, 62.

watched the revolution from afar but were thrilled by the victories in Russia they read about from the newspapers. With a group of writers, the couple would drink at the Golden Swan Saloon, “an atmosphere of drink and smoke” near the playhouse.⁴² She drank port in the back room of the saloon, as women were not allowed to drink in the front.⁴³ It was with O’Neil that Day was introduced to “The Hound of Heaven.” Gene, as she called him, could recite all of Francis Thompson’s poem.⁴⁴ O’Neil’s intellectual curiosity spanned further than that of revolution. He, though only abstractly, thought frequently about the divine and his interest reignited a spark in Day. The idea of being relentlessly pursued by God fascinated her. She was made to feel that sooner or later she would “have to pause in the mad rush of living and remember (her) first beginning and (her) last end.” Day was intrigued by O’Neil, and she listened to what he had to say. Nevertheless, Day could only relax into religious consideration because it was a man who presented it to her. Further, she was only considering the existence of God – not a Christian one or Christ himself.

As time went on, Day became exhausted by the late nights of drinking and talking. O’Neil was a heavy drinker and while the couple’s relationship was positive, Day found herself in the back of St. Joseph’s Church on a Sunday after a weekend of boozing. Day went to church but she did not engage in “conscious” prayer. She rather wanted to “put (herself) there in the atmosphere of prayer.” Day still held to the law of the “life of the flesh.”⁴⁵ A law she claimed could be made

⁴² Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 84.

⁴³ Kate Hennessy, *The World Will be Saved by Beauty* (New York: Scribner, 2017), 14.

⁴⁴ “The Hound of Heaven” was a poem written in 1893 by English poet Francis Thomson. This 182-line poem is about how an individual feels being perused by God. It was a highly influential work for Christian writers in the mid twentieth century. Maurice Leahy. “The Hound of Heaven,” *The Irish Monthly* 62, no. 735 (1934): 567.

⁴⁵ Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 84-85.

up by someone if they were strong enough. Day's peaceful romance with O'Neil broke when the United States became involved in WWI. Although she opposed the war, she felt compelled to work as a nurse at Kings County Hospital in Brooklyn, the setting for her most tempestuous affair.

Day's relationship with Lionel Moise was the inspiration for her semi-autobiography and first book *The Eleventh Virgin*. In the story, a young girl named June meets a handsome dynamic man named Dick at a hospital. The couple had a tumultuous relationship that ends in a devastating abortion. Day writes extraordinarily sparingly about the details of her relationship with Moise, almost never mentioning him by name, so biographers of Day must rely on her claims in *The Eleventh Virgin*, which she ended up calling "a bad book."⁴⁶ In *The Eleventh Virgin*, the female protagonist June, representative of Day, meets Dick at the hospital. Though, according to Loughery and Randolph in *Dorothy Day: Dissenting Voice of the American Century*, because of where Moise was living, it is more likely Day met him on a weekend trip to Manhattan.⁴⁷ *The Eleventh Virgin* is a raw and emotional account of a girl's infatuation with an older man who cares far less for her than she does for him. Dick's manipulative jealousy is a theme that runs throughout. On one account, he stormed out of a café when June sits too close to another man. While locked out of the apartment, June sits in despair in the café in the knowledge that, "He would not be there if she went home, and there she could not get in if he was not." Day writes June as wise to the notion that Dick is hurting her, but she never plucks up the courage to leave, and in moments of distress, "'God, how I want him.' Was the cry she kept making."⁴⁸ Evidence that does confirm Moise's

⁴⁶ Forest, *Love is the Measure*, 65.

⁴⁷ Loughery and Randolph, *Dorothy Day*, 71.

⁴⁸ Dorothy Day, *The Eleventh Virgin* (Chicago: The Cottger Press 1924), 293-294.

character is given in *The Long Loneliness*. Moise hated certain beloved authors of Day like Dostoyevsky and James Joyce. Without naming her lover she wrote that the two got into an argument on the El train while Day was reading *Portrait of the Artists as a Young Man* by Joyce. Moise angrily “wrested the book ...from my hands and threw it out the window of the train.”⁴⁹ This is one of the few references to Moise in Day’s nonfiction accounts of her own life and it is the only one that tells of a particular instance of communication between the two. It is highly likely that Dick from *The Eleventh Virgin* was an accurate portrayal of Moise.

The final two chapters of the book detail June’s discovery that she is pregnant and her decision to have an abortion. Four months into her pregnancy, Day had an abortion. It was a necessity; Moise would leave her if she did not. In *The Eleventh Virgin*, June visits the female Dr. Pringle who accepted such patients as June to financially support herself and her child. One particularly poignant moment in the chapter is when June, lying on the cold table, sees Dr. Pringle’s son run by the door to catch a glimpse of his mother on his way to school.⁵⁰ Day’s own abortion was quite different. She met with Dr. Ben Reitman for the procedure. Reitman, a pioneer in the treatment of sexually transmitted diseases among women and the poor, was also an anarchist. Kate Hennessy wrote that “he would have been handsome but for the filthy hair, hands, and fingernails.”⁵¹ Day’s decision to alter the story in this way raises questions. Perhaps she was not prepared to share the intimate details of a procedure she found so emotionally distressing or perhaps she was worried about legal consequences. But a letter Day wrote in 1926 reveals a different way to understand her choice to present June’s abortion slightly more positively than her

⁴⁹ Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 108.

⁵⁰ Day, *The Eleventh Virgin*, 306-310.

⁵¹ Hennessy, *The World Will be Saved by Beauty*, 28.

own. Day wrote to Margret Sanger, founder of the American Birth Control League and later Planned Parenthood, asking to work as her publicity director. Day was disappointed to learn the League had no money to hire her as she was, “so interested in the work.”⁵² It was for the best though Day decided because she needed the time to devote to her writing. This letter to Sanger confirms that Day recognized the positive implications that access to abortions could bring women in need despite her own troubling encounter with Dr. Reitman.

Day, deeply distraught after her abortion and break with Moise, quickly married Berkley Tobey, the wealthy founder of the Literary Guild.⁵³ They married in 1920 in Connecticut and according to Day’s granddaughter, under Tobey’s instruction, the two waited until they were in New York to consummate the marriage, making the union legally invalid.⁵⁴ The couple traveled around Europe for the summer while Day worked on her manuscript for *The Eleventh Virgin*. Day loved the time spent in London where she was free to write, explore and ponder. In Paris, she was not as interested in the progressive art movement as Tobey was. Architecture, Cubism, and Dadaism were Tobey’s interests.⁵⁵ Though she did not completely enjoy it at the time, Day looked back fondly on her time in Italy. She claims that the smell of food, wine, strong Italian voices, and even buzzing of insects transported her back to “the months (she) spent beside the Mediterranean or wandering around the streets of Naples.” When they returned to the United States Day, “went to Chicago and threw (herself) back into the life (she) had known there,” completely avoiding any

⁵² Dorothy Day, and Robert Ellsberg, *All the Way to Heaven: The Selected Letters of Dorothy Day* (New York: Image Books, 2012), 6.

⁵³ Forest, *Love is the Measure*, 51.

⁵⁴ Hennessy, *The World Will be Saved by Beauty*, 29.

⁵⁵ Loughery and Randolph, *Dorothy Day*, 81-82.

discussion of her marriage in her writings.⁵⁶ Kate Hennessy reveals that Day had woken up early one morning, put all her jewelry in a box on the nightstand, and left Tobey. The two had little communication after this.⁵⁷ Living the high life with Tobey put Day in touch with aspects of life she would not have otherwise encountered, such as the radical art movements and the native culture of Italy, whose many immigrants she lived with for the rest of her life.

Forster Batterham, an activist and biologist, fathered Day's only child and simultaneously brought an end to her romantic escapades. A man deeply opposed to marriage and religion, Batterham pushed Day into family and Catholicism. Only twenty-two years old, Day did take some time to be independent after her marriage with Tobey dissolved. She lived in the upstairs rooms of the IWW headquarters. In a police raid authorized by U.S. Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer and J. Edgar Hoover as part of the Red Scare, Day was arrested. Her time spent in the Chicago city jail where she had none of the comradery like she did during her Washington D.C. arrest rattled her. Afterward, she needed to get away and traveled to New Orleans and then eventually ended up back in New York where she met Batterham. Unlike Moise and Tobey, Day wrote honestly and at length about Batterham whom she called 'Lefty' and opened the second section of *The Long Loneliness* with the line, "The man I loved...was an anarchist, an Englishman by descent, and a biologist."⁵⁸ The two lived in a beach house on Staten Island where Day could focus on her writing.

Day found peace with Batterham and looked for a long-term commitment. In comparison to her fast-paced life traveling around the country and the world, life in her cottage in Staten Island was slightly mundane, but she writes for pages about her life with Lefty there, his painting, fishing,

⁵⁶ Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 95.

⁵⁷ Hennessy, *The World Will be Saved by Beauty*, 30.

⁵⁸ Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 113.

gardening, and conversations with the neighbors. Batterham's easy-going nature was just what Day needed, but there were troubles on the horizon. The two had disagreements about money and about religion but most importantly, Batterham deeply opposed commitment.⁵⁹

Her house on the beach brought Day tremendous peace. So much so that she found her thoughts drifting towards God. As she watched the workers on the water, she heard the bells at St. Joseph's Chapel ring the Angelus and she, "found (herself) praying, praying with thanksgiving, praying with open eyes."⁶⁰ What exactly Day prayed to or prayed for is unclear. But the sound of the waves crashing on the rocks and the gulls screaming in the sky and the smell of the sea put her in a pious state of mind.

Batterham had no such peace. It was not just commitment that produced anxiety in Batterham but his political beliefs. Though he devoted much of his energy to his work as a biologist and found solace in nature, Batterham could not help but feel the mounting turmoil in the nation. He was an anarchist by all accounts and was affected negatively by the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti.⁶¹ Day recalls that "He did not eat for days. He sat around the house in a stupor of misery, sickened by the cruelty of life and men."⁶² The execution of what he believed to be innocent men

⁵⁹ Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 120.

⁶⁰ Day, *From Union Square to Rome*, 116.

⁶¹ Israel Shenker "Sacco-Vanzetti Case is Evoking Passions 50 Years after Deaths," *New York Times* August 23, 1977. Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were anarchists and Italian immigrants. They were charged and convicted of the murder of town men transporting money for a shoe company in Braintree, Massachusetts. Following and short deliberation, a jury convicted the men. Their executions by electric chair lead to outrage and protests in the Italian community, socialists, anarchists, and all those wary of government power. The men maintained their innocence until they died and after their death they became symbols of victimization by the system. In 1977, Michael Dukakis, then the governor of Massachusetts, proclaimed that the men had been unfairly tried and convicted.

⁶² Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 147.

targeted for their beliefs confirmed for Batterham that society was indeed beyond repair. Nature and the outdoors were, he thought, the only place to live. As Batterham became a recluse, Day longed to become part of the Catholic Church. Day, of course, was deeply saddened by the execution of the two men and includes in *The Long Loneliness* a letter from Vanzetti to a friend which was shared with her. Faith, though, quietly became a central part of her life.

Despite their troubles, Day stayed with Batterham and became pregnant in the early summer of 1925.⁶³ Batterham did not want a child and although he did not demand an abortion as Moise did, he made his unhappiness about a child and about Day's growing interest in Catholicism known.⁶⁴ Day, burdened by Batterham's anxieties about becoming a father and her own anxieties about bringing new life into the world (she had suffered gynecological problems following her abortion), traveled from Staten Island to Florida where her parents had settled in their old age. The ever-financially focused Mr. Day, who disapproved of his daughter's life as a freelance writer, demanded answers as to how she planned to support herself.⁶⁵ It just so happened that she had recently published the short story, *What Price Love?* in the *Chicago Herald*. The plot of the story follows two young flapper girls, Ruth who was prudish around men, and Tamar, a worldlier type, with the philosophy, "If you don't let men ever kiss you, you are going to place too much importance on those same kisses."⁶⁶ In the early spring of 1926, following a painful and anxious labor, Day became a mother to Tamar Teresa. She was elated and wanted to share her happiness

⁶³ Loughery and Randolph, *Dorothy Day*, 104.

⁶⁴ Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 136.

⁶⁵ Loughery and Randolph, *Dorothy Day*, 106.

⁶⁶ Dorothy Day, "What Price Love?," *Chicago Herald Examiner* (Chicago), June 15, 1924.

with the world and during the few days she spent in the hospital, wrote an article for the *New Masses*. She recalls in *Union Square*, “I 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.”⁶⁷ Batterham, of course, was not there for the labor, and political events would send him into a depression ultimately ending the relationship.⁶⁸ So, there Day sat in her hospital bed, with no man by her side, writing for a Communist publication, a new mother who had named her child after a promiscuous book character. This is not the image one would expect of a woman at the start of her conversion to Catholicism, but it was. In the years following Tamar’s birth, Day baptized her daughter and sought council as a single mother in priests and nuns. She converted a year later.

The next phase of Day’s life - meeting Peter Maurin and founding the Catholic Worker Movement - defined the direction of her legacy. Her individualistic spirit never receded during her career as editor-in-chief of a Catholic newspaper. She became part of a long American tradition by establishing a small independent newspaper. She faced economic challenges and structural adversity from the right and the left but never considered that she was incapable or not up for the task of defending what she believed to be right in the face of power.

⁶⁷ Day, *From Union Square to Rome*, 128

⁶⁸ Hennessy, *The World Will be Saved by Beauty*, 48.

CHAPTER TWO

PUBLISHING A PAPER

Tamar Tearesa married on April 19, 1944, to a young Catholic man named David Hennessy. A small group of Catholic Workers attended the ceremony. Wedding presents included farm animals and hand-stitched clothes. The couple had plans to move to Easton a town in upstate New York to live on a homestead. The home, a cottage, and an orchard was a wedding gift as well⁶⁹ Neither Tamar nor David had graduated high school or had any career prospects, but they were in love and desperately looking to get away from the city. In a letter to a friend, Gerry Griffin, Day wrote of her concerns about the marriage and hoped it would all work out in the end.

The Hennessys had nine children and struggled financially and emotionally. Life did not work out in Easton and the family moved to West Virginia. They relied heavily on financial support from Day, Batterham, and the *Catholic Worker*. Tamar knew that after the birth of her third child, she had made a mistake in marrying David who had very little education and failed to maintain employment. Day visited the family in West Virginia. The house looked unkempt, the children were happy but untamed, and most of all tension felt incredibly high between husband and wife. Day had come to help, but that did not stop Tamar from crying and throwing a few tantrums. She pleaded with her mother to help her move to Staten Island. She said she could not go on living on the farm and needed to leave as soon as possible. To keep the peace, Day did not

⁶⁹ Loughery and Randolph, *Dorothy Day*, 224. The couple named their new home “Cobbett Cottage,” after William Cobbett, a British journalist, pamphleteer, and farmer. As a member of parliament in the nineteenth century he argued for reform including lower taxes, restraint of foreign activity, cutting bureaucracy, Catholic emancipation, and promoted a return to agrarian lifestyle for Britons. Interestingly, Cobbett exhumed Thomas Paine’s body from his grave in New Rochelle to bring his corpse back to England. The bone remained in Cobbett’s possession until his death. So, whatever unpredictable life the Hennessy’s had ahead of them, it could not be as odd as that of the cottage’s namesake. Michael Bush, “Thomas Paine’s Remains Like Mainly in the Manchester Area (probably)” *The Guardian* (London), June 22, 2015.

give a definitive answer while on her visit to West Virginia. When she returned to New York she sent a scathing letter to her daughter that broke the bounds of “tough love.” She opened the letter by informing Tamar that she drank tea as she wrote because they had run out of money for coffee at the house. She would not support Tamar and her family if they moved to Staten Island. Rent was too expensive, she wrote, and no one was hiring, especially a man with a family when there were so many young college-age men looking for work. Prices of clothes and food were high too - there was no way that Tamar could arrive with her family in Staten Island in hopes of a better life than the one she had. She insisted that life was more than tolerable for Tamar in West Virginia and wrote, “You have shelter, and your children are happy there, and you have enough to eat.” Day went on to compare Tamar’s situation to what she witnessed on a day-to-day basis in New York City - the misery, the breadlines, the unemployment. But this harsh comparison was not all. Day made personal attacks on her depressed daughter, “You are bitter and critical...No matter what one does for you, you are not really grateful...you have been helped ever since your marriage.” Day continued that Tamar and David had dragged each other down and that in cases like that she “blamed the woman more than the man.”⁷⁰ Day told her daughter not to expect any contact until Tamar changed her attitude. There is no doubt but that Tamar at twenty-three years old with several children and no education, reading these harsh words from her mother, had tears in her eyes.

When Day encountered thousands of individuals, specifically women who were in bad marriages with many children or families oppressed by economic conditions and unemployment she responded with sympathy and looked to their perseverance more than their failings. This was

⁷⁰ Dorothy Day to Tamar Hennessy in *All the Way to Heaven; A Collection of Letters by Dorothy Day*, Edited by Robert Ellsberg (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2011), 224-229.

not the case with Tamar. She received Day's harshest critique and most limited patience. Tamar followed everything that Day preached. She lived in poverty, raised a Catholic family, and sustained herself by living off the land. Seemingly, Day should have had more hope for Tamar at the outset of her marriage and more patience when her only child ran into difficulties

This inconsistency resulted from the heightened emotional response present in strong maternal love. But it can also reveal something about Day's nature. Day was an activist and that meant leading an active life as she had done in her twenties - facing danger and uncertainty, not running away from it. Ultimately, Tamar's passive approach to life, marrying the first man she met, letting children run wild in her home, and constantly relying on the good nature of others angered and perplexed Day. In a professional life, she rejected a passive approach to remedying social ills, like that of Peter Maurin. As Day began the *Catholic Worker* her activist journalism evolved and matured into organized action to aid the poor. During the early years of the newspaper, she held her ground on the right and the left. By establishing the *Catholic Worker*, she put herself in direct conflict with the leftist publication, the *Daily Worker*. The paper also came under threat from the Church when Day refused to align herself on key issues. Day was pragmatic and never divorced from her activist spirit.

Peter Maurin

Meeting French theologian Peter Maurin marked the official end to Day's fast-paced life. Neither the birth of her daughter nor her conversion to Catholicism caused Day to change the direction of her life as much as talking to and being under his influence.

In the winter of 1928, Day lived with her daughter in a boarding house on West 14th Street. Her most popular and reproduced piece of journalism "Having a Baby" written for the *New Masses* reinvigorated Day's notoriety in the writing world. She worked various writing jobs including one

for MGM as a synopsis writer. She attended church and went to confession daily. She maintained her connections in the theater world and wrote a play that made its way to some Hollywood office. The play was never purchased and not long after Day destroyed all copies of the work. But the endeavor was not useless. Pathe Film Company offered Day a three-month contract as a dialogue writer earning \$125 a week. This huge financial boon brought Day security for the first time. However After three months., Pathe did not renew the contract and Day was all too happy to leave the West Coast.⁷¹

The world fell apart at this time. Two months earlier the stock market crashed resulting in widespread business failure and unemployment.⁷² Day wrote that in the early days of The Great Depression, “More and more people were losing their jobs, more families were being evicted (and) the Unemployment Councils were being formed.”⁷³ Life changed rapidly and for the worse. So she was not eager to return to New York City.⁷⁴ Day went South, all the way to Mexico City where she lived with a mother and her adult daughter. The house had no plumbing and broken windows. But none of these less than idyllic conditions bothered Day and she believed that she would have likely stayed in Mexico if Tamar had not become sick. They returned to New York and Day took

⁷¹ Los Angeles did not invigorate Day in the same way New York did. The city was slower, and so were the people, who Day found to be exhaustingly self-absorbed. In a letter to Forster Batterham she wrote that “Life in this place broadens the fanny and narrows the mind.” Dorothy Day to Forster Batterham, April 1929.

⁷² Lizabeth Cohen, “Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1991-1939” (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 249.

⁷³ Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 158.

⁷⁴ There were reasons other than financial that prohibited Day from going back to New York. Old relationships and lovers weighed on her mind. She had converted to Catholicism but did not practice abstinence. She regretted it, even at the time, so she thought it was best for daughter and herself to be out of the city.

up a job writing for *Commonweal*, a liberal Catholic journal, and the oldest independent Catholic opinion journal in the United States. By the winter of 1930, she moved in with her brother John and his wife Tessa.

In December of 1932, she traveled to Washington D.C. to cover the National Hunger March organized by the Communist Party. The march traveled through Jersey City, Newark, Philadelphia, Wilmington, Baltimore, and eventually on to Washington D.C. When they arrived at the nation's capital they were prohibited from marching down Pennsylvania Avenue, even though they were unarmed. The press stirred up fear about violence as the men, most of whom were not Communists, made their way to Washington D.C. The group lived on the streets for two nights waiting for court permission to march. Day reported that part of the victory for the marchers was that they “had forced a stupid press to play into their hands and given them columns and pages of dramatic publicity.” Police officers in Washington D.C. taunted the men as if they wanted to start a violent conflict. But Day blamed the “yellow press” which “for a few ghastly headlines, a few gruesome pictures was ready to precipitate a useless massacre of a group of unemployed human beings.” As they marched the city was, according to Day, in “a state bordering on hysteria.”⁷⁵ There were riot drills and guards at the White House, the Capitol, and electric and gas companies. The police, the National Guard, and the American Legion were all armed with machine guns, tear gas, revolvers, and nightsticks. Tensions were high and violence seemed imminent but Day remained comfortable being at the heart of change even if that meant being close to danger. Her article was incisive, detailed, and emblematic of an emotional maturity that earlier pieces of her teenage years lacked.

⁷⁵ Day, “Hunger Marchers in Washington” *Commonweal*, (New York), December 24, 1932.

On her last day in Washington D.C., Day visited the Catholic University of America and considered what her role should be in this dynamic of hungry masses facing an armed state protecting the interest of the few. Writing, reading, traveling all over the country, and reporting on injustice no longer felt like the most she could do for the poor, unemployed, and hungry. She reflected in *The Long Loneliness*, “How little, how puny my work had been since becoming a Catholic, I thought. How self-centered, how ingrown, how lacking in sense of community...my self-absorption seemed sinful as I watched my brothers in this struggle, not for themselves but for others.”⁷⁶ She prayed at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception for guidance. She had gone to protests and strikes, she had been to jail, and she had embraced the Catholic faith. How could she harness her yearning for social justice and her faith to better the lives of others? The answer came a day later.

When she returned to New York after a long bus journey, Day looked forward to eating dinner and holding her daughter to sleep. But when she arrived home a “short, stocky man in his mid-fifties, as ragged and rugged as any of the marchers (she) had left” was waiting for her in the apartment. He had been sent by the editor of *Commonweal* magazine who believed that the two should work together. In *Loaves and Fishes* and *The Long Loneliness*, Day is upfront that a good bit of time passed before she fully understood all that Maurin had to say during their first meeting. There were three key points she did take away, however: founding a newspaper for clarification of thought, starting houses of hospitality, and organizing farming communes.”⁷⁷ He talked about the Church, the state of the world, and the salvation of souls. He could tell that Day lacked a knowledge of Church history that most Catholics had so he took it upon himself to be her tutor.

⁷⁶ Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 165.

⁷⁷ Dorothy Day, *Loaves and Fishes*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1963), 7.

She finally got him out of the house that night, but he came back again the next day. He spent the next day reciting from memory essays that he had written that would eventually turn into his published column “Easy Essays.” He taught Day about voluntary poverty, Catholic social theory, and philosophy. He taught her about distributionism - an ideology many Catholic leaders turned to during The Great Depression. Distributionists were equally wary of socialism and capitalism. They believed the means of production should be spread more widely among the population. Under distributionist policy, monopolies are outlawed, people work as part of guilds and factories are locally owned. Distributionists believed that an agrarian way of life brought wealth equality as well. Pride in work and property is important for Distributionists as the remedy to the notion of alienation as defined by Marx.⁷⁸

Historians of the *Catholic Worker* paint Maurin as Day’s instructor. While in many cases this was true, they frequently disagreed, and Day never changed her fundamental beliefs. Maurin’s lifestyle of voluntary poverty - owning very few clothes, sleeping in doorways, and living in constant food insecurity defined the kind of life that Day believed to be the noblest way to live. All of her scattered philosophy that she pieced together in her early years found a home in Maurin’s Catholicism. However, she did not adhere entirely to his prescriptions for societal problems. Maurin was the kind of thinker who believed that everyone should be reading all the time if they wanted to know anything, but Day was a single mother. She had responsibilities and a greater understanding of what it was like to be poor in New York City. Despite their differences, Day did not want to lose the opportunity to publish a newspaper.

Maurin’s faith drove him but Day had a different experience. A careful reading of her autobiography reveals that she attributes her relationship with the poor to her radical background.

⁷⁸ Mark and Louise Zwick, *The Catholic Worker Movement: Intellectual and Spiritual Origins*, Paulist Press (Mahwah, NJ), 2004, 156.

The Church was an intermediary - a vehicle by which she could connect deeper with the masses.

In *The Long Loneliness*, she wrote,

I had heard many say that they wanted to worship God in their own way and did not need a Church in which to praise Him, nor a body of people with whom to associate themselves. But I did not agree to this. 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. Without even looking into the claims of the Catholic Church, I was willing to admit that for me she was the one true Church. She had come down through the centuries since the time of Peter, (the Apostle) and far from being dead, she claimed and held the allegiance of the masses of people in all the cities where I had lived.⁷⁹

By her own admission, Day could not have been a Christian if she practiced alone. To live as an active member of society was vital to her experience as a Catholic. People, the impoverished masses throughout the United States were what made Christianity compelling to Day. She states that the teachings of the Church, the logic, and the philosophy on which Maurin placed so much emphasis were not very important to her at her initial conversion. Her history as a radical made it so that she must vigorously associate with the masses and if the masses were Catholic then Day must be a Catholic as well. This is a vitally important lens through which to look at Day's conversion and attitudes as a Catholic. It is a view that lacks reference to Christ and centers the masses.

This view contrasted heavily with Maurin's and the divergence in opinion often led to disagreement as the two ran the paper. Maurin took issue with some of Day's core beliefs on the role of the *Catholic Worker*. He struggled to accept her willingness to consistently cover strikes. Maurin believed that the solution to rampant unemployment and poverty was a mass shift towards an agrarian lifestyle.⁸⁰ Day thought in more immediate terms of strikes and unions. She wanted to run a paper that stoked interest in charity and voluntary poverty as well as support of union strikes

⁷⁹ Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 139.

⁸⁰ Peter Maurin, "Easy Essays," *Catholic Worker*, October 1938.

and boycotts. On two occasions Maurin's difference with Day and other editors almost resulted in a permanent break with the *Catholic Worker*. Younger editors strongly suggested that an influx of cash contributions be used to support printing, reporting, and honing propaganda rather than feeding the hungry who came to the doors of the *Catholic Worker*. During this discussion, Maurin stood up from the table and suggested that he and Day leave the paper and the house to these editors. Day had none of this. Though she too disagreed with the editors, she had a far more flexible mind. It was apparent to her that throwing the paper away entirely was no solution to a difference of opinion. A year later during WWII, Maurin was worried about the *Catholic Worker's* continued pacifist position. Silence, he thought, was better than upholding the stand of conscientious objectors. Maurin was a pacifist like Day but he worried that the paper's position would divide Catholics. Day never agreed with Maurin on this subject. In *The Long Loneliness* she reflected on this issue and wrote, "God gives us our temperaments, and in spite of my pacifism, it is natural for me to stand my ground, to continue in what actually amounts to a class war, using such weapons as the works of mercy for immediate means to show our love and to alleviate suffering." Day saw the world in terms of class conflict and the works of mercy she referred to meant journalism. She saw herself as wielding her weapon of activist journalism in that war. "Immediate means" to "alleviate suffering" was always at the front of Day's mind while she worked as editor-in-chief of the paper. Day wrote playfully about her disagreements with Maurin as representing the distinctly male and female approaches to the crisis. During times of conflict with her co-founder, she comforted herself by thinking, "Men are more singled-mined. They are the pure of heart."⁸¹ Maurin was a good man and he wanted the world to be a kinder and easier place in which to live. He only

⁸¹ Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 180

considered long-term programs based on intellectualism and thought in terms of sweeping and mostly implausible changes to society.

In addition to the private conflicts revealed in Day's autobiographies, their separate approaches and ideas about the *Catholic Worker* is apparent in what they contributed to the paper in those early issues. In Maurin's first "Easy Essays," a column on philosophy that was supposedly accessible to all, he pontificated on Jean Jacques Rousseau's philosophy, ethics, and economics.⁸² Day's first column was an entire page longer than Maurin's. She wrote on so much more, including teacher's strikes, a picket line in front of a popular New York restaurant, a thirty-hour work week bill in the Senate, and clothing sweatshops. The Women's Trade Union League began a campaign to label all clothing items produced in a sweatshop. Day implored her readers to look out for these labels and change their shopping habits accordingly.⁸³

Day and Maurin carefully considered how the paper ran. The most obvious and perhaps what made the paper most interesting to read was the intentional inclusion of personal stories of people facing poverty in New York City. These stories were written as stand-alone articles or put in juxtaposition to excessive spending by the city's elite.⁸⁴ Maurin encouraged reporters to both report on the news and to make the news themselves. In this same vein, the *Catholic Worker* set out to comment on the coverage of strikes, trials, and laws in other mainstream papers and to put that coverage into a scriptural context. The final two elements rested mostly on Day's shoulders because they were rooted in her personal philosophy. The paper was a means for a call to action. It advised readers on what strikes and boycotts to look out for and became a place frequently for

⁸² Peter Maurin, "Easy Essays," *Catholic Worker* (New York), May 1, 1933.

⁸³ Dorothy Day "The Listener," *Catholic Worker* (New York), May 1, 1933.

⁸⁴ Dorothy Day "The Listener," *Catholic Worker* (New York), June 1, 1933.

workers to meet and organize outside of the workplace. The *Catholic Worker's* relationship with money set it apart (and continues to set it apart) from other publications. For many years the staff was unpaid, they did not accept ads, only relying on street sales and subscriptions. The influx of cash the paper received from time to time was a direct result of Day's compelling writing on various issues that needed funding.

Dorothy Day was the powerful force that got the first issue of the paper published. Maurin believed that he could rely on priests to fund the publishing costs, but it was Day who put off her rent and other bills to raise \$57 to pay the Paulist Press.

Back in Union Square

The paper's first issue was published on May 1, 1933. Early that morning, Day and several men from the Catholic Worker Movement - sans Maurin - headed to Union Square to deliver the first copies of the *Catholic Worker*. The reception on that day was not simply positive or negative. The reaction was fervently emotional. Day's little paper did not cause the near-explosive climate at Union Square in 1933 - poverty, unemployment, hunger, an appreciation of communist ideology, and racial abuse had done that. Day recalled the sun and the warmth of early spring. At thirty-six years old she, as editor-in-chief of a paper entered the square which "was packed with demonstrators and parades, listening to speeches, carrying on disputes among themselves, or glancing through the great masses of literature...which so soon were litter on the ground"⁸⁵ The first issue of the paper covers a range of topics including the passage of child labor laws, racial exploitation with a heavy focus on the Scottsboro case and an interview with Roy Wilkins of the NAACP, and the situation of female workers in the textile factories. From this collection of articles, the *Catholic Worker* was not in support of the establishment. But Day's words written in

⁸⁵ Day, *Loaves and Fishes*, 17.

bold, “Do something! Join the Catholic League for Social Justice!” made young Communists uneasy. They believed that religion had no place in Union Square and people who were writing on behalf of the powerful Church were not to be trusted. The paper, Day, and her companions received criticism from virtually every angle that day. An Irish Catholic read “a penny a copy” on the masthead and believed it to be a sign of English allegiance. Day changed the line to “a cent a copy” the next month.⁸⁶ A black man also took issue with the masthead - but for a different reason. It featured two bare-chested white men, one with a hammer and the other with a pick. He wondered why, with all the attention given to the abuse of black Americans in the paper, one of these figures was not black. By the December issue, the masthead depicted a black man on the left.⁸⁷

The *Catholic Worker* did not sell many copies that day. There was more conversation and argument on the streets about the paper than people sitting down and reading the content. The *Catholic Worker* mailed copies to editors of diocesan papers and other influential people in the Catholic world. Before long the movement was receiving letters praising the effort. Much of the mail contained donations and Day was “light-headed with success.”⁸⁸ Letters came from Nova Scotia, Nebraska, and California. Recipients of the first issue were so compelled by the new paper that they sent them to connections across the country. Before long the *Catholic Worker* expanded operations from a small second-floor apartment to an entire building.

Early Conflict

From the title alone, the *Catholic Worker* was an obvious challenge to the *Daily Worker*. Maurin suggested titles like the *Catholic Radical* or even better the *Christian Radical*. Day got her

⁸⁶ Masthead, *Catholic Worker* (New York), June 1, 1933.

⁸⁷ Masthead, *Catholic Worker* (New York), December 1, 1933.

⁸⁸ Day, *Loaves and Fishes*, 19.

way and the name signals her attitude toward journalist activism as well as her thirst for a challenge. Day positioned her paper in opposition to the Communist paper for three reasons: its atheism, its belief in violent revolution rather than acts of mercy, and its denial of the natural right to own private property. In the very first issue published in May of 1933, the editors wrote, “The fundamental aim of most radical sheets is the conversion of its readers to Radicalism and Atheism. Is it not possible to be radical and not atheist?” In a letter to Father Cook, the editor-in-chief of the *Corpus Christi Reporter* she expressed her thrill that his parishioners read the paper, “which was started a year ago in opposition to the *Daily Worker*, the communist sheet.”⁸⁹ In a letter to Catherine De Hueck, a Russian Soviet who fled the USSR to New York where she became associated with the Catholic Worker Movement, Day dismissed Catherine’s request for Day to send a copy of the *Daily Worker* to her in Canada writing, “what do you want that for?”⁹⁰

Day’s private criticism was matched by the public rift that developed between the two publications. Her part in this rivalry was not entirely by choice. By becoming a Catholic and a Catholic advocate she made herself a stated enemy of the Communist Party. In a 1926 pamphlet published by Max Bedacht the animosity the Party had for the Church was clear.⁹¹ He wrote, “The Catholic Church is and has been one of the strongest and most consistent counter-revolutionary forces in society. In (our) struggles we find this organization a formidable opponent.” In an issue published on August 18, 1934, the *Daily Worker* ran a four-column spread criticizing the *Catholic Worker*. Author Oakley Johnson began by examining the publication’s name and its masthead, claiming that the *Catholic Worker* was trying to stealthily take ownership of the *Daily Worker*’s

⁸⁹ Dorothy Day to Father Cook in *All The Way to Heaven*, 74.

⁹⁰ Dorothy Day to Catherine De Hueck in *All the Way to Heaven*, 81.

⁹¹ Sheila Webb, “Dorothy Day and the Early Years of the ‘Catholic Worker’: Social Action through the Pages of the Press.” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 21, no. 3 (2003): 80.

readership. Johnson was ruthless in his lambasting of the *Catholic Worker*. He took issue with the Movement's attempts to help the unemployed only through charity alone and claimed they aided landlords by moving evicted renters' furniture out of their apartments instead of helping them maintain their homes. He rebuked a claim by the *Catholic Worker* that Catholics should no longer give to legal aid funds for the Scottsboro case because Communists had turned the case into propaganda "leaving the boys in jail forgotten" He wrote that the denial of a Red Revolution and a supreme trust in the clergy was backward. Attacking Maurin on this point he wrote, "You want a society even older than the one we have." The *Catholic Worker* espoused a policy of distribution that appalled Johnson who believed it to be reminiscent of the early stages of capitalism that grew out of dying feudalism. Distribution was akin to the fascism "of Dollfuss and Mussolini, a Catholic, fascism which opposed the Protestant fascism of Hitler: or, more exactly, just fascism run by one gang of capitalists instead of some other."⁹² The *Catholic Worker* published in their February 1935 issue a feature titled, "Specimens of Communist Propaganda," in which the editors stated that "there is hardly a copy of a Communist magazine which does not have its far from subtle digs against the Catholic Church."⁹³ The extensive article published by the *Daily Worker* did not threaten readership. It shows, however, the anger and fear a Communist publication felt at the emergence of the *Catholic Worker*, and the kind of adversity Day faced from the left.

The Catholic Church had an interest in how issues were presented in the *Catholic Worker*. Though the paper was not affiliated with the Church, they were going after a Catholic readership, so what was being presented as fact or fiction was very important to New York priests. In 1934,

⁹² *Daily Worker*, August 18, 1934.

⁹³ "Specimens of Communist Propaganda," *Catholic Worker* (New York), February 1, 1934.

as a gesture of both kindness and surveillance, the Church appointed Day a spiritual advisor. Day accepted but made clear that she would take advice on matters of doctrine and not on the economics of sociology.

Day faced complaints from the Church in those early years. Most were about anti-capitalist rhetoric in the paper that angered upper-class Catholics with sway in the parish. One, interestingly, was about a priest who preached too vigorously at one of the *Catholic Worker* farms. But Day, ever prudent, kept a very positive relationship with the Church, censoring some anti-Church writings by younger editors. During the Spanish Civil War, however, the *Catholic Worker* dissented from the Church's position and opposed Francisco Franco.⁹⁴ Catholics all around the world were put under duress during the Spanish Civil War. Supporters of the government, known as Republicans, murdered priests and nuns, desecrated cemeteries, and made alliances with violent Stalinists. The nationalists under Franco executed, tortured, and raped Republicans, killing the laborers and intellectuals alike. The Church and much of the international community backed Franco because of his opposition to Communism and his supposed support of Catholicism. Day saw "a false Catholic and an anti-semite, only another version of his appalling allies, Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini."⁹⁵ Taking this position hurt the paper. Catholic schools canceled their subscriptions, as did Catholic colleges and seminaries. The *Catholic Worker* came under attack from Father Charles Coughlin, the so-called 'radio priest.' They received horrible mail accusing Day specifically. One letter accused her of being "a wolf in sheep's clothing, serving (her) Red

⁹⁴ Dorothy Day, "The Mystical Body in Spain," *Catholic Worker* (New York), May 1936.

⁹⁵ Loughery and Randolph, *Dorothy Day*, 186.

master Joseph Stalin.” Soon almost all churches in New York City removed the paper. Circulation dropped from 150,000 to 30,000 during this time.⁹⁶

From 1926 to the mid-1930s Day developed her Catholic faith and understanding of Catholic philosophy. She established herself as a writer nationwide and then as the editor-in-chief of a new publication that caught the attention of as many supporters as detractors. She distributed her paper in Union Square without Maurin and handled all the criticism and demands that entailed. She published an excellent paper. That is evident by its positive reception from close readers. She faced head-on conflict with the *Daily Worker* and the Church establishment. The *Catholic Worker's* ability to anger both the right and the left was no accident. Day did not write to placate any faction. Day found it difficult to publish the paper. But her success would not have been possible if she had not held fast to her tenacious spirit of activism. Her Catholic faith compelled her to seek justice in certain ways like prayer and voluntary poverty, but her active spirit sought to bring immediate change to alleviate suffering. Her industrious nature fueled the *Catholic Worker* through the hardships of early publication.

⁹⁶ Webb, “Dorothy Day and the Early Years of the ‘Catholic Worker’: Social Action through the Pages of the Press” 84.

CHAPTER THREE

ANARCHY AND PEACE

On a drizzly day in the fall of 1953, Max Bodenheim came to the *Catholic Worker's* prayer room and library on Chrystie Street in New York City. He was with his wife, Ruth, a strikingly beautiful Jewish woman in her mid-thirties. Ruth was Max's third wife. During the 1920s and 30s, he published ten books of poetry and thirteen novels, making a name for himself in the American literary scene. He met Dorothy Day for the first time at the Golden Swan back when she boozed with playwright Eugene O'Neil. Max's haughty temper and disregard for social norms meant he struggled to maintain normalcy after early career success. Eventually, he was homeless by choice, and after the death of his second wife, social services placed him in a mental hospital.

In 1952, he married his third wife, Ruth Fagin. Max's lifestyle charmed Ruth, and the two panhandled, living on the streets. Ruth engaged in prostitution, seemingly at Max's prompting. When the couple arrived at Day's doorstep, Max's leg was in a cast. The couple had been evicted and Ruth asked if they could live at one of the *Catholic Worker* farms for some time. Of course, they could. When Ruth left to collect the rest of their belongings, Max made himself at home in the library near a statue of the Virgin Mary. Before long, people staggered in to pray, Day among them. She watched Max and felt bad for him. Here was a man she previously knew at the prime of his life and yet now visibly trapped; a career in ruins, poor, unable to walk, prideful, and now surrounded by "dozens of other ragged, down-and-out people." Day worried that the couple might feel uncomfortable so when Ruth returned, she made it clear that the role of the *Catholic Worker* did not push religious obligation. Ruth confirmed for Day that both she and Max were baptized and raised Catholic, but they believed in love, not God. The couple made their way out to Newburg,

New York where they stayed at Maryfarm. They stayed there for six weeks or so. Ruth constantly flirted with other men which greatly angered Max who took to threatening people with his cane.

By the spring, Max's leg had healed and suddenly without notice, the couple left. A week later, Ruth returned with a young man to retrieve some of their belongings.⁹⁷ A little less than a year later, Day read in the paper that Charlie Weinberg, a friend with whom they were living murdered the couple.⁹⁸ The deranged Weinberg gave conflicting confessions and appeared delighted at his arrest. Ultimately, he claimed that he and Ruth began to have sex when they believed Max had fallen asleep, when Max noticed what they were doing in the room, he challenged Weinberg to fight. He shot Max twice in the chest, beat Ruth, and stabbed her to death. The papers described the couple as drunken bohemians, Max as a clown and pathetic writer, and Ruth as a sexually depraved woman. The papers printed photos depicting the awful condition of the room on Third Avenue where the bodies were found - dirty socks and rags, cigarette bums, old food, and coffee.⁹⁹ The Bodenheims were creatures of the material world, seeking pleasure in the physical but were completely unsatisfied.

The Bodenheims were not the only victims, as Weinberg, himself orphaned and placed in a mental hospital at ten years old. At seventeen, he joined the army and was soon discharged because he was unfit for service. He worked as a dishwasher.¹⁰⁰ He had no community, no family, no faith, no love, and was in desperate need of treatment. He sought pleasure and comfort in the

⁹⁷ Day, *Loaves and Fishes*, 161.

⁹⁸ Kermit Jaediker, "The Last Bohemian," *New York Daily News* (New York), February 28, 1954.

⁹⁹ "Officials Withhold Suspect's Story in Bodenhhim Murder" *Evening Star* (Washington), February 12, 1954.

¹⁰⁰ Day, *Loaves and Fishes*, 161.

only place that he could, sexually. When faced with the consequences of his risqué behavior, violence and murder were his way of regaining control.

Though deeply disturbed, his story tells a complex truth about post-war America. When arrested for the murders, he called out, “I have killed two Communists. I should get a medal!”¹⁰¹ Weinberg craved to be accepted and ultimately loved. In the mid-1950s Communists were despised and hunted and for critics, the Bodenheim's loose lifestyle proved the threat Communism posed to the American way of life. But Weinberg, a man dealt a bad hand as a child and went on to serve his country remained at the bottom of society.

The story of these people only tangentially touched Day's life; she saw hundreds of people who were poor, hungry, and without love or direction. But their stories are symbolic of the conditions of many Americans after the war, ignored by the elite, and left behind by a rapidly expanding government that claimed to take care of all.

Day's work was not done as America moved into the second half of the 20th century. Turmoil still riddled the country. There was still anarchy and chaos. But maybe there could be peace, too. After the Second World War, Day's anarchist tendencies seem to return. The Cold War, the Atomic Age, and particularly McCarthyism stirred her ire and distrust of the government. Excessive consumerism, militarism, individual debt, and a powerful state are the themes from the 1950s to the 1970s that backdrop this time in Day's life.

Materialism and Debt

Day understood consumerism to be a pervasive threat to the poor. The pain of the depression increasingly in the rear-view mirror for many Americans and post-war prosperity in the United States meant a cultural shift in attitudes towards wealth. After the war, Americans wished

¹⁰¹ Day, *Loaves and Fishes*, 160.

to escape the emotional and financial pain of the first part of the 20th century, in an article entitled “Toward a Throw-Away Culture. Consumerism, 'Style Obsolescence' and Cultural Theory in the 1950s and 1960s” Cultural historian Nigel Whiteley explored the rapid shift in the economy and purchasing habits of Americans in the decade after the war. He writes that economic historians agree that “about half the population - not the poorest and not the wealthiest - enjoyed a substantial rise in their share of real income during and shortly after the Second World War, and that their share remained generally stable from then on.” The emergence of a new middle class, he wrote, meant, “an expanded market for homes, cars, appliances, and services.” The production of passenger cars for example rose from two million in 1946 to eight million in 1955. Televisions, refrigerators, and perhaps most consequently short-term consumer credit increased as well from \$8.4 billion to \$45 billion over a twelve-year period from 1946 to 1958.¹⁰² In 1958 Bank of America introduced the first revolving credit system.¹⁰³ These kinds of changes rocked the economy and drastically changed the American lifestyle. As the middle class emerged, so did the suburbs. Life was more comfortable, people gained satisfaction from the newness of what they bought in this new consumptive culture. Appliances, for example, were no longer used until they could be used no more, instead, they were traded every few years for a more aesthetically appealing model. While families furnished their homes with the newest goods those at the top made tremendous amounts of money.

¹⁰² Nigel Whiteley, “Toward a Throw-Away Culture. Consumerism, ‘Style Obsolescence’ and Cultural Theory in the 1950s and 1960s.” *Oxford Art Journal* 10, no. 2 (1987): 3.

¹⁰³ Revolving credit is a credit line that remains available, up to a limit, as the balance is being paid. The Diner’s Club credit card came about in the early 1950s. The difference with revolving credit is that the card could be accepted by any merchant with a credit card reader.

Americans wanted to think of themselves as past poverty. But Day understood that people can be poor in more ways than one. Her constant contact with the poor and refusal to deny their circumstances made her understand that the whole system that supposedly freed Americans from poverty was built on a weak foundation. Poverty could manifest itself in a variety of ways. People could be poor in space alone, for example. A man could have a regular job and feed his family but only live in a four room apartment with his wife, four children, and several members of his extended family. A man like this, Day wrote, “is poor in air and space.” People could live in seemingly positive economic prosperity and be on “the fearful brink of financial disaster.” Day traveled to Georgia and then to South Carolina in 1957 to visit an agricultural community - a commune where white and black Americans were welcome to live and work together. During her time in the South, she also visited construction workers who lived in trailers near a hydrogen bomb plant.¹⁰⁴ While they lived on comfortable wages and in new trailers, they were subject to a sudden illness. When a construction worker injured his body or fell victim to a reaction to a certain chemical, an entire family could be plunged into financial ruin. This fear and uncertainty plagued a community. Despite this shared fear, families were more atomized than families thirty years ago living in factory housing.

Day knew while the wealth of the nation grew, many were still poor, particularly in the city. By the mid-1950s there came an influx of Puerto Rican immigrants into New York City. Because they came in such large numbers, they had the lowest wages in the city and were left with the most undesirable jobs. Day notes that at the *Catholic Worker*, they typically had a hard time giving away all the small clothes that came in as donations, but countless poor Puerto Ricans began to take all of the smaller-sized clothes. She writes, “They have been undernourished through

¹⁰⁴ Dorothy Day, “On Pilgrimage,” *Catholic Worker* (New York), May 1, 1957.

generations of exploitation and privation.” As well as being underpaid, and undernourished, they were under-housed as well. Families, “double up in vermin-ridden, dark, crowded tenements.”¹⁰⁵ A rapid surge in migration into a particular area will always stress infrastructure. However, Day identified that government action years earlier exacerbated the problem. The Housing Act of 1949 reformed housing intending to raise living standards, but the Act ended up drastically raising costs for city residents. The federal government wanted to aid cities like New York in clearing out their slums.¹⁰⁶ But poor people still needed a place to live, and making the slums exorbitant in cost would not reduce the number of poor. Day contrasted the situation of Puerto Ricans to that of New Yorkers just two decades prior when a family of seven had no issue renting an apartment. But government standards had changed and forced families to get by with bank loans, from the G.I. Bill, from friends, or even from cutting all spending - even for clothes and food until the money could be saved. In *Loaves and Fishes*, she writes, “The fact is we are no longer a nation of homeowners and apartment renters. We are a nation of people owing debts and mortgages, and so enslaved by their installment buying that families do indeed live in poverty, only poverty with a new face.”¹⁰⁷

Day and the *Catholic Worker* were not prepared to accept this new American order. In an article for *Integrity Magazine* Day said, “We hope that those who come to us, as well as those who read the paper, will be led to examine their consciences on their work - whether or not it contributes to the evil of the world, to wars - and then to have the courage and resolution to embrace voluntary

¹⁰⁵ Day, *Loaves and Fishes*, 72.

¹⁰⁶ “Provisions of the Housing Act of 1949,” *Monthly Labor Review* 69, no. 2 (1949): 155.

¹⁰⁷ Day, *Loaves and Fishes*, 73.

poverty and give up their jobs, lower their standard of living, and raise their standard of thinking and loving.”¹⁰⁸

Frustration with the Catholic Church

Church hierarchy was equally wrapped up in the search for material gratification. Reflecting in her final autobiography, *The Long Loneliness*, she wrote, “The scandal of businesslike priests, of collective wealth, the lack of sense of responsibility for the poor, the worker...and even oppression of these, and the consenting to the oppression of them by our industrial-capitalist order... this made me feel often that priests were more like Cain than Able.”¹⁰⁹ The Catholic Church stayed complacent in the face of an ill society; they also supported the structures that kept the working class in poverty. Day remained incredibly frustrated with the Church’s lack of activism on behalf of peace and the poor while they shunned and demonized Communism. In 1949 Pope Pius XII decreed any Catholic who professed communist doctrine to be excommunicated from the Church. In a very serious sense, her membership with the Catholic Church was tentative due to her allegiance with and sympathies for Communists and their ideology. Yet Day unapologetically expressed her allegiance to those who were oppressed.

While she did not publicly butt heads with Pope Pius XII (it was virtually unheard of for a lay Catholic to publicly admonish the Vicar of Christ however much she believed he was in the wrong), she did partake in a protracted standoff with Cardinal Francis Spellman, the Archbishop of New York during a grave digger’s strike in 1949. In January of that year, several unions that represented the gravediggers and groundskeepers at the cemeteries employed by the Archdiocese of New York’s cemeteries went on strike. After their contract had expired, two-hundred fifty

¹⁰⁸ Dorothy Day, “The Catholic Worker,” *Integrity Magazine* (New York), June 1946.

¹⁰⁹ Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 150.

members of the United Cemetery Workers Union demanded a reduction in hours from forty-eight to forty hours a week, an increase in pay, and overtime pay for work done on Saturdays.¹¹⁰ When management negotiators rejected the terms of the proposed contract, the strike commenced. It appalled Cardinal Spellman to see Catholics striking in such a way, believing it to be “Communist-inspired” activity, and said that he “was happy to be a strikebreaker.”¹¹¹ A strikebreaker he was. After months of refusing to negotiate with the union, on March third he brought in lay brothers from the local seminary and later the diocesan seminarians who were directly under his supervision to dig the graves. Cardinal Spellman was adamant and said “resistance to the strike was the most important thing I have done in my ten years in New York.”¹¹² On March fourth, Day wrote a letter to the Cardinal asking him to reconsider the demands of the union. The letter praised Spellman’s virtue, his devotion to the Catholic faith, and his talent as a peacemaker.¹¹³ The strike broke seven days later March 11, no thanks to Day’s letter. The strikers accepted an eight percent wage increase and continued to work forty-eight hours a week. These terms were an improvement but much less than what the workers initially demanded when the strike began in January.¹¹⁴

In April of 1949, Day wrote an extensive and scathing article on the strike. It contained none of the conciliatory attitude of her earlier letter to Cardinal Spellman. The article outlined the conditions of the strikers, and the reasonableness of their demands, and most inflammatory, the

¹¹⁰ David L. Gregory “Dorothy Day, Workers’ Rights and Catholic Authenticity,” *Fordham Urban Law Journal*, 1374.

¹¹¹ Miller, *Dorothy Day: A Biography*, 404.

¹¹² “Cardinal to Help Bury Dead Today and Seminarians Replace Strikers,” *New York Times*, March 3, 1949.

¹¹³ Dorothy Day To Cardinal Spellman on March 4, 1949, *All the Way to Heaven*.

¹¹⁴ John Cort, “The Cemetery Strike II, *Commonweal* (New York), March 18, 1949.

greed of the men in charge – both the lay and clergy. The piece closed with a sharp attack on the management negotiators who worked for Cardinal Spellman:

It's old stuff now, except for those of us who went through it. And it will be a long time before we lose that nagging sense of shame and bewilderment that filled us when we first realized that there were eminent Catholic laymen surrounding Cardinal Spellman, advising him out of their own weakness, greed and lack of diplomatic ability to follow a course that must inevitably lead him to a loss of dignity and humiliation. And all because they, the lay trustees of St. Patrick's Cathedral, could not treat Catholic working men as human beings and brothers.

The “Catholic laymen surrounding Cardinal Spellman” were the managers who had failed to deal with the contract negotiation themselves. When the gravediggers threatened to strike initially, the managers wrote threatening letters to each of the families. The letters went unanswered. Eventually, when the employers, in a major panic, took the issue to the Cardinal they mischaracterized the demands of the strikers, falsely leading the Cardinal to believe that they wanted a thirty percent increase in wages instead of the nineteen percent they demanded.¹¹⁵ Day, of course, as an investigative reporter and in communication with the strikers had all this information. Nevertheless, Day’s article outraged Spellman. He said that he would never forgive the Catholic press, “in this world or the next” for their behavior during the strike. But the story was not over for Day. Three years later in 1951 Monsignor Edward Gaffney called Day for a meeting and informed her that the “*Catholic Worker* would have to cease publication or change the name of the newspaper by deleting the word “Catholic” from the title.”¹¹⁶ Day had to turn on the charm once more and after some convincing, the Monsignor backed off. Simply standing up for the gravediggers who were inarguably overworked, underpaid, and subject to threats put Day

¹¹⁵ Dorothy Day “Cardinal Brings to End New York Strike,” *Catholic Worker* (New York), April 1, 1949.

¹¹⁶ David L. Gregory “Dorothy Day, Workers’ Rights and Catholic Authenticity,” *Fordam Law Journal*, no. 5, 1999, 1375.

herself in the line of fire. Cardinal Spellman and Monsignor Gaffney did not scare her and their power in the Church and the New York community did not deter her from revealing the truth of the matter. In an article titled “On Poverty” she wrote:

“One of the terrible indictments against Christianity, as we are failing to live it, is that everywhere and always it seems today that Christianity is called out to defend the status quo, to millionaires and billionaires holding in ‘private property,’ the necessity for the peace between classes, and the wrongness of violence between classes, whereas in the other hand, it is called on to defend the necessity for war between nations, and the rightness of violence between nations.”¹¹⁷

During the McCarthy Era, when fear of Communist and Soviet infiltration of the federal government took hold, Day’s sympathies to Communism made a return in her writing. She did not just write about the positive influence Communists had on her life, but she put that in contrast to the Catholic Church. In an essay titled, “Beyond Politics” she wrote, “I can say with warmth that I loved the Communist people I worked with and learned much from them. They helped me to find God in His poor, His abandoned ones, as I had not found Him in Christian churches.”¹¹⁸ Day here is not only humanizing a group demonized in the nation but throwing the Catholic church under the bus as she is doing it. At the beginning of Day’s conversion to Catholicism, she worried about how a Communist Revolution would bring a strong Atheist ethos over societies and workers, depriving them of a faith in God she believed to be so essential to their happiness and salvation. But always taking up the mantle of those who were oppressed by the powerful, Day voiced her concerns about the persecution of Communists in her writings. Critics often accused her of being a Communist because of the company she kept in the past and her lifelong friendships with

¹¹⁷ Day, “Thoughts on Property” *Catholic Worker* (New York), December 1, 1948.

¹¹⁸ Day, “Beyond Politics” *Catholic Worker* (New York), 1949.

communists like Mike Gold and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn.¹¹⁹ Day stood up and spoke out for those Communists who were denied bail during the Smith Act Trials.¹²⁰ In 1953 when Ethel and Julius Rosenberg became the first American citizens to be executed during peacetime, Day voiced her deep sympathies for the Communist couple in the *Catholic Worker*. In an article, she described how as she bathed her granddaughter, she thought about the Rosenbergs in the electric chair. As she washed the baby's legs, she thought of how Ethel Rosenberg must have been thinking of her own children who were soon to be orphaned. She thought, "O God, let them be strong, take away all fear from them, let them be spared this suffering, at least this suffering of fear and trembling." *The New York Times* gave a detailed report on the couple's last moments.¹²¹ Ethel had turned to one of the police matrons who accompanied them and, clasping her by the hand, pulled her toward her and kissed her warmly. Her last gesture was a gesture of love." Day described them as the "children of that race to which Mary and Jesus and Joseph, the Holy Family, belonged...May their souls, as well as the souls of the faithful departed, rest in peace."

Dorothy Day maintained her connection to the Communist Party. When they held a convention just down the street from the *Catholic Worker* headquarters, event organizers invited Day to attend as a spectator. Going in this capacity, Day remained protected from affiliation with

¹¹⁹ Loughery and Randolph, *Dorothy Day*, 212. Elizabeth Gurly Flynn was a labor leader and activist and a prominent figure in the IWW. She founded the American Civil Liberties Union. She was a member of the Communist Party of the USA and at 71 become its chairwoman. An incredibly inspiring figure in the labor movement, she was a hero for women like Day. Flynn left her small estate of books, clothing, and furniture to the *Catholic Worker* Movement. She was a regular donor to the houses of hospitality, although she and Day were not in regular correspondence.

¹²⁰ Loughery and Randolph, *Dorothy Day*, 252.

¹²¹ Luther Huston, "Rosenbergs Executed After Supreme Court Vacates Stay; Last Minute Plea to President Fails," *New York Times*, June 20, 1953.

the Party and the convention would not have to answer to any who took objection to religious appeasement. When Elizabeth Gurley Flynn died in 1964, her family invited Day to speak at the memorial service held in her honor. In a letter, Day wrote of Gurley Flynn,

Her aim was to bring about the kind of society where each would work according to his ability and receive according to his needs, truly one of the noblest possible aims in life She has long been in my prayers and I really believe that one's prayer is always answered There is no time with God All the prayers that I have said, and will say in the future have meant that Gurley Flynn held out her arms to God, and the word God means good, truth, love, all that is most beautiful at the moment of her death and that she was received by Him and that she will be judged by the love that is in her heart.¹²²

Three years later Mike Gold died, and again, Party members wanted Day to speak at a similar memorial service. Though the organizers of the event suggested only seven minutes per speaker, according to Tom Carrol of the *Catholic Worker*, Day spoke for over twenty minutes. She enraptured her audience and as Carrol described, “Nobody dared to stop her. And she was the only one who spoke of a real live person, a man of flesh and blood and soul.”¹²³

Day’s interest in peace and sympathies with Communist ideology were early signs of a shift, a change in the heart of many American Catholics at the time if they did not tolerate Communists but they held some Marxist ideology themselves. Richard Gid Powers writes in an article for the *US Catholic Historian* about the rise and fall of Catholic anti-Communism in the United States. He argues that since Catholics arrived in the United States, to remedy their political and cultural isolation in a predominantly Protestant nation they strongly espoused anger and hatred towards Communism. From the 1890s to the mid-20th century, anti-Communism prevailed as the

¹²² Dorothy Day, “Red Roses for her (In Memoriam: Elizabeth Gurley Flynn),” *Catholic Worker* (New York), November 1, 1964.

¹²³ Tom Cornell, “[About the Cover]: The *Catholic Worker*, Communism and the Communist Party.” *American Catholic Studies* 125, no. 1 (2014): 98.

way for Catholics to prove their patriotism, accusing and to accuse their WASP and Jewish adversaries of being un-American. In addition, tensions rose in the 1930s when the Church felt as if it had to vie with communist ideology for the attention of its congregations. There were, of course, religious reasons, too that Catholics were fearful of Communism. After WWII the loss of Catholic countries like Lithuania and Poland to Stalin and what they saw as his Atheist empire of the Soviet Union, Catholics worried that a new Communist world order put the Church's global influence under threat. Catholics were deeply concerned about the persecution of Catholics in Eastern Europe. In fact, Cardinal Spellman emerged as the face of a large group of American Catholics opposed to the persecution of the Catholics in the Soviet Union. The trial and exile of Hungarian Cardinal Joseph Mindszenty particularly distressed Catholics. However, the plight of Catholics in the Soviet Union did not capture the attention of the rest of the country and led many Catholics, particularly uneducated Irish Catholics in Boston, to believe in conspiracies like a Roosevelt-Stalin anti-Catholic alliance or some sort of Jewish-backed plot to see the Church weakened. Liberal elites were bent on destroying that institution for their own personal gain. When Joseph McCarthy arrived in Washington D.C. following his election in 1946, he connected with other Catholics like Joseph Kennedy, William F. Buckley, and John Flynn. His "rampage through American politics" targeted the elite, just the kind of elite that Irish Catholics in Boston, and McCarthy's home state of Wisconsin found so egregious. But like most radical conspiracy theorists, McCarthy went too far, even for the Catholics who adored him. His attacks on the Army likely made him seem more power-hungry rather than patriotic. Disgraced on national television and later censured, Catholics quickly abandoned the McCarthy train in the late 1950s.

They were not disillusioned for long, however. John F. Kennedy ran a campaign that aroused ethnic pride in American Catholics and his election made them feel that they were no

longer outsiders in America, but that their values and their patriotism were important and recognized. Catholics wanted to be respected in the body politic. With the election of the young, suave, Catholic Kennedy they, “began to cast off the attributes of their ghetto mentality, and it turned out that their anti-Communism was one of the ghetto rags.” The 1960s saw a shift in Rome as well that softened American Catholic views on Communism. The election of Pope John XIII after the conservative Pope Pius XII meant a new and more modern spirit of Catholicism. In 1965 Vatican II renounced reflexive anti-communism and called nuclear war “a crime against God and man.” In 1971 Bishops in America came out against the involvement of the war in Vietnam, but bishops were likely followed the attitudes of their congregations. According to Powers, “In 1969 the majority of American Catholics supported Nixon's policy of de-Americanizing the war. In 1970 a clear majority opposed the Cambodian invasion. In January 1971, 80 percent were for withdrawal from Vietnam.”¹²⁴ Once the most militant faction for the cause of anti-Communism in the United States became by the 1970s and certainly the election of Reagan totally unreliable in that regard. They were anti-war, anti-nuclear, and pro-peace with that previous mortal enemy in the Soviet Union. Important and powerful men like McCarthy, Kennedy, and Pope John made this change happen. But Day did not need popular opinion or powerful men on her side to do the world and write the words she believed to be true.

The Atomic Age

The use of the nuclear bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki proved to Day of the notion that war begets war. The United States had ended a war against the Nazi Regime and the Imperial Japanese Military - two despotic powers with a force so strong and vengeful that it risked tearing humans away from God. The use of napalm and cluster bombing in Tokyo and Dresden, however

¹²⁴ Richard Gid Powers, “American Catholics and Catholic Americans: The Rise and Fall of Catholic Anticommunism” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 22, no. 4 (2004): 17–35.

awful, could not compare to the force of a singular bomb that had the power to level a city and incinerate its population in an instant meant a new world. Man now had in his hand a God-like power to destroy the planet. The use and aftermath of the atomic bomb deeply affected Day and she sought to constantly remind people of its reality.

In the September issue of the *Catholic Worker* in 1945 Day wrote the cover piece entitled “We Go on Record.” The article sharply condemned President Truman and acknowledged the new precedent that the use of the atomic bomb had set. She wrote, “Today’s paper with its columns of description of the new era, the atomic era, which this colossal slaughter of the innocents has ushered in is filled with stories conveying every conceivable phase of the new discovery.” In that same article, she directed much of her anger at Harry Truman. She wrote, “President Truman. True man; was a strange name, come to think of it. We refer to Jesus Christ as the true God and true man. Truman is a true man of his time in that he was jubilant. He was not a song of God, a brother of Christ brother of the Japanese, jubilating as he did.”¹²⁵

On August sixth of 1976, Day spoke at the International Eucharistic Congress in Philadelphia. It was her final public appearance only four years before her death. In her speech she addressed, as she had done in earlier *Catholic Worker* articles, how quickly Americans had forgotten about the evil the American Government had inflicted on the Japanese people. In that same speech, she issued a condemnation of a Mass held across town in honor of the armed forces. In her speech, which she had uncharacteristically written out beforehand, likely because of her frailty she said, “And here we are on August 6th, the day the first atomic bomb was dropped...we are celebrating — how strange to use such a word — a Mass for the military, the “armed forces.” No one in charge of the Eucharistic Congress had remembered what August 6th means in the minds

¹²⁵ Dorothy Day, “We go on Record” *Catholic Worker*, (New York) September 1, 1945.

of all who are dedicated to the work of peace.”¹²⁶ Day believed that August sixth should be a day of penance for all Americans.

The threat of Big Government

Day’s commitment to pacifism extended long after WWII and a principled stand against forced involvement in the Cold War put her in opposition with the New York City government. In the early 1950s the city had mandated through the New York State Defense Emergency Act that all people were required to seek shelter when an alarm siren sounded. At the time, it was just a precaution, but only four years later, that civil duty became a requirement. On June 15th, 1955, New York City scheduled statewide civil defense drills to prepare the citizenry for possible enemy attacks. When the alarm sounded, all New Yorkers had to either get off their bus or leave the street and head underground. Those who did not heed the government’s instructions would receive a \$500 fine or up to one year in jail.¹²⁷ While the drills were in some part to soothe the fears of Americans during the escalating Cold War, the drills were effectively involving innocent citizens in a nuclear conflict. As a pacifist, Day and her followers refused to follow government instructions and take part in the drills. On the first day of the drills, Day and a small group of her followers met at a park and sat on a bench. When the sirens sounded, people poured out of cars and busses and headed inside. Other pacifists from the War Resisters League and the Fellowship of Reconciliation joined the Catholic Workers. Television cameras and reporters descended upon them.¹²⁸ People who interestingly did not have an obligation to shelter but to report on those who were defying the

¹²⁶ Dorothy Day, “Bread for the Hungry,” recorded 1976 at the Forty-first International Eucharistic Congress, Congress Cassettes, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

¹²⁷ Arthur I. Waskow, “The Shelter-Centered Society.” *Scientific American* 206, no. 5 (1962): 46.

¹²⁸ “500 Defy Civil Defense Drill in NYC” *Catholic Worker*, October 1957.

government. For the dissenters to become a spectacle undoubtedly served as a narrative about national unity in the face of the Soviet threat. The protesters were arrested and given the option to pay a fine or to serve five days in jail. Day chose jail.

A year later, the police arrested her again and this time the group was even more robust. Leaflets were distributed and people of all faiths joined. Among those arrested, Day writes, were “five Catholics, two Jews, two Protestants, and three who were of no faith.” One couple, believing Day’s protest to be a Catholic demonstration decided to picket independently in Times Square. They received the same sentence, according to Day. “We truly represented a pluralist society. We regretted only that there were no Negroes among us.” The endeavor was a pluralistic one and not reserved for Catholics. Day protested not because of her Catholic philosophy or for some adherence to the natural law, but because the United States government involved all Americans in a kind of warfare that might destroy the planet. They protested the status quo. She expanded on this idea in *Loaves and Fishes*, “We were setting our faces against things as they are, against the terrible injustice our basic capitalist industrial system perpetrates by making profits out of preparation for war. But especially gas, germ warfare, guided missiles, testing and stockpiling of nuclear bombs, conscription, the collection of income tax...”¹²⁹ The entire system was set up in favor of war.

Primarily, Day’s objections were of a political and moral nature. In her writing and presumably her discussion with other protesters, the moral was more important. However, there a small part of her was personally drawn to being arrested and living a jailed life. Those formative months in Washington D.C. with the suffragettes had instilled in her a yearning to be subjected to a kind of servitude and to live in *forced* proximity with those who are at the bottom of the social

¹²⁹ Day, *Loaves and Fishes*, 167.

order. Her years of being editor-in-chief and the one in charge of the day-to-day activity of Chryst Street exhausted Day. She recognized that being in charge had made her “brusque, cold, and indifferent.” But in jail, she wrote, “it was I who was getting pushed about. I was told what I could or could not do, hemmed in by the rules and regulations and red tape and bureaucracy.”¹³⁰ With the burden of decision no longer on her shoulders, she could be free in jail.

Despite her lifetime vocation of caring for the poor, Day was adamant about the fundamentally anarchist notion that governments were inherently coercive. She disliked Social Security. When the program expanded during the 1950s, Day spoke out. Her emphasis on self-reliance did not reflect an economically conservative view to save the government money, but to save the individual from the government. Day wrote in an article for the *Catholic Worker*, “We believe that Social Security legislation, now hailed 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.”¹³¹ She used words like “force and compulsion” to describe a program with arguably very good intentions to aid the elderly. This kind of language only makes sense if Day continued to engage in some level of anarchist philosophy.

Day’s concern about the government taking the place of Christian love and community were well founded. In a moment when Americans were faced with a choice about whether to reject or accept a powerful government, Max and Ruth Bodenhime and their murderer Charlie Weinberg were all detached from families and communities. Because the Bodenhimes were eccentric and lived abnormally, the press treated them as if they deserved their gruesome death. Weinberg, mentally ill and shuffled around by society all the while growing increasingly disturbed finally

¹³⁰ Day, *Loaves and Fishes*, 177.

¹³¹ Dorothy Day, “A Lesson from History” *Catholic Worker* (New York), May 1, 1945.

had done something so egregious that he could be locked away forever. WWII changed American's outlook on each other. Economic and cultural changes atomized them, driving them into their own homes, families, and themselves. Day saw the threat of the American federal government, capable of the worst atrocities, seeking to fill that void between Americans. A government too involved and overbearing would permanently displace the opportunity, the duty, for a person to look out and care for their fellow man. In *Loaves and Fishes*, she wrote:

The act and spirit of giving are the best counter to the evil forces in the world today, and giving liberates the individual not only spiritually but materially. For, in a world of enslavement through installment-buying mortgages, the only way to live in any true security is to live so close to the bottom that when you fall you don't have far to drop, you don't have much to lose.¹³²

Voluntary poverty was at the heart Day's philosophy. She rejected an increasingly materialistic lifestyle. The economic system kept people "enslaved" and freedom came when a person had little to lose. Liberation meant detachment from flashy cars, new refrigerators, and endless wardrobes. While she revered poverty by choice, she did not forget the duty of Christians and of all people to give of themselves to people who were not poor by choice. When Day met the Bodenhimes, her instinct was not to pass the couple on to a faceless government program. She sought to embrace them, offer them a place to stay, and assimilate them into a culture of love. This was her solution and it was a solution in which all Americans could have a part. In American fashion, Day understood the supreme power of the individual to act freely. She believed the individual's power to give voluntarily to be a stronger force than the evils that caused eviction, depression, war, and unjust prosecution.

¹³² Day, *Loaves and Fishes*, 73.

EPILOGUE

In the 1780s Rome sought to appoint a leader of a new American Catholic mission. Much to the surprise of the Vatican, Americans resisted this idea. At the forefront of American Catholic independence was John Carroll of Baltimore. Interference from a foreign entity, he thought, would be too drastic for the political prejudices of the new nation.¹³³ He worried that if Americans, so sensitive to authority, felt pressured into the Catholic faith, the Church would lose its membership altogether. In democratic fashion, American Catholics elected Carroll as the first bishop in the United States. So began the relationship of American Catholics to the Church. Over the next fifty years, almost all clerical positions in the United States were elected. From the outset, the laity had a strong influence.

As opposed to centuries of strict class and educational divide in Europe, Catholic Americans did not think of themselves as inferior to their priests or bishops. Before the law, they were all Americans. In this new nation, social pressure and ethnic legacy did not play a role in people's faith. As a minority group, there was no inherent connection between being an American and being a Catholic as there was in Italy, France, or Spain. Each Catholic in America is a Catholic because they choose to be and a mass exodus of Catholics from the Church will likely never happen in America because, for Americans, faith is an individual practice and not a cultural obligation. During the French Revolution, for example, citizens yearning for justice were forced to abandon Catholicism because of its long-standing association and protection of the elite and powerful.

To question and challenge Church authority like Dorothy Day did was not exceptional, it is part of a larger story of the American Catholic disposition. As the old world of European empires

¹³³ Catherine O'Donnell. "John Carroll and the Origins of an American Catholic Church, 1783–1815." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (2011): 113.

is officially lost to history and there is no hope for the return of a wholly Catholic confessional state, American Catholicism offers a democratic, modern, liberal relationship with the Church that guarantees its longevity. In America, one does not have to abandon one's faith to be a radical. The Church is subject to small, constant reforms by the laity and membership remains strong and true. Dorothy Day's fortitude, creativity, and talent make all who read her story sit back in awe. But reverence for her in the Catholic community and beyond should not eclipse the potential nature of all Catholics in America to bring change. American Catholics must realize that Day's philosophy and way of life are replicable in this country because they have no obligation to adhere to the status quo. Catholic values like justice, freedom, and protection of the sick poor, and disadvantaged should compel Catholics today to act in Day's American tradition.

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