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# The Spirituality of Dorothy Day's Pacifism\*

Anne Klejment

A decade before her conversion to Catholicism, while a young radical journalist, Dorothy Day became a public opponent of war, a pacifist, according to the inclusive pre-World War I definition of the word.<sup>1</sup> Day's advocacy of pacifism at the time emerged from two interwoven sources. The radical movement's penetrating critique of militarism, war, and imperialism helped to initiate and shape her opposition to war. Underlying her radical humanism, never having entirely disappeared from her childhood, was Day's precocious and profound understanding that the core of Christian belief and practice involved loving God and one's neighbor. When as a young adult she rejected organized Christianity, radicalism appealed to her precisely because she found its concern for ordinary people to be compatible with the authentic teaching of Christ.

Adult conversion to Catholicism transformed her antiwar beliefs and practices. Traditional religious practices together with the ongoing renewal of Catholicism during the first half of the twentieth century enabled Day to adopt Christian nonviolence and absolute pacifism as her personal values and the aims of the Catholic Worker movement. While the young radical had allowed for violence in class warfare and in revolution, as an adult Catholic, Day rejected all war and all violence on principle. Conversion emboldened and empowered her to educate and follow her conscience and to act on her beliefs, with or without the support of Church leadership. Her Catholic pacifism, fruit of eclectic spiritual and secular influences, exhibited attributes shared by and different from the pacifism of her radical life. These influences included insightful reading of the Gospels, reflection on Church teachings,

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1. See Charles Chatfield, "Pacifism," in Alexander DeConde, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy* (New York, 1978), 722-729. Day's early views on war cannot be completely reconstructed from the few existing sources; however, sufficient evidence documents her belief in class war in 1917 and her engaging in aggressive action in personal and political matters.

study of the classic texts of Christian thought, belief in ongoing renewal through retreats, and daily Mass and Eucharist, along with an appreciation for the radical spiritual and social implications of the early liturgical renewal movement.

### Dorothy Day's Childhood and Adolescent Spirituality

To understand the development of Dorothy Day's Catholic pacifism, the proper point of departure is the study of the nature of her childhood religious beliefs and her radicalism and opposition to World War I. Without this historical context, her pacifism becomes distorted. Disappointment in the tepidity of American Christians' faith and their failure to live the values of Christ's law of love, not a rejection of Christ's teachings, propelled her into the radical movement.

Despite the religious indifference of her parents, Dorothy Day's autobiographical works detailed the search of a precocious child for meaningful spiritual life.<sup>2</sup> Throughout her long life, the Bible provided her with spiritual sustenance. She recalled that it "always meant much to me, since I was a little girl. It was the Word, and so was *Christ* [emphasis in original] to me. I came across it by myself. . . ."<sup>3</sup> Her family simply did not share whatever religious feelings they had with each other. Articulating their reticence, she commented that "to bear [*sic*] one's soul was bad as to bare one's body. Might as well strip naked in front of others."<sup>4</sup> Casting familial inhibitions aside, she joined the Episcopal church as an adolescent on her own initiative.

As a young adult, Dorothy grasped, however imperfectly, the profound spiritual and social implications of Jesus' core teachings in a more penetrating way than the complacent and personal spirituality of white middle class Christians. From childhood, she believed that Christ taught an all encompassing love of neighbor. She continued to believe this even after the tepidity of Christians alienated her from organized religion and she found satisfaction in the radicalism of the World War I era Left.

Writing in her pre-conversion autobiographical novel, Day described the religious beliefs of her youth in the words of June, her alter ego. June expressed two important tenets about her faith to a confidante. First, she acknowledged her view of the nature of God. "God is love, ever-present, ready to enfold us and comfort us and hold us up," she declared. Then, assuming knowledge of Christ's command to love one's neighbor, the adolescent June made an astonishing observation of what Christians are empowered by grace to accomplish. She pointed out the apparent foolishness of attempting to be so Christlike, but explained that God encouraged it with "His command, 'Be ye

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2. According to Day's biographer, William D. Miller, she told him that everything in the "novel" *The Eleventh Virgin* (New York, 1924) is true. Miller, *Dorothy Day: A Biography* (San Francisco, 1982), xiii. It was a point Miller repeatedly made in conversation and in print. This author's evidence from other sources has thus far supported Miller's claim.

3. Robert Ellsberg, ed., *The Duty of Delight: The Diaries of Dorothy Day* (Milwaukee, 2008), 514.

4. Ellsberg, ed., *Duty*, 514.

therefore perfect.”<sup>5</sup> The autobiographical truth of these statements cannot be denied. Virtually the same words from the 1924 novel appeared verbatim three decades later in *The Long Loneliness*. Before and after her conversion to Catholicism, then, Dorothy Day continued to believe in and live by the counsels of perfection.

Why did young Dorothy's encounter with organized Christianity disappoint her? In certain respects, Dorothy Day's adolescent faith showed a spiritually mature understanding of Christianity and its social implications. Already she expressed awareness that to be fully Christian meant that a private spiritual relationship with God was insufficient. Unfortunately, other white middle class Christians, she discovered, missed this crucial point. “[W]e never met anyone who had a vital faith, or, if he had one, was articulate or apostolic,” Day later observed, and “we never met any whose personal morality was matched by a social morality or who tried to make life here for others a foretaste of the life to come.”<sup>6</sup>

Reflecting on “the ugliness of life in a world which professed itself to be Christian,” as a young woman she complained that bourgeois Christians were engaged in “a smug disregard of the misery of the world.” They preferred complacency and personal comfort to living out Jesus' core teaching: to love one's neighbor. So narrow and distorted was their religious practice that Dorothy found herself “repelled by them.” She detested their hypocrisy and considered such behavior sinful since she regarded it as a de facto denial and rejection of God.<sup>7</sup> Not only did their privatized spirituality neglect concern for the needs of their neighbor, but, as she was beginning to understand, it stifled their ability to question the existence of the unjust social order that was creating inhumane conditions. Having recognized that she “did not want to be like them,” she chose to identify with the radical movement. Such “religion,” she concluded, “would only impede my work.”<sup>8</sup>

At least once during her childhood, Dorothy Day had experienced the possibilities of love of neighbor—during the aftermath of the terrible 1906 San Francisco earthquake. Mutual need and care temporarily had created a Christian-type community among needy disaster survivors. Here, Dorothy later believed, was an example of what Jesus meant in the Sermon on the Mount. Prayer without acts of loving kindness represented a false Christianity. She knew of what she wrote, since the disaster resulted temporarily in her family's loss of security and middle class comforts, when their home was destroyed and her father's employer was forced to close down. Her family participated in the spirit of sharing and cooperation in the aftermath.

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5. Day, *Virgin*, 50, 51. That Day was expressing these views prior to her 1927 conversion to Catholicism strongly suggests the strength of her young adult religious sensibility and its continuing influence on her during her secular radical phase. See also Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness* (New York, 1952), 35.

6. Day, *Loneliness*, 70-71.

7. She wrote, “My criticism of Christians in the past, and it still holds good of too many of them, is that they in fact deny God and reject Him.” Day, *From Union Square to Rome* (New York, reprint 1978), 147.

8. Day, *Union Square*, 38, 42.

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After the tragedy, when the family relocated to Chicago's South Side, the streets of the "Windy City" surrounding their apartment introduced Dorothy to the human poverty lived and observed daily. Although the resilient Days eventually would regain their former prosperity, the child's sensitive nature encouraged her continuing efforts to grasp at the deeper implications of social justice and Christian love.

Dorothy Day's teenage choice of fiction—socialist realists Jack London and Upton Sinclair were favorites—provided her with yet more material to confirm the presence of human misery and to advocate effective ways to end it. She credited their writing with converting her "to the poor and suffering . . . the workers of the world." Furthermore, they convinced her of the "Messianic mission of the proletariat." These writers and ideas eventually led to her adult conversion to Christianity because, as she explained, "I found him [Christ] in the people, though hidden."<sup>9</sup> Her next conversion, however, was to radicalism.

### The "Incomplete" Pacifism of a Radical Activist

Having dropped out of the University of Illinois and followed her peripatetic family to New York in 1916, the headstrong apprentice journalist landed work with the Socialist daily *Call*. Not without warning, her career immediately cost the comforts of home, a price affordable, even attractive, to the young radical. When confronted with a paternal ultimatum, Dorothy defied her father's Victorian notions of womanhood by choosing an unladylike but exciting career in journalism, and, even worse in her father's eyes, *radical* journalism.

Among Christians she had been unable to find community inspired by acts of selfless love. Dorothy Day turned to radicalism as the best way to help the poor. In the lives of young radicals, she found a dedication to the poor lacking among bourgeois Christians. These comrades understood the meaning of preferential treatment for the poor. "[A]s young people," she wrote, "we were attracted to the people, to the poor, and we lived in slums and suffered in order to do the work we chose."<sup>10</sup>

"I was in love with the masses," she wrote, ". . . the poor and the oppressed who were going to rise up. . . ."<sup>11</sup> Young radicals' "hearts burned with the desire for justice and were revolted at the idea of a doled-out charity. . . . The true meaning of the word we did not know."<sup>12</sup> If comfortable Christians lacked desire to change the world, perhaps she and her comrades, together with the oppressed of the working class, could overturn the status quo. Dorothy Day yearned for revolution. Mastering the intricacies of arcane radical ideologies—and academic learning—held little attraction. Unless ideas served the purpose of addressing the root of

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9. Ellsberg, ed., *Duty*, 88.

10. Day, *Loneliness*, 86-87. Later she questioned the selflessness of young radicals, but, at the time, their way offered her the most convincing model for living a meaningful life of social responsibility.

11. Day, *Union Square*, 48.

12. Day, *Loneliness*, 87.



*New York Call* journalist Dorothy Day joined other women in February 1917 in attempting to sway public opinion and the government from joining in the war. Credit: UPI, courtesy Marquette University.

social problems of the time and could be lived, she impatiently refused to engage with them.<sup>13</sup>

How would nineteen-year old Dorothy Day have changed the world in 1917 after she quit college? Her early radical activism centered on her work as an advocacy journalist. Not only did she write about social and economic issues, but her chosen career as a radical journalist required that she prove her solidarity with ordinary folks by taking part in public protests.<sup>14</sup> She agitated for revolution! While a student and aspiring journalist, Day deliberately chose a lifestyle compatible with her radical social views. She aimed to live simply, as working people did, and in a spirit of self-sacrifice and solidarity with the poor. By forsaking bourgeois excess, Day thought that she was experiencing life as ordinary people did.<sup>15</sup> Her authentic experience of

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13. Day, *Union Square*, 43, commented on her indifference towards her university classes because “nothing that I studied was related to life as I saw it.”

14. For an exploration of the dimensions of Day's advocacy journalism, see Nancy L. Roberts, *Dorothy Day and the “Catholic Worker”* (Albany, 1984), 37-38. The detailed story of Day's 1917 activist journalism has been reconstructed in Anne Klejment, “The Radical Origins of Catholic Pacifism: Dorothy Day and the Lyrical Left during World War I,” in Anne Klejment and Nancy L. Roberts, eds., *American Catholic Pacifism: The Influence of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker* (Westport, 1996), especially 15-22.

15. Day described her self-imposed privations beginning in childhood from religious impulses and in revolt from bourgeois religiosity. See *Virgin*, 16-17; *Union Square*, 43-45.

poverty and self-imposed hardship, she believed, would lend her writing authority. Ultimately, it would help her to advance the long awaited revolution that would profoundly transform the social and economic system. Afterwards, exploitation of worker, the poor, and immigrants would no longer be possible.

The spirit of responsible freedom and sacrifice that Day assumed and observed in other young radicals imitated the spirit of sacrifice that she had desired in modern Christians. Beginning with a series she planned and wrote about the challenges of living on a woman worker's meager five dollars a week wages, world events in early 1917 resulted in a shift in her writing assignments. As the country lurched toward a war declaration, Day increasingly covered antiwar protests while engaging in the requisite antimilitarist protest.

*The Call's* brand of pacifism reflected the paper's socialist grounding. Militarism, nationalism, and imperialism, according to radical propagandists, were poisoning the working class of the world. If Americans were to join the Allies, they would be sacrificing the precious ideals of the Founding Fathers by violating individual rights and engaging in foreign intrigues. A global perspective, informed by the class conscious slogan "Workers of the World Unite!" provided an essential ingredient in Day's pacifism as a radical and, to some extent, later as a Catholic.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, radicals and their progressive allies affirmed that profits for capitalists contributed to support for militarism and war.

Dorothy Day's antiwar activism started out tamely. Her pacifism publicly surfaced in 1917 as tensions between the United States and Germany mounted and her newspaper's editorial stance stubbornly focused on opposing the impending declaration of war. Assigned to cover and participate in peace demonstrations, Day wrote a colorful series of articles using her byline, and probably many other brief reports without it.<sup>17</sup> The best documentation of her activities involved an eleventh hour peace trip to Washington, D.C. Organized by a coalition of pacifists, the majority of whom were progressives, not radicals, the excursion was intended to spark a popular uprising of citizens against the war. Naively, the activists expected that the silent working folks, their allies in the class struggle, would join them in a popular groundswell of opposition to the expected declaration of war, thereby preventing Congress from entangling the U.S. in the raging European war. At a major peace rally in Baltimore, Day suffered broken ribs, when, while gathering facts, she was accidentally clubbed by a blinded police officer during a clash between pro-war and antiwar demonstrators.<sup>18</sup> In

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16. For an example of the paper's pacifist analysis, see John Reed, "'Whose War?'" *New York Call Sunday Magazine*, 18 March 1917.

17. Citations for the *Call* articles are listed in Anne Klejment and Alice Klejment, *Dorothy Day and "The Catholic Worker": A Bibliography and Index* (New York, 1986), 10. Since publication of the bibliography, two additional articles have come to light, "Jersey Workers Not Urging War, Pacifists Find," *Call* (1 April 1917), 1 and unsigned article, "Pacifists Attacked by Baltimore Mob," *Call* (2 April 1917), 2.

18. Klejment, "Radical Origins," 16-18 reconstructed the peace tour from Day's writings, memoirs, organization documents, and newspaper articles.

the end, the peace excursion failed to deter President Wilson and Congress from declaring war. The coalition of progressive and radical pacifists had failed to halt the dreaded event.

Day's personal integrity as a journalist soon led her to regret having written some of the content in her articles about the peace tour. Complaining that her editor had demanded slanted reports, Day's alter ego June promptly disavowed them. Instead of large enthusiastic pacifist crowds in the days immediately preceding President Wilson's call for a declaration of war, described in her writings, she confessed that indifferent and stolid people had actually lined their travel route.<sup>19</sup> Such were the demands of working for an ideologically driven publication!

Once war was declared, Day, having left the *Call*, found few opportunities to publish antiwar journalism. She contributed one relatively inconsequential article against wartime government censorship for the Collegiate Anti-Militarism League's publication, *War?*<sup>20</sup> During the summer and fall of 1917, she presided over the technicalities of publishing *The Masses*, the independent radical magazine of culture and politics, which challenged American participation in the war until government censorship shut it down. The senior staff had written the lead articles. Day, the less experienced assistant, managed to publish a few book reviews. As she recalled, at the time, she and others indulged in "a general feeling of irresponsibility, stemming from our incapacity to do anything in the face of the war into which we had just been dragged."<sup>21</sup>

Although outlets for radical antiwar journalism were diminishing, Day still belonged to a network of young antiwar radicals who intended to continue opposing the war. Their devotion to principle and self-sacrifice for the cause inspired her. With the passage of the conscription measure, young males faced the issue of whether to register for the draft and be inducted into the military. Only once before had the U.S. government eventually resorted to conscription. During the Civil War, the draft came only after volunteers no longer raised sufficient numbers of soldiers. In 1917, however, the draft law swiftly followed the war declaration. Although women were immune from registration, they experienced the toll of the draft on their loved ones and comrades who confided in them. Day remembered, even years later, the "profound" suffering of such friends over the draft.<sup>22</sup>

Several of Day's comrades refused to cooperate with conscription. While she was working at the Collegiate Anti-Militarism League, three of the organization's officers were arrested for impeding the draft. With two other students, Charles Phillips, a Columbia University student and organizing secretary of the League, composed an

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19. Day, *Virgin*, 146-147. Later, and more charitably, Day observed that newspaper work by nature "makes one lose all perspective at the time," since the range of topics and deadlines "left little time at all for thought." She singled out writings on advocates of birth control as exaggerated. Day, *Union Square*, 72 and 74.

20. (Summer 1917), 5-6.

21. Dorothy Day, *On Pilgrimage: The Sixties* (New York: Curtis Books, 1972), 302.

22. Day, *Sixties*, 304.



anti-draft pamphlet.<sup>23</sup> Charlie and another male student were prosecuted and found guilty, although his fiancée was tried and freed on a technicality. The unrepentant Phillips not only served time in jail but was punitively ordered to boot camp, where his continuing antiwar mischief annoyed authorities and led to his eventual exodus to Mexico and conversion to Communism. After agonizing over whether to register, Day's close friends Irwin Granich (Mike Gold), a member of Emma Goldman's No Conscription League, and Maurice Becker reluctantly decided to cooperate. Unable to face the prospect of killing, however, they, too, fled to Mexico to avoid induction. Another young radical of their circle, Louis Kramer, was sentenced to Atlanta Penitentiary for violating the draft. Compared to what the men experienced, Day explained "my suffering at that time was brief."<sup>24</sup> The absence of the young exiles and prisoners temporarily depleted the languishing radical movement.

Some of Day's colleagues at *The Masses* likewise faced the draft dilemma. After debate, they chose to register, with less anguish apparently than her younger friends. *The Masses* continued to publish anti conscription writings and cartoons, but, as the editors could foresee, the government would soon add their iconic magazine of culture and protest to the long list of publications censored out of existence. By 1918 the senior editors were unsuccessfully put on trial and Day served as a witness.

A few other experiences of 1917 helped to define Dorothy Day's stand on war and violence. Jobless because government censorship had shuttered the radical press, Day traveled to Washington, D.C. with militant suffragists to picket the White House that fall. Repeatedly arrested for obstruction of traffic, the women considered themselves political prisoners. While the Wilson administration was fighting to make the world safe for democracy, suffragists were fighting for democracy for women throughout the United States. As a left wing radical who believed in direct action over mainstream politics, Day identified with the political prisoner aspect of the movement. She noted, "I went to jail in Washington, upholding the rights of political prisoners." Not until she wrote her autobiographical works did she publish her experiences as a "suffragist" or prisoner. Never did she exercise her right to vote.<sup>25</sup>

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23. Day consistently referred to an organization she called the "Anti Conscription League." Day was in error. The actual name was the Collegiate Anti Militarism League. In 1917 she signed attendance lists as a member of the correctly named group. See "Meeting to Discuss Conscription—Tuesday, May 27th 1917," Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Dana Papers, Box 2, Swarthmore College Peace Collection and "[Untitled List]," ca. April-May 1917, Margaret Rockwell Finch Papers (of Jessie Hughan), Swarthmore College Peace Collection. Briefly working for the League, Day socialized outside of work with her student boss, Phillips. After fleeing the U.S., Phillips invented multiple aliases: Frank Seaman, Jesus Ramirez, Manuel Gomez, and Charles Shipman. Day mentioned Gomez as an acquaintance from an earlier time in *The Long Loneliness*, 96. See Charles Shipman (Charles Phillips), *It Had to be Revolution: Memoirs of an American Radical* (Ithaca, 1993), 30-31. As Manuel Gomez, he hired Day as a publicist for a Communist-front organization, the All America Anti Imperialism League in 1927. Phillips's relationship to Day was important off and on for over a decade, from 1917 through 1927 or 1928. See Anne Klejment, "Review of Charles Shipman. 'It Had to Be Revolution: Memoirs of an American Radical,'" *Catholic Worker* (May 1994).

24. Day, *Sixties*, 304.

25. Day, *Sixties*, 304.



*Expatriate Americans in Mexico during World War I. Second from left, Charles Francis Phillips, who employed Day at the Collegiate Anti-Militarism League in 1917 and on the right, Irwin Granich (Mike Gold), Dorothy Day's close friend, who like Phillips, resisted the draft, fled to Mexico, and later became a Communist. Credit: National Archives, Record Group 165, War Department General and Special Staffs, Military Intelligence Division 10058-0 (Box 2290).*

Many citizens regarded the picketing as an unpatriotic provocation in time of war. In front of the White House, when an inebriated sailor tried to wrest her banner from her, Day grappled with the fellow. Later, as an inmate of the notorious Occoquan Workhouse, her retaliatory blows aimed at the ruthless warden reconfirmed her less than absolute commitment to nonviolent protest. While she was challenging the legitimacy of wartime killing, Day did not entirely reject the use of force. These events, and a conflict with the hapless Kramer in a dancehall before his sentencing, illustrate her instinctive resort to violence when provoked. The desire to strike out at an opponent had originated in her childhood, however, not in radicalism. Besides engaging in name calling, the child Dorothy “threw things,” resulting in the loss of at least one playmate, thanks to the friend’s outraged parent.<sup>26</sup>

Informed by progressive and radical critiques of war, Dorothy Day found herself in a swirl of antiwar activity from spring 1917 through spring 1918. Circumstances had contributed to a frustrating situation: as her opposition to war increased, her ability to engage in antiwar journalism diminished once the nation was at war. Disillusioned, Day turned her attentions elsewhere. To help others, she began nurse training. To satisfy herself, she engaged in an ill-fated love affair with the violent but

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26. Day, *Union Square*, 22.

irresistible Lionel Moise, and contracted a brief rebound marriage to an older and often married Berkeley Tobey.<sup>27</sup>

The World War I era, then, was a crucial time of learning about pacifism for Dorothy Day. Progressives, socialists, and anarchists shared a trenchant humanistic critique of war. Day found it convincing, and, with radical and progressive pacifists, she engaged in antiwar writing and agitation. From her male comrades, she discovered the coercive nature of the conscription law. Her comrades, male and female, introduced her to principled non-cooperation with what they regarded as unjust laws in support of an unjust war and incomplete democracy. From them she learned the cost of conscience. Her chosen means of opposition had included attending meetings, writing, and agitating in public. Unafraid to risk opprobrium for engaging in questionable activities as she gathered material for her writing, Day engaged in protests that, in the fever of wartime patriotism, many interpreted as subversive, and which eventually landed her in prison.

As a radical advocacy journalist, Day had hoped to live her love towards her neighbor. To an extent, she met her aim. In practice, however, her belief in class warfare and revolutionary resistance to unjust authority compromised that love by allowing for the use of force. The spirit of Christian love that had led her to the radical movement was eclipsed by her acceptance of class warfare and revolution in 1917. Filled “with the impatience of youth,” she thought then that “nothing could be done except by revolution, by use of force.”<sup>28</sup> Her habit of fighting back, which predated her radicalism, continued. Ultimately, the failure of the radical movement to end the war and a series of misfortunes in her personal life contributed to a period of disillusionment. For a brief interlude, then, Dorothy Day’s experiences truly illustrated the perils confronting “the Lost Generation.”

## **Towards Catholic Pacifism**

Still embracing a radical critique of society, in 1927, at the age of thirty Dorothy Day became a Catholic. Conversion came, she later wrote, because “my early religious fervor . . . underlay my radicalism and finally saved me.”<sup>29</sup> Becoming Catholic required a leap of faith. “I loved the Church for Christ made visible,” she wrote, “[n]ot for itself, because it was so often a scandal to me.” The Church’s property, its comfortable relations with the wealthy, its failure to criticize the abuses of government and capitalism—all of these troubled her. On the other hand, Day found herself attracted to the Catholic Church, because of its laity. She regarded it as “the Church

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27. Charlie Phillips, who knew Day in New York and Chicago, described Moise as a “dark-browed bruiser” and claimed that he had once seen Day “almost unrecognizable . . . her face . . . a mess of swellings and discolorations—left there she said, by Lionel.” Shipman, *Revolution*, 144. Malcolm Cowley remembered Moise as large and strong. Malcolm Cowley Interview with William D. Miller, August 1976, Dorothy Day-Catholic Worker Collection, Series W-9, Box 1, Marquette University.

28. Day, *Union Square*, 78.

29. Ellsberg, ed., *Duty*, 37.

of the poor.”<sup>30</sup> “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,” she realized.<sup>31</sup> Day also felt welcomed into the Church because of its “great diversity.”<sup>32</sup> At the time of her conversion, and for some time afterward, she remained unaware of Church teaching on social issues and peace.

In need of a regular income to support herself and her daughter after her conversion ended her domestic partnership with Forster Batterham, Day turned for help first to her old radical friends. Manuel Gomez, whom she had known back in 1917 as Charlie Phillips, had always regarded her as a friend and appreciated her willingness to work hard. He hired her to work for him at the All America Anti Imperialism League in 1927. “That very winter,” she explained, “I was writing a series of articles, interviews with the workers, with the unemployed.” Still adamantly anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist, Day shared key values of the communist-affiliated League. She interviewed General Sandino, a foe of American military intervention in Nicaragua and the League delivered “aid and comfort to the enemy, [his] forces,” she recalled.<sup>33</sup> Commenting on his politics, Day remembered that the general identified with Nicaraguan communism only, not with the communist government of Russia. Sandino said that “he was a communist because he was for the poor,” she wrote.<sup>34</sup> Day’s modest work for the League never received mention by the organization’s enemies. Not only was the League eyed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation for its allegedly subversive foreign policy, but even within the Communist party, at least one faction ridiculed its allegedly “pacifist” approach. Gomez claimed that the League’s slogan “Stop the flow of Nicaraguan blood” inspired the colorful taunt “Gomez’s Kotex campaign.”<sup>35</sup>

Day confessed to reservations about working for a Communist party-affiliated organization after her conversion. Recognizing her dire need for financial independence, her sensible spiritual advisor, Father Zachary, advised her to continue there until more suitable work became available. Despite the short duration of her employment with Gomez and the League, Dorothy Day was working to confront global imperialism, and its materialist roots, including the rarely acknowledged American variety.

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30. Day, *Loneliness*, 149-150. Here she enumerated her list of complaints relating to the Church’s failings in following Christ’s example of perfect love.

31. Day, *Loneliness*, 139.

32. William D. Miller, ed., *All Is Grace: The Spirituality of Dorothy Day* (Garden City, 1987), 82.

33. Day, *Loneliness*, 149.

34. Day, *Sixties*, 70.

35. Shipman, *Revolution*, 167. The author has doubts that the actual rivalry involved the use of the brand name Kotex, since the product was less well known in the twenties that it would be during the post-war era. Quite possibly it was an ex post facto invention intended to jazz up the memoir. After leaving the Communist party, Gomez adopted still another name: Charles Shipman. Although Shipman’s memoir mentioned his previous connections to Dorothy Day in both New York and Chicago, oddly, he made no mention of her work for the League. Day, who mentioned both Phillips and Gomez in *The Long Loneliness*, discreetly kept Phillips’s cover to herself! FBI-FOIA materials on the League and Phillips/Gomez (in the author’s possession), while interesting, do not add much to our knowledge of Day’s specific work. Likewise League materials in the Swarthmore College Peace Collection made no mention of Day.

Later, as her faith and confidence in her judgment grew, she would Christianize her challenge to militarism and imperialism. A radical or a Catholic could work to end exploitation of the poor. Her post conversion anti militarism and anti-imperialism would retain the materialist critique while bolstering it with complementary Catholic-sourced insights.

More suitable work for peace at the Fellowship of Reconciliation followed Day's stint at the League. The FOR devoted itself to ecumenical nonviolence, although at the time Catholics, suspicious of the designs of Protestants, had not formally created an affiliation. This stand possibly drew her closer to the position of Christian nonviolence that would shape her religious pacifism and become a fundamental value of her Catholic Worker movement. Again, the brevity of her tenure there and the lack of sources confound any attempt to show a specific influence that the FOR might have had on the development of Day's pacifism.

In 1933, with the encouragement of her mentor Peter Maurin, Dorothy Day launched the *Catholic Worker* paper and the Catholic Worker movement. While deepening her personal spirituality and providing direction for the movement, Day encountered vibrant Catholic renewal impulses that enriched her eclectic spirituality and ultimately strengthened her commitment to Christian pacifism and nonviolence. Building her movement in the 1930s, Day faced pressing social problems complicated by the global economic depression and multiplying conflicts within and among nations as totalitarian regimes sought to dominate and oppress not only their own citizens, but also foreigners, victimized by their aggrandizing movements. In an effort to respond to these situations in a radical and Catholic way, Day began to articulate and practice Christian nonviolence and pacifism unknown in the American Catholic community of that time.

Her inspiration came from a variety of sources. The Bible remained a crucial source of Christ's teaching. As a young radical, she had absorbed the works of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, and she continued to find sustenance from them throughout her life. Continuing her habit of voracious reading, Day familiarized herself with modern classic works on nonviolent theory. Richard Gregg's *Power of Nonviolence*, which she read in 1938, taught her Gandhian nonviolence.<sup>36</sup> Peter Maurin's relentless proselytizing acquainted her with the works of Catholic intellectuals. He introduced her to the writings of Jacques Maritain and Emmanuel Mounier, whose philosophy of personal responsibility fit with her vision of working for justice while dispensing charity. Papal pronouncements, personalist philosophy, the Mystical Body of Christ theology of liturgical renewal, the retreat movement, devotionism, and attendance at Mass and reception of the sacraments sustained and educated her. Consequently, Day drew from these sources to reinvigorate for modern American Catholics the pacifism and nonviolence of Christ and the early Church. To this she added a radical critique of militarism, war, and imperialism, which complemented Catholic teachings

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36. Ellsberg, ed., *Duty*, 36.

and anticipated the Church's increasing discomfort with justifying wars and colonialism during the second half of the twentieth century.

## **Sources of Pacifism: The Bible and the Law of Love**

From childhood, through her period of radicalism, and throughout her life as a Catholic, the Bible, and in particular, the message of love—the words spoken by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount—to love God and neighbor—remained central to Dorothy Day's faith. Her profound insight into Jesus' teachings had drawn her first to the Episcopal church, then to the poor and radicalism, and finally to serve the poor as a radical and Catholic. So powerful was this love, that she credited the poor for her conversion. "I found Him through His poor. I have said, sometimes flippantly," she confessed, "that the mass of bourgeois smug Christians who denied Christ in His poor made me turn to Communism, and that it was the Communists and working with them that made me turn to God."<sup>37</sup> The love of God entered her consciousness through the poor and their allies.

The roots of Jesus' law of love, as Day understood, could be traced back to the Ten Commandments. Jesus reduced the rules of life to two: love of God and love of neighbor. Loving God and one's neighbor was a matter of choosing obedience. How did one show a love for God in obedience to the first commandment and Christ's law of love? Quoting 1 John 4:20, Day proclaimed, "We can only show our love for God by our love for our fellows," whose dignity is a consequence of their creation by God.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, one's love for God, she believed, was measured by one's love for the least loved person! How did humans know God? Confidently, Day wrote: "We know God thru creatures—samples—man made to the image of God."<sup>39</sup>

Creation by God bestowed dignity on one's neighbor and Day trusted that neighbor included one's enemy, even in time of war. Evil deeds did not deprive one's enemy of their God-given dignity. "We must see Christ in others," she concluded. "We must put love, and strength, and courage where there is none, and we will find it, as St. John of the Cross says."<sup>40</sup> For that reason, Day believed that pacifism offered a more thoroughly Christian response to one's enemy than war.

While conventional thinking viewed pacifism as surrender to an enemy, Day's insight that pacifism simply involved the practice of love overturned conventional wisdom. "Love casts out fear" summarized her belief in the power of love to overcome evil, even evil perpetrated by one's enemy in wartime.<sup>41</sup>

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37. Day, *Union Square*, 10.

38. She believed that love for humans shows our love for God and attributed this insight to Teresa of Avila. "St. Teresa says that the only way we can measure the love we have for God, is the love we have for our fellows. So by working for our fellows we come to love them." Day, *Union Square*, 162, 170.

39. Ellsberg, ed., *Duty*, 119. She was echoing Father John J. Hugo, who preached retreats for the Catholic Worker.

40. Ellsberg, ed., *Duty*, 205.

41. Ellsberg, ed., *Duty*, 191.

Human love provided her with a taste of divine love. Reminding her readers that “[l]ove is the best thing we can know in this life,” she observed that suffering, patience, and compassion were needed to increase it. Suffering for loved ones helped one to understand God’s love and the crucifixion of Christ.<sup>42</sup> This suffering might include choosing pacifism and nonviolence over war and brute force.

The commandment of love possessed the highest authority for Dorothy Day. Its authority was found in Jewish law, in Christ’s succinct teaching of the foundation of faith, and in multiple biblical examples of love in action. Finally, the authoritative nature of love as the core of Christianity came from its power to transform situations and persons. Day trusted in the power of love. However, she found faith in the power of love lacking in her own time as well as in certain episodes of Christian history. Commenting on the Crusades, Day confided in her diary that had Christians behaved in a truly Christian manner, “perhaps . . . the conqueror could have been conquered, overcome by the Sermon on the Mount.” She thought of the Crusades as “second best” and noted that “we are told to aim for perfection.”<sup>43</sup> For Day, the law of love allowed no exceptions. “God sees Christ, His Son, in us,” she reminded all. “And so we should see Christ in others, *and nothing else*, and love them.”<sup>44</sup>

## Sources of Pacifism: The Catechism

Dorothy Day’s entry into the Church was guided by a simple nun, a Sister of Charity, who plied the neophyte with pious magazines and pamphlets, or, as Day humorously noted, “saccharine stories of the saints, emasculated lives of saints young and old,” in addition to drilling her on knowledge of the faith from a catechism book. Just as school children learned their catechism lesson, so, too, did Day, “recit[ing] word for word, with the repetition of the question that was in the book.”<sup>45</sup>

Typically, study of the catechism did not create Catholic pacifists. Through the middle of the twentieth century American Catholics were known for their unquestioning obedience to civil authority and faith in anticommunism. For many Catholics the latter required that all means should be used to extirpate a morally and politically dangerous foe bent on global domination. Day’s encounter with the catechism, however, sparked the beginning of a new synthesis of Catholic pacifism—one eventually leading Day to a “seamless garment” ethic of love.

Sister Aloysia’s catechism drills, in which she used with her adult convert the mind numbing methods she employed with her fourth grade students, reinforced Day’s understanding of the social implications of the law of love. The catechism exercises embedded in Day’s religious belief the dignity of all human beings, who are, after all, created by an all loving God.

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42. Day, *Union Square*, 148, 151.

43. Ellsberg, ed., *Duty*, 187.

44. Ellsberg, ed., *By Little and By Little: The Selected Writings of Dorothy Day* (New York, 1983), 213.

45. Day, *Union Square*, 136, 137.

Later, using these insights, Day taught Catholics that the practice of nonviolence and pacifism honored God by protecting the dignity of humans. In numerous publications, she repeated words familiar to any Catholic educated with a catechism. The dignity of the human person originates, she wrote, in the reality that a person “is the temple of the Holy Spirit and made to the image and likeness of God.”<sup>46</sup>

From the catechism and related teachings, Day concluded that “[m]an’s love for God can be measured by his love for the one he loves least. . . . We should prefer our neighbor’s welfare to all except our own soul’s welfare. We are all one flesh.”<sup>47</sup> The first commandment and belief in God-given human dignity led directly to the practice of Christian charity and beyond it to the pursuit of Christian justice. For Dorothy Day, the practice of charity and the pursuit of justice were inseparable. Each was required. While charity demanded generosity and forbearance, justice required working to change the political, economic, and social “system” through nonviolent revolution. In recognition of human dignity, she found that war was not an option consistent with these requirements.

### **Sources of Pacifism: Mystical Body of Christ Theology**

By 1933 or 1934, Dorothy Day had begun to connect with two influential Catholic renewal movements of the era. The pages of the *Catholic Worker* and Day’s other writings reveal connections to liturgical renewal and Catholic Action. Both of these movements advanced Mystical Body doctrine, rooted in the teachings of St. Paul. Finally, in 1943, Pope Pius XII would issue his wartime encyclical, *Mystici Corporis*, validating an ancient theology and the work of theologians who rediscovered it over the course of the past century first in Europe, then in the United States. Mystical Body theology contributed an essential ingredient to modern Catholic pacifism. According to theologian William Cavanaugh, Mystical Body theology “made Christian participation in . . . conflict . . . inconceivable” for Day.<sup>48</sup>

The liturgical renewal network began to flourish in the United States by the late 1920s, having begun in Europe earlier, and was responsible for recovering Mystical Body theology for modern Catholics.<sup>49</sup> Dorothy Day appreciated the work of the movement. “‘The Liturgical movement has meant everything to the Catholic Worker,’” Day declared,” “‘from its [the CW’s] beginning.’”<sup>50</sup> By attending Mass and receiving Communion daily as a liturgically aware worshiper, she was constantly

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46. Day, *Union Square*, 149.

47. Ellsberg, ed., *Duty*, 119.

48. William T. Cavanaugh, “Dorothy Day and the Mystical Body of Christ in the Second World War,” in William Thorn, et al., eds., *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement: Centenary Essays* (Milwaukee, 2001), 457.

49. For an overview of the early liturgical renewal movement, see Keith Pecklers, S.J., *The Unread Vision: The Liturgical Movement in the United States of America: 1926-1955* (Collegeville, Minn.: 1998).

50. Mark Zwick and Louise Zwick, *The Catholic Worker Movement: Intellectual and Spiritual Origins* (New York, 2005), 72.



reminded of Mystical Body doctrine and its implications for daily living. “‘I would not dare write or speak or try to follow the vocation God has given me to work for the poor and for peace, if I did not have this constant reassurance of the Mass, the confidence the Mass gives,’” she noted.<sup>51</sup> Writing in the sixties, Day declared her “tribute to the Liturgical movement—first to recognize the need for ‘personalist and communitarian revolution,’ to use of phrase of Emmanuel Mounier, whose book, *The Personalist Manifesto* was . . . published in 1934 or ’5.”<sup>52</sup>

Day’s large circle of supporters and friends included some of the pioneers of liturgical renewal. The charismatic leader of the early renewal movement, Virgil Michel, O.S.B., visited Day in New York City. In turn, she journeyed to St. John’s in Collegeville, where Michel had established the Liturgical Press and its companion journal, *Orate Fratres*. They agreed to promote each other’s movement by exchanging publications.<sup>53</sup> Members of the Catholic Worker attended talks by such renewal leaders as Michel and Gerald Ellard, S.J. In fact, one of the first books to appear on the Catholic Worker’s recommended reading list was Ellard’s *Christian Life and Worship*.<sup>54</sup>

Catholic Action, a social movement of the laity encouraged by Pope Pius XI during the thirties, likewise promoted Mystical Body theology.<sup>55</sup> By emphasizing the unity of humans, the church encouraged and validated efforts of Catholics to alleviate material suffering. Pre-Vatican II Catholics, searching for a rich spirituality beyond meeting the minimum requirements of Church law, found in Mystical Body theology a new appreciation for active lay participation and leadership in worship and in social activism. Ironically, the theology of the Mystical Body of Christ was becoming more visible in Catholic activist circles as class war erupted in the industrialized nations, totalitarianism in Europe was on the rise, and nations sowed the seeds of another World War. Catholic Action challenged these situations that were dividing Christians and threatening peace throughout the world.

Dorothy Day discovered in the theology of the Mystical Body of Christ a powerful, scripturally based explanation of the spiritual unity of humankind and the inviolability of life. When she wrote “Christ is the head and we are the members,” she chose a standard generic wording of this theology. Typically, Catholics understood the Mystical Body of Christ as a living metaphor for the Church. Prayer and sacrifice strengthened the Mystical Body.<sup>56</sup> Accepting the concept of the Mystical Body came easily for Day. Mystical Body theology complemented the fundamental teaching of

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51. Zwick and Zwick, *Catholic Worker*, 73.

52. Ellsberg, ed., *Duty*, 424.

53. “Roots of the Catholic Worker Movement: Saints and Philosophers who Influenced Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin: Virgil Michel, O.S.B., and the Benedictine Influence on the CW Movement: Correspondence between Dorothy Day and the Benedictines,” <http://www.cjd.org/paper/roots/rcorres.html>. Accessed 6/28/2005.

54. *Catholic Worker* (15 December 1933).

55. Cavanaugh, “Day and Mystical Body,” 457–464, has researched Catholic Action and Mystical Body theology as it related to Day’s World War II pacifism.

56. Dorothy Day, “The Mystical Body of Christ,” *CW* (August 1936).

Jesus Christ, the law of love. It also embraced an old radical slogan from the International Workers of the World (IWW) movement that had so inspired her years earlier: "An injury to one is an injury to all."<sup>57</sup>

Day, like Father Virgil, probed the depths of Mystical Body theology. Both agreed that worship should not be separated from life and that the liturgy could assist Catholics in overcoming rampant individualism. Linking the liturgy to life, Day wrote in an editorial: "The Mystical Body of Christ is a union—a unit—and action within the Body is common action. In the Liturgy we have the means to teach Catholics . . . that they ARE members of one body and that 'an injury to one is an injury to all.'"<sup>58</sup> Members of the Mystical Body, as they understood it, were obliged to practice charity and work for justice toward others, a reminder that the concept of the Mystical Body did not begin and end at the church door. Mystical Body theology served as an antidote to rampant individualism or, as Day expressed it, "the best weapon against the world."<sup>59</sup> Therefore, the true meaning of the theology required a critique of the social and economic system. Summarizing the implications of the theology in quotations from an unacknowledged author (Michel), Day wrote:

Pius X tells us that the liturgy is the indispensable source of the true Christian Spirit.

Pius XI tells us that the true Christian spirit is indispensable for social regeneration.

Hence the conclusion: The Liturgy is the indispensable basis of Christian social regeneration.<sup>60</sup>

Unlike most Catholics of her time, Dorothy Day understood that the Mystical Body represented a spiritual entity greater than the Catholic Church. From St. Augustine, Day borrowed an expansive interpretation of the term. "[W]e are all members *or potential members* [emphasis added] of the Mystical Body of Christ," she wrote innumerable times. Thus, the commandment to love one's neighbor included all humans, friend and enemy alike, in peace and in war. Following two favored insights that "all is grace" and that "there is no time with God," Day relied on Augustine's warning to "never . . . judge another because we do not know what he may be in the future." Today's enemy, she concluded, could be tomorrow's friend. She found scriptural precedent for her view. "We are to remember St. Paul," she noted, "who persecuted the Christians and became the foremost preacher of the doctrine of the Mystical Body."<sup>61</sup>

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57. Day, *Sixties*, 94.

58. Dorothy Day, "[Editorial] Liturgy and Sociology," *CW* (December 1935).

59. Day, "Liturgy and Sociology."

60. Day, "Liturgy and Sociology." In the same issue, Day described in her "Day By Day" column a visit with Virgil Michel in Minnesota, mentioning that "Father Virgil has started a school of social studies at St. John's which takes up such subjects as war and peace, the state, labor and money." The unacknowledged author quoted by Day was identified by Mark and Louise Zwick as Virgil Michel in *Catholic Worker*, 59. A convenient guide to Michel's religious and social thought is R. William Franklin and Robert L. Spaeth, *Virgil Michel: American Catholic* (Collegeville, Minn.: 1988).

61. Day, "Liturgy and Sociology" and Day, *Union Square*, 147.

Day's inclusive interpretation of Mystical Body theology had profound implications for the development of her spirituality of nonviolence. The reality of the Mystical Body, she believed, "superceded" the nationalism and class divisions that inevitably generate rage and violence. "We are one with Christ as Christ is one with the Father," she noted, and therefore "[t]he Mystical Body is the inseparable oneness of the human race from Adam to the last man." In Christ, in the Mystical Body, she concluded "[t]here is no nationality. The only foreigner is he who has not Jesus in him and of human creation there never was such nor will ever be such. If men and women recognized this there would be no war."<sup>62</sup> Calling Mystical Body theology "perhaps the greatest need of the present time," Day believed that in an era of ascendant totalitarianism in Europe, social and economic injustice, and labor unrest, it provided lay Christians with a mandate for radical social action. Since "illnesses of injustice, hate, disunion, race hatred, prejudice, class war, selfishness, greed, nationalism, and war weaken[ed]" the Mystical Body, Day urged that these attitudes and behaviors be avoided. As members of the Mystical Body, of which Christ is head, hatred against a neighbor results in hatred of Christ.<sup>63</sup> Consequently, Christians who rejected the social requirements of Mystical Body doctrine were denying Christ. Condemning the commonplace "Catholics only" interpretation of the doctrine, she insisted on an alternative. "That the Mystical Body includes only Roman Catholics is heresy," she concluded.<sup>64</sup>

Finally, Dorothy Day understood how the doctrines of the Mystical Body and Incarnation reinforced each other as reminders of God's love for all humans and the human capacity to express love for God in love of all people. In the Incarnation, Christ had assumed a human nature while maintaining his divinity. By "worshiping of the Divinity alone of Christ and ignoring His Sacred Humanity," she observed, "religious people looked [only] to Heaven for justice."<sup>65</sup> Thus, many modern social radicals had concluded that religion was a tool of the establishment, serving as an opiate for misguided believers. Such interpretations fostered apathy on earth and hopelessness. Dorothy Day, inspired and strengthened by the Mystical Body of Christ, offered another possibility: to work toward a nonviolent "revolution of the heart."

### Sources of Pacifism: Weapons of the Spirit

Dorothy Day fully understood the human impulse to strike back at an enemy. On occasion, in her earlier life, she followed her impulse to resolve difficulties by resorting to force. Reflecting on being the recipient of physical violence, she commented about the thoughts and emotions underpinning violence: "A spirit of hatred

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62. Miller, ed., *Grace*, 146-147.

63. Ibid.

64. Miller, ed., *Grace*, 146.

65. Dorothy Day, "[Editorial] The Humanity of Christ," *CW* (June 1935).

and a fierce desire for retaliation seems more manly, more human. Moral force[,] being hard to see, is a thousand times harder than physical force. Strength of spirit is not so often felt to be apparent as strength of body. And we in our vanity wish this strength to be apparent.”<sup>66</sup> Many shunned nonviolence, then, because they perceived it as the response of a weak person. Having lived through World War I, Dorothy Day recognized that the public, stirred up by the propaganda of the militarists, falsely accused principled war opponents of cowardice and inertia by the propaganda of the militarists. Pacifists of the World War I generation had been branded by the military-minded as “slackers,” as men too weak or timid to engage the enemy in war.

As Day understood, to follow a nonviolent path in imitation of Christ one required a good measure of courage, self-discipline, and, most importantly, armor and weapons of the spirit. Therefore, she urged Christian pacifists to prepare themselves spiritually, since practicing pacifism meant engaging in conflict with nonviolent weapons, not in withdrawing from it. Day considered pacifists “heroic,” since they would be facing hostility and danger. The lot of a pacifist included angry mobs, the likelihood of prison, and death threats.

Like other proponents of nonviolence, Dorothy Day countered the fallacy that passivity, inertia, and cowardice represented true pacifism. No, in her view, a pacifist “cannot be lightly dismissed as a coward afraid of physical pain.”<sup>67</sup> While soldiers defending their country took up arms, Catholic pacifists courageously defended authentic Christianity by employing pure means, the weapons of the spirit.

Dorothy Day believed that love was an essential weapon of the spirit and that nonviolence originated in love. Love, as Day viewed it, was nothing less than “a great and holy force” that “must be used.”<sup>68</sup> While addressing two issues—domestic labor injustice and strife and political upheaval abroad, she clarified her stand on the use of force. She tried to conquer the conundrum of class warfare from a Catholic and radical perspective as workers sought to unionize. Among workers in the United States, she confided to her diary in 1937, “[t]he big fight is against violence,” not against atheism.<sup>69</sup> Increasingly during the thirties, her attention turned to such divisive events as the Spanish Civil War. In both cases, she advised consistent nonviolence, as she rejected her earlier position that force was an acceptable tool of the class war or revolution. By advocating a nonviolent response to the conflict in Spain, Day boldly challenged official Catholic just war teaching on numerous moral and practical grounds.<sup>70</sup> Clerics too often blessed violence in the name of perceived Church interests, thus, in Day’s opinion, undermining Christ’s non-negotiable law of love. By the

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66. Ellsberg, ed., *Duty*, 26-27.

67. Day, “Pacifism,” *CW* (May 1936).

68. Miller, ed., *Grace*, 93.

69. Ellsberg, ed., *Duty*, 25.

70. The just war oriented Catholic Association for International Peace (CAIP) has been analyzed in Patricia McNeal, *Harder Than War: Catholic Peacemaking in Twentieth-Century America* (New Brunswick, 1992), especially Chapter 1 which focuses on the organization’s early years.

mid thirties, Day unequivocally opposed the use of force in personal relations, labor disputes, and in national and international situations.<sup>71</sup>

Reflecting on modern conflicts, Dorothy Day frequently argued that the use of force begets the need for ever more brutal force in order to win a victory. This, decidedly, deviated from Christ's way. The example of Christ showed that love overcomes hatred and death. On the other hand, the use of force neglected Christ's way. She firmly believed that spiritual power overcomes human force. To express the thought in more concrete terms, love overcomes hatred. Grace overcomes evil. This, she believed, was the lesson of the "folly of the Cross:" Christ ultimately triumphed.

Day refused to judge those who resorted to violence, to force. Soldiers, many of them poor men from the oppressed classes, she thought, were goaded to fight "against a foe they do not know."<sup>72</sup> Many had never heard of Christ's law of love or experienced it in practice, as she noted. Even the apostles had failed to understand the "primacy of the spiritual."<sup>73</sup> Christ's kingdom was not of this world, a message that the apostles missed until the coming of the Holy Spirit. Day regularly cited Christ's response to defense by force: when Peter used his sword to protect Christ, Christ admonished Peter and healed the enemy who was struck by Peter's sword. This example, she believed, reinforced the law of love. It presented a prohibition of the use of violence against another human. As Day interpreted the story, whose life was more worthy of protection than Jesus'—yet Jesus refused the offer of defense by force.

Jesus' teachings and example inspired nonviolence in the early Christian community. Stephen asked God to forgive those who stoned him. Saul, who violently persecuted the Church, was conquered with spiritual weapons, converted to become the zealous missionary Paul. All of the examples that Day cited from the New Testament—and the Old—illustrated her point: "love is stronger than death, stronger than hatred." As she reached her conclusion that the Catholic Worker movement must pray for *all* Spanish people during their bloody Civil War, she reminded her followers that "all of them [are] our brothers [and sisters] in Christ."<sup>74</sup>

According to Catholic Worker Tom Cornell, Day "was puzzled by the low moral standard set for Catholic laity. . . . She wanted passionately a great moral movement that would transform society and re-establish all things in Christ in a manner worthy of sons and daughters of Christ." This meant that she envisioned and worked for "a society based upon Jewish and Christian truths and values." Day's nonviolent revo-

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71. For a sampling of the early writings that were building Day's approach to nonviolence and pacifism, see the following *Catholic Worker* articles: "Is War Justifiable? War Preparations Cause Questioning" (1 April 1934), "Pope Pius XI Condemns Exaggerated Nationalism" (1 May 1934), "The Mystical Body of Christ" (October 1934), "Not Pacifism" (November 1934), "[Editorial] Class War" (June 1935), "Pacifism" (May 1936), "The Mystical Body and Spain" (September 1936), "Open Letter to John Brophy, CIO Director" (April 1937), "Explains CW Stand on Use of Force, (September 1938).

72. Day, *Union Square*, 148-149.

73. Dorothy Day, "[Editorial] Explains CW Stand on Use of Force," *CW* (September 1938).

74. Day, "Explains."

lution “would be a ‘war on war,’ . . . a war on evil societal structures fought with the only weapons that can really overcome them, the weapons of the spirit.”<sup>75</sup>

Dorothy Day decried the misuse of spiritual weapons by Catholics who had failed to inform themselves about world issues as well as spiritual matters. During the sixties, she confided to her journal thoughts that were implied in earlier writings. Day expressed concern about using spiritual weapons towards an end that violated the Mystical Body of Christ. During the Vietnam War, she regretted that “convents of nuns [who were praying for a military victory] . . . have never considered these things . . . do not know the gasoline jelly that napalm is, a fire that burns the flesh from the bone . . . know nothing of the gasses which are being manufactured. How can they use those tremendous powers of prayer which they possess if they do not know—if they do not ‘form the intention,’ if they do not know what they [are] praying for, if ‘they pray amiss,’ thinking of an impossible victory by force of arms.”<sup>76</sup>

Prayer constituted one of Dorothy Day's weapons of the spirit. “We can do nothing without prayer,” she insisted. By asking for grace, pacifists armed themselves and could transform others. One's prayer, however, ought to “have good sense” and be rooted in doctrine. She advised that one must “[p]ray always,” since “our whole life is used to promote God's glory and to loving Christ in others.”<sup>77</sup> At Catholic Worker houses, a variety of prayers were recited as the United States geared up to enter World War II. The rosary “for peace (not for victory),” Pope Benedict XV's prayers for peace, and the stations of the Cross counted among the prayers intended to promote peace.<sup>78</sup>

To prayer, Dorothy Day added the essential daily Mass and Eucharist. Together, prayer and the sacraments could overcome “whole armies.”<sup>79</sup> She quoted philosopher Jacques Maritain to the effect that faith, baptism, and confirmation empowered the layperson to “infus[e] into the world . . . the sap and savor of Christianity.”<sup>80</sup>

Detachment counted as a multifaceted weapon of the spirit. Day recommended fasting and detachment from material goods. Powerful as a source of grace, fasting required that one detach oneself from whatever is unnecessary in meeting our basic needs. In her analysis of the roots of war, Day agreed with those progressives and radicals who understood the role of property and profit to lead nations into war. Voluntary poverty constituted another form of detachment. By choosing to live in voluntary poverty, Day believed that the roots of war would be severed, and the renunciation of highly paid work enabled Catholic pacifists to avoid the payment of war

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75. Tom Cornell, “Traditional Catholic Pacifism Versus Modern Variants,” <http://catholicworker.org/roundtable/essaytext.cfm?Number=8>. Accessed 3/5/02.

76. Ellsberg, ed., *Duty*, 383.

77. Miller, ed., *Grace*, 110.

78. Day, “Fight Conscription!” [pamphlet] ca. September 1939. The papal prayers for peace that Day recited dated back to World War I.

79. Day, “The Folly of Force,” [pamphlet] ca. 1938.

80. Ellsberg, ed., *Duty*, 201-202.



*Ade Bethune illustration of the Mystical Body of Christ used in the Catholic Worker paper. Credit: Artwork by Ade Bethune from the Ade Bethune Collection, College of St. Catherine Library, St. Paul, MN 55105.*

taxes or employment in jobs attached to the proliferation of arms and war making. As she succinctly stated: “Detachment gives peace. Attachment gives war.”<sup>81</sup> In his retreats, Father John J. Hugo’s message contained a subtlety that Day and Catholic Worker Dorothy Gauchat grasped. Good things could be used but pursuing ownership of them obstructed one’s ability to live the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>82</sup> Day’s understanding of materialism, then, challenged the predominant Catholic view of the era that it was Americans who were spiritual and Communists who were materialists. Her insight sprang from her radicalism, the works of mercy, the counsels of perfection, and the retreats.

The works of mercy constituted essential weapons of the spirit. Dorothy Day emphasized the practice of both the corporal and spiritual works of mercy at the Catholic Worker. During strikes, for example, Catholic Workers used “the [corporal] works of mercy for immediate means to show our love and to alleviate suffering” among the workers. Her movement rented an annex to feed and house strikers as they

81. Miller, ed., *Grace*, 148.

82. See the conversations with Dorothy Gauchat and Julian Pleasants in Rosalie Riegler Troester, ed., *Voices from the Catholic Worker* (Philadelphia, 1993), 19-20.

organized the National Maritime Union. She viewed her writing as a weapon of the spirit, since instructing the ignorant was a spiritual work of mercy. In supporting the workers, Day noted, "We were ready to 'endure wrongs patiently' for ourselves (this is another of the spiritual works of mercy) but we were not going to be meek for others, enduring *their* wrongs patiently."<sup>83</sup> She understood that without working for justice, there could be no true peace.

## Conclusion

Sacred and secular sources alike shaped Dorothy Day's developing pacifism and nonviolence. Her lifelong devotion to Bible reading, Christ's law of love, the catechism, Mystical Body theology, and the efficacy of grace and weapons of the spirit numbered among the most powerful sacred influences on her thought. While Day's nonviolence could not have developed without these spiritual sources, Day's encounter with secular radicalism nourished her love of neighbor when organized Christianity failed her. From the radicals of the first third of the twentieth century Day gained an appreciation for direct nonviolent action, accepted prison as the cost of direct action, and acquired an analytical edge in critiquing conscription, militarism, nationalism, and imperialism.

Dorothy Day's regular and liberal use of the weapons of the spirit during the thirties prepared her for the pacifist's long loneliness during the Second World War. Prayer, Mass, the sacraments, and detachment strengthened her as she followed a controversial pacifist position, which she not only personally practiced, but also advocated in an effort to affect public opinion. Without the weapons of the spirit, Day might have disavowed nonviolence after Pearl Harbor. Without the weapons of the spirit, Day might have sunk into disillusionment as some young radicals had during World War I. No matter that her movement was divided over the issue and volunteers departed, unable to accept pacifism. No matter that irate readers cancelled their subscriptions and reduced the circulation of her paper to slightly more than one quarter of its peak influence. No matter that her bold editorial of July-August 1940 attracted the unwanted attention of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and that its director, J. Edgar Hoover, in a letter dated 3 April 1941, recommended that Day "be considered for custodial detention in the event of a national emergency," advice fortunately not acted upon.<sup>84</sup>

Because of the soundness of her spirituality, Dorothy Day was able to reinsert Catholic pacifism into modern discourse on war. As a pioneer in rediscovering and renewing pacifism for American Catholics, her nonviolent pilgrimage exerted a powerful influence on American and global Catholic culture by the middle of the twenti-

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83. Day, *Loneliness*, 181.

84. FBI-FOIA 62-61208-3 and 62-61208-4. After investigation, on 3 February 1942, Day was "tentatively" designated "somewhat less dangerous [than those to be interned] but whose activities should be restricted."



eth century. Indeed, her “disarmament of the heart” has continued to inspire public critiques of war and nonviolent activism against the national security state more than twenty five years after her death.<sup>85</sup>

85. Day wrote of a “disarmament of the heart” in “Explains.” Perhaps the greatest tribute to Day’s nonviolence was paid her memory by the American Catholic Bishops in their 1983 letter “The Challenge of Peace.” The standard source on Day’s role in shaping pacifism has been documented by McNeal, *Harder*. To examine Day’s influence on Philip Berrigan and consequently on the international plowshares movement, see Sharon Nepstad, *Religion and War Resistance in the Plowshares Movement* (Cambridge: 2008).