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“To Relate the Eucharist to Real Living”: Mother Teresa and Dorothy Day at the Forty-First International Eucharistic Congress, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Nicholas Rademacher

Much has been written recently about Abraham Lincoln and Charles Darwin on the occasion of the bicentennial of their respective births, February 12, 2009. The coincidence that Lincoln and Darwin share the same birthday inspired at least two recent biographies that trace the lives of both men and the impact they had on the world.¹ The fact that two prominent figures in world history walked the earth at the same time, but never met, sparks the imagination to consider what a meeting of those two men would have been like, and what they would have said to one another, especially in terms of their respective views on current events.

The occasion of the writing of the present paper was another bicentennial celebration, the creation of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia on April 8, 1808, and the seeming coincidence that two women who significantly impacted the history of twentieth-century Roman Catholicism shared the same stage during the Forty-First International Eucharistic Congress held in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia in 1976.² Unlike with Lincoln and Darwin, one need not speculate on a hypothetical meeting between these remarkable women, contemporaries of one another. Dorothy Day and Mother Teresa actually did meet one another on different occasions and developed a

1. See David R. Contosta, *Rebel Giants: The Revolutionary Lives of Abraham Lincoln and Charles Darwin* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2008) and Adam Gopnik, *Angels and Ages: A Short Book about Darwin, Lincoln, and Modern Life* (New York: Knopf, 2009).

2. The present article is an updated version of a paper presented at the “Chronicle of Faith: A Conference Celebrating the 200-Year Legacy of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia 1808-2008.” The conference was hosted at Immaculata University on April 4, 2008. I thank two Cabrini College colleagues, Dr. Nancy Watterson for facilitating helpful conversation for the clarification of thought on the revision of this paper as well as Dr. Leonard Norman Primiano for his extensive comments and suggestions for the revision of this work from oral presentation to written article.

longstanding relationship. The Congress was not their first, but in fact it would be one of their last meetings, and it was Day's final public appearance.³

This study focuses on the development of that little known relationship as mediated by their mutual friend, Eileen Egan. Set against the backdrop of the Forty-First International Eucharistic Congress, particular attention will be paid both to their respective apostolates, which combined work for justice with Eucharistic spirituality in a manner that had been extolled at the Second Vatican Council, and the divergence in their approach to the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church.

The 1976 International Eucharistic Congress had as its theme "The Eucharist and the Hungers of the Human Family." This theme referred to two types of hunger: material hunger and spiritual hunger; the former remedied by loaves and fishes, the latter remedied by the Bread of Life, the Eucharist. The Congress addressed both concerns over an eight-day period, from Sunday, August 1 to Sunday, August 8, filled with conferences, workshops, performances, and exhibits interspersed with opportunities for prayer, including numerous liturgies. Through these events, the congress addressed a perennial problem in Christian social thought and action, namely the tension between a life dedicated to the cultivation of the spiritual life and a life dedicated to the pursuit of justice, two options which are often presented as mutually exclusive of one another but which the Second Vatican Council linked together.⁴ According to the official history of the Congress, planners intentionally strove to realize the teachings of Vatican II in this way.⁵

Dorothy Day and Mother Teresa appeared on the same stage on the sixth day of the congress, Friday, August 6, 1976, to address the topic of women and the liturgy. These two women modeled for contemporary Christians a way in which to integrate action for justice with a profound spiritual life that included devotion to the Eucharist. In so doing, they exemplified what the Second Vatican Council referred to as the "universal call to holiness" and the liturgy as "source and summit" of the Christian life.⁶ Both women had been embodying these themes of Vatican II long before the

3. Eileen Egan, *Such a Vision of the Street: Mother Teresa—The Spirit and the Work* (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 283.

4. For one recent discussion of this bifurcation of justice and spirituality see Susan Rakoczy's *Great Mystics and Social Justice: Walking on the Two Feet of Love* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2006).

5. Official historians of the congress John B. DeMayo and Joseph J. Casino explicitly link the eight days of conferences to the Second Vatican Council. "The purpose of the conferences was to show that the 'Eucharistic Sacrifice is the font and apex of the whole Christian life' (*The Church*, n.II), and that 'modern man's secular activities become truly sacred through their offering at the Eucharistic Sacrifice in unity with Christ's own supreme offering.' (*Church and the modern World*, n.38)." See John B. DeMayo and Joseph J. Casino, *The Forty-First International Eucharistic Congress, August 1-8, 1976: A History* (Pennsauken, New Jersey: DeVlieger Associates, 1978), 74.

6. For the "universal call to holiness," see chapter five of *Lumen Gentium* (http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html); and for the liturgy as "source and summit" of the Christian life see chapter one, paragraph ten of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html). *Gaudium et Spes* is relevant, as well. See especially paragraphs 22 and 38 (http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

Candlelight procession on the first night of the Forty-First International Eucharistic Congress (August 1). The procession was on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway and ended with a benediction at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Photo used with permission from the Philadelphia Archdiocesan Historical Research Center. Robert and Theresa Halvey Collection.

council was convened by John XXIII in 1962; and continued embodying these themes in the years since the council closed in 1965. While there are many similarities between Day's and Mother Teresa's work for justice in the world, it is impossible to avoid one significant difference between each woman's posture concerning justice in the church as well. To be more precise, Dorothy Day is not remembered as being as suppliant as Mother Teresa to the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church, as will be seen on the occasion of their presentations at the congress.⁷ A brief biographical sketch of Day, Mother Teresa, and Eileen Egan, the woman who brought them together, will set the stage for a more detailed discussion of the congress itself and each woman's participation in it.

7. Day's involvement in the 1949 grave diggers' strike in New York City, during which she sided with the union workers, was one of the more famous confrontations between Dorothy Day and a member of the hierarchy, in this instance Cardinal Francis Spellman. Day's reflection on this event reveals that her devotion to the church in fact led her to confront it when issues of injustice were at stake. In the April 1949 issue of *The Catholic Worker*, Day described Spellman's role in the strike as "ill-advised" and his actions as an "overwhelming show of force against a handful of poor working men." She interpreted the strike as "a temptation of the devil to that most awful of all wars, the war between the clergy and the laity, a heightening of the tension which is there and which it is the work of both to try to overcome." Day did not back down from her alliance with the workers in order to appease the Cardinal but she understood it to be her responsibility as a member of the church to work towards a nonviolent resolution with him.

A Communion of Saints: Dorothy Day, Mother Teresa, and Eileen Egan

Dorothy Day (1897-1980) famously converted to Catholicism in 1927 after the birth of her daughter, Tamar. Prior to her entry into the Catholic Church, she was a journalist, writing for the socialist newspaper *The Call*, and a social justice activist, agitating for women's right to vote and protesting unjust working conditions in modern industry. Dorothy Day was baptized with her daughter, Tamar, whom she considered a gift from God and a profound blessing in light of the fact that Day had previously had an abortion. After her conversion, Day met Peter Maurin with whom she founded the Catholic Worker Movement in the early 1930's. They inaugurated the movement in New York City among the poor and each remained there for the duration of their respective lives. The Catholic Worker is best known for its newspaper and personalistic response to injustice, which included houses of hospitality, round table discussions, and agrarian communes.⁸ The purpose of the movement was (and is) to live the Gospel as literally as possible: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, and house the homeless.

Day, and by extension her movement, was (and remains) committed to pacifism. Even during World War II, Day refused to sanction U.S. involvement in the conflict. She remained committed to this vocation for peace the rest of her life, which meant living with the poor as the poor and speaking out against militarism. Similar projects opened around the country and even in other countries during her lifetime. Individuals remain committed to the movement to this day, twenty-nine years after her 1980 passing. Day's cause for canonization is open even though she opposed the process and many of her followers continue to oppose it. Day rejected the designation, "living saint," in her lifetime saying: "Don't call me a saint. I don't want to be dismissed so easily."⁹

Mother Teresa (1910-1997) was born Gonxha (Agnus) Bojaxhiu in 1910. At age 18, she entered the Sisters of Loreto and served in St. Mary's High School in Calcutta, India for twenty years. After a bout with tuberculosis, she felt called by God to ded-

8. Day shared Peter Maurin's theory and practice of personalism. In her biography of Maurin, Day admits that their views on personalism were difficult to clarify. She wrote: "Peter was always getting back to St. Francis of Assisi, who was truly the 'gentle personalist.' In his poverty, rich; in renouncing all, possessing all; generous, giving out of the fullness of his heart, sowing generously and reaping generously, humble and asking when in need, possessing freedom and all joy." See Dorothy Day with Francis J. Sicius, *Peter Maurin: Apostle to the World* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Press, 2004), 79. Additionally, Mark and Louise Zwick provide a chapter length treatment of Catholic Worker personalism in their *The Catholic Worker Movement: Intellectual and Spiritual Origins* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 97-115. They explain that the "central concept of Worker personalism is personal responsibility." As the Zwicks note, this perspective continues today: "When asked what they mean by personalism, most contemporary Catholic Workers reply that it means assuming personal responsibility for one's brothers and sisters—that it means not leaving the poor to the tender mercies of the state welfare bureaucracy." See page 113.

9. See <http://www.catholicworker.com/ddaybio.htm>.

Eileen Egan, Dorothy Day and Mother Teresa having tea in the Catholic Worker newspaper office at Maryhouse, New York City, 1979. Copyright © Bill Barrett. Courtesy of the Marquette University Archives.

icate her entire life to the poor by taking a personalistic approach.¹⁰ In 1948, she founded the Missionaries of Charity to serve the poor by living among the poor, including among others, lepers and people suffering with AIDS. Her order continues to serve in all parts of the world. In 1971, she was awarded the first Pope John XXIII Peace Prize and in 1979, she won the Nobel Peace prize. In 1999, two years after her death, Pope John Paul II accelerated her cause for canonization by waiving the five-year waiting period. She was beatified on December 20, 2002.

Eileen Egan (1911-2000) was pivotal in bringing these two women together. After a brief period with the Catholic Worker Movement in New York City, Egan joined the U.S. bishops' War Relief Services, now known as Catholic Relief Services (CRS). In his remembrance of Egan published in *Commonweal* at the time of her death, Patrick Jordan wrote that "Egan combined CRS' practical work of providing economic assistance, food, housing, and transportation to war victims with speaking writing, and demonstrating against the causes of war."¹¹ She co-founded the American Pax Society

10. The following passages clarify how Mother Teresa understood the personalist approach: "I do not agree with the big way of doing things. To us what matters is the individual. To get to love the person we must come in close contact with him. If we wait till we get the numbers, then we will be lost in the numbers. And we will never be able to show that love and respect for the person. I believe in person to person; every person is Christ for me, and since there is only one Jesus, that person is the one person in the world at that moment." Like the contemporary Catholic Workers noted in footnote eight, above, Mother Teresa distinguished her work from government relief: "Government agencies accomplish many things in the field of assistance. We must offer something else: Christ's love." See Mother Teresa of Calcutta, *A Gift for God: Prayer and Meditations* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1975), 40-41 and 44.

11. Patrick Jordan, *Commonweal* 127, no. 20 (November 17, 2000): 7.

in the early 1960's, which developed into Pax Christi USA in 1972 under her leadership.¹² Egan remained dedicated to this work until her death in 2000. Rather famously, late in her life, Egan was mugged on the streets of New York City. Beaten badly, she was hospitalized. From the hospital, she phoned her attacker (who was in prison) to forgive him and to counsel him on the way of peace. She is reported to have remarked that it was a testimony to contemporary mores that such an act of kindness and forgiveness would make the news.

Eileen Egan had close relationships with both Dorothy Day and Mother Teresa. She met Dorothy Day in the early 1940's and in 1943 became a regular at the New York house of hospitality. Biographer Linda L. Baratte has written, "Thus began a lifelong association and a profound friendship formed on a shared vision that only an infusion of compassion through works of mercy could trump the works of war."¹³ In 1945, Egan began her career as a member of CRS; by 1955 she was working in Calcutta, India where she had her first encounter with Mother Teresa. This initial encounter developed into a long-lasting and cherished association.¹⁴

Egan was responsible for Mother Teresa's first visit to the United States in October of 1960, when the nun agreed to speak at the National Council of Catholic Women's conference in Las Vegas, Nevada. Egan accompanied Mother Teresa to other destinations in the United States, including Peoria, Illinois, Washington, D.C. and New York City where Egan arranged for her to meet Dorothy Day. Mother Teresa gave a talk to the "regular Friday evening meeting of the Catholic Worker movement" at their "Hospitality House then on Chrystie Street on New York's Lower East Side."¹⁵ During a tour of the house's urban environs, Mother Teresa expressed her concern for the poor persons who surrounded them; as Dorothy Day explained the context and nature of the Catholic Worker's role there. Egan recounts that "The contact [Mother Teresa's] with Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker was maintained over the years and was strengthened by Dorothy Day's visit to Calcutta in 1970. The friendship was broken only by Dorothy Day's death in 1980."¹⁶

A decade after Mother Teresa's 1960 visit to the United States, Egan was in charge of "arranging Day's lecture tours and accompanied her on many of them," including a trip that Day made to Australia in 1970.¹⁷ On the way back to the United States from Australia, Egan arranged for Day to meet Mother Teresa in Calcutta. The diminutive nun greeted them at the airport when they arrived. Later, Day was given a tour of the operations that Mother Teresa's associates were running; and she was given the

12. Ibid.

13. Linda L. Baratte, "Religious Education in the Prophetic Voice: The Pedagogy of Eileen Egan." See http://www.religiouseducation.net/member/03_papers/Baratte.pdf.

14. Ibid.

15. *Such a Vision of the Street*, 124.

16. Ibid., 136.

17. Ibid., 45; Egan, *Peace Be with You: Justified Warfare or the Way of Nonviolence* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Press, 1999):148. See also Baratte, "Religious Education in the Prophetic Voice: The Pedagogy of Eileen Egan." See http://www.religiouseducation.net/member/03_papers/Baratte.pdf.

opportunity to speak to the sisters and brothers who worked with Mother Teresa. Day shared with them the history of the Catholic Worker movement from its inception in 1931 and the theory behind their practice: “the ‘daily practice of the works of mercy,’ at a personal sacrifice.”¹⁸

Egan was privy to a special vision when she accompanied Day and Mother Teresa to an hour of meditation. As she explained in the following passage, prayer, especially at the Eucharistic banquet, was central to both women’s work not only as source and summit but also as a model for living a Christian life:

The two women kneeling in front of me in the Calcutta chapel were visionaries who brought people to them and their work by their unique vision, not by argument. For each one, the mass was the central act of the day. Despite her schedule of travel, Dorothy Day hardly missed daily mass.

Each blazed forth a special genius. With an unerring precision, coupled with the wild abandon of faith in providence, each had gone straight to the least wanted, the poorest, in her society—one to the poor of the megalopolis of New York, the other to the poor of the megalopolis of Calcutta. Each had insisted on face-to-face contact with those who might seem unlovable, but who were lovable in the all-embracing love of the Universal Brother, Jesus.

Each had made a banquet to which had been called the lame, the halt, and the blind.¹⁹

One could anticipate, then, that their next meeting would be at a Eucharistic Congress with the theme “Hunger in the World” in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, the “city of brotherly love.” On the eve of their presentations, August 5, 1976, Mother Teresa and Dorothy Day stayed at the same residence, Cathedral Convent, as arranged by Eileen Egan.²⁰

The 1976 Eucharistic Congress in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia

This Forty-First Eucharistic Congress, held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1976, coincided with the bicentennial celebration of the United States of America. Philadelphia was an apt choice for a congress that year as the city was rich in U.S. and Catholic history, once the nation’s financial and political capital. The bicentennial caused some concern for the Vatican fearing that the two events would overshadow or compete with one another.²¹ A final decision was not made until June 6, 1974 at which point the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, under the leadership of John Cardinal Krol, began to prepare in earnest for the massive event.²² There was much consternation over what theme to choose for the congress. According to the official

18. Egan, *Peace Be with You*, 184-185.

19. *Such a Vision*, 186.

20. *Such a Vision*, 283; See also Dorothy Day to Archbishop Krol, January 29, 1976, in the records from the forty-first International Eucharistic Congress located at the Philadelphia Archdiocesan Historical Research Center [PAHRC].

21. John B. De Mayo and Joseph J. Casino, *The Forty-First International Eucharistic Congress, August 1-8, 1976: A History* (Pennsauken, New Jersey: DeVlieger Associates, 1978): 14.

22. *Ibid.*, 16.

history of the congress, Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen planted the seed of an idea that eventually flowered into the congress' theme. When asked if he had any ideas about what theme to give the congress, he is remembered to have said, "Have you ever thought of the starving souls all about us? There are people starving in body for food and people starving in soul for God."²³ But it was not until April 18, 1975 after much discussion among various committees both here and in Rome that the theme, "The Eucharist and the Hungers of the Human Family" was chosen.²⁴

In order to provide a sense of the scope of this congress, it is important to note that there were seven "major conferences centering around one of the various hungers of the human family. Each of these conferences had six to ten panels with an average of twenty-five participants."²⁵ The purpose of the conferences was to be "consciousness-raising, heightening awareness and leading to a personal motivation that glorifies God and transforms the participant in Christ."²⁶ It is estimated that "[t]he conferences and exhibits attracted almost 112,000" people.²⁷ In addition to the conferences, there were approximately forty-one liturgies, variously attended by "more than 950,000" people.²⁸ These liturgies included the opening and closing services and masses for many ethnic groups and nationalities ranging from Armenians to Vietnamese; and still other masses arranged according to theme ranging from a mass for military personnel to a mass for the "fullness of Freedom and Justice."²⁹ According to the official history of the congress, "A conservative estimate, then, would place the total number of persons who participated in the Congress at 1,000,000 and 1,500,000."³⁰

A Proposal from Military Personnel

A production on the scale of a Eucharistic Congress could not have passed without controversy. The planning for and preparations of a mass for members of the military and their families was an occasion of significant criticism for the organizers. The mass was scheduled for August 6, 1976, which was the same day as the conference "Women and the Eucharist" where Dorothy Day and Mother Teresa had agreed to serve as respondents

23. Ibid., 23.

24. Ibid., 29.

25. Ibid., 74. The various hungers, attached to particular days of the week, included: "The Eucharist and the Hunger for God" (the first day, Sunday, August 1); "The Eucharist and the Hunger for Bread" (the second day, Monday, August 2); "The Eucharist and the Hunger for Freedom and Justice" (the third day, Tuesday, August 3); "The Eucharist and the Hunger for the Spirit" (the fourth day, Wednesday, August 4); "The Eucharist and the Hunger for Truth" (the fifth day, Thursday, August 5); "The Eucharist and the Hunger for Understanding" (the sixth day, Friday, August 6); "The Eucharist and the Hunger for Peace" (the seventh day, Saturday, August 7); "The Eucharist and the Hunger for Jesus, the Bread of Life" (the eighth day, Sunday, August 8). See DeMayo, 33-34.

26. Ibid., 74.

27. Ibid., 144.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., 565. For a full listing, see the index of *The 41st International Eucharistic Congress: A History* under "Liturgies." There are forty-one liturgies listed there.

30. Ibid., 144.

to the main address by Sister Angelita Myerscough, ASC.³¹ Ironically, August 6 is the anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and the Feast of the Transfiguration.

As early as April 11, 1975, Monsignor John Kowsky, Chairman of the Priests' Advisory Council of the Military Ordinariate, sent a letter to Cardinal Terence Cooke, Archbishop of New York and Military Ordinary, requesting a day at the Eucharistic Congress that would be dedicated to military personnel and their families. Cooke was very receptive to the idea and forwarded this letter to Bishop James P. Mahoney, a member of the board of governors for the congress who, through correspondence with Kowsky, decided that a mid-day mass for the military personnel and their families would be most satisfactory.³² Soon thereafter, on June 26, 1975, Kowsky was named Military Vicariate Director for the Eucharistic Congress. During a coordinating committee meeting with the executive secretary of the congress on September 18, 1975, it was recommended and subsequently decided that the mass for the military would be held at 1 P.M. on Friday August 6, 1976 at the Cathedral of SS. Peter and Paul. They anticipated a capacity crowd of 2,000 people with overflow moving into the adjacent chapel. "The concelebrants of the Mass would be Cardinal Cooke, the senior Catholic chaplains of each service, bishops who are associated with the military as former chaplains or Vicars, and other designated priests."³³ The principal homilist was Cardinal Humberto Medeiros (1915-1983), Archbishop of Boston.

It was further recommended that "the Military Vicariate reserve exhibit space in an area which will be entitled 'apostolates,'" which would include "exhibits by the four services" that were to be "staffed by chaplains, and personnel (officer and enlisted)" and that "part of the cost might be paid for by the recruiting sections of the respective services."³⁴ They were successful in acquiring exhibit space, which was reserved in the Philadelphia Civic Center amidst a total of more than seven-hundred displays of which three-hundred were "apostolic exhibits."³⁵

The Pacifists' Dissent

It should be pointed out that the organizers of the congress had sent invitations to Catholic groups and organizations that represented a wide range of views on what it means to be Christian in the contemporary world. Booths at the exhibition site covered every topic from abortion and Catholic charismatic groups to Padre Pio and the Shroud of Turin. As early as February 25, 1975, Thomas Cornell wrote to Msgr. Walter J. Conway, executive secretary of the congress, to thank him for inviting the

31. Angelita Myerscough, a member of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, an order of nuns founded by Maria De Mattias in Acuto, Italy in 1834. Myerscough was provincial of the Ruma Province.

32. 2 May 1975 Kowsky to Mahoney in PAHRC.

33. 23 September 1975 MEMORANDUM FOR THE SENIOR COORDINATOR MILITARY ORDINARIATE EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS CORR DINATING COMMITTEE Thomas Hilferty (signed) in PAHRC.

34. Ibid.

35. DeMayo, 135.

Catholic Peace Fellowship [CPF] to the congress. Cornell, one of the co-chairman of CPF, submitted an application to the congress organizers explaining that the CPF was “an education service conducted by the 4,000 Catholic members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation aiming at clarifying and developing the Church’s teaching on peace.” Additionally, he clarified what role the organization wished to play at the congress: “To display the books, booklets, pamphlets, re-prints, films, tapes and records available through the literature service of the CPF and the Fellowship of Reconciliation, many of which are hard-to-get classics of nonviolent philosophy.”³⁶ Cornell also suggested that Conway “contact the newly formed American section of Pax Christi, the ‘official international peace movement,’ for their participation.”³⁷

Evidently, no one contacted Pax Christi, U.S.A. As preparations for the Congress proceeded, word about the military mass was disclosed. About a week ahead of the opening ceremonies, on July 27, 1976, Joseph J. Fahey, general secretary of Pax Christi, the International Catholic Movement for Peace, wrote to Conway to protest the celebration of a mass for the military on the thirty-first anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing (1945). Speaking on behalf of the executive committee of Pax Christi, U.S.A., he suggested that “a penitential service be held at the Liturgy to atone for the violations of Christian morality that took place on August 6th, 1945.”³⁸

Fahey was clear about his purpose and did not wish to be misunderstood about his intentions. He wrote,

We make this suggestion as Catholics committed to the Eucharistic call for peace and justice in the world. We also fully realize that it is not the intention of the Mass to honor militarism nor to imply that war is part of the Christian Gospel. In addition, we understand that military personnel are in need of the graces of the Eucharist since they so often suffer injustice themselves because they are victims of the military tradition of unquestioning obedience which has cost the lives of so many.³⁹

Additionally, Fahey submitted an application that Pax Christi be permitted to reserve exhibit space, so that his organization could display materials. He wrote on the application, “We wish to relate man’s need for the Eucharist to his need to work for justice and peace in the world and in the U.S.A.”⁴⁰ He also requested that they “sponsor a liturgy with a Peace theme.”⁴¹ A sample program incorporated a list of speakers including Gordon Zahn, Bishop Thomas Gumbleton and Eileen Egan, among others. The program explained that “The purpose of the Pax Christi speakers will be to stress that there can be no complete Eucharistic theology without a commitment to peace and justice on the part of each Catholic who partakes of the Eucharist.”⁴² Their appli-

36. CPF Application, February 25, 1975 in PAHRC.

37. Cornell to Conway, February 25, 1975 in PAHRC.

38. July 27, 1976, Joseph J. Fahey to Msgr. Walter J. Conway in PAHRC.

39. Ibid.

40. Application, Fahey, n.d. in PAHRC

41. Ibid.

42. [Typed Program], n.d. in PAHRC

Mother Teresa viewing the religious exhibit during the 41st International Eucharistic Congress at the Philadelphia Civic Center in 1976. This was an exhibit of various religious, ethnic, educational groups, as well as a display of liturgical art that ran the length of the Congress. Photo used with permission from the Philadelphia Archdiocesan Historical Research Center.

cation was accepted and they hosted a conference entitled, “The Eucharistic Challenge to Work for Justice and Peace” on Tuesday, August 3.⁴³

Women and the Eucharist

Independently of one another, both Mother Teresa and Dorothy Day expressed trepidation at the thought of speaking before such large crowds. On June 1, 1975, Mother Teresa wrote to Cardinal Krol, graciously accepting his invitation to the congress but expressing her desire to avoid public presentations. She wrote, “I am very happy to share the Eucharistic Congress with your people, but I am afraid of the big crowds and my simple talk. I would be very happy if I did not have to speak but I leave it to you to decide whatever Jesus wants.”⁴⁴ Krol, jubilant at her acceptance, encouraged Mother Teresa to speak by comparing her to the prophets Abraham, Moses, and Jeremiah who “also protested their inadequacy.”⁴⁵ Similarly, Day wrote to Krol, “Though terrified at the prospect of such crowds I will certainly accept your request that I participate as panel speaker, Friday August 6, god [sic] willing.”⁴⁶

The conference “Woman and the Eucharist” took place at the Philadelphia Civic Center across town from Ss. Peter and Paul where the mass for military personnel and

43. DeMayo, 134.

44. Mother Teresa to Cardinal Krol, June 1, 1975 in PAHRC

45. Krol to Mother Teresa, June 30, 1975 in PAHRC

46. Day to Krol, January 29, 1976 in PAHRC

family members was to be celebrated. Sister Angelita Myerscough provided the main address. In her talk, Myerscough challenged her listeners to recognize that “the Lord of Eucharist speaks to us a challenging word to take the [women’s] movement seriously, to see the issues it raises for us not merely as political or economic or social questions but as Gospel questions.”⁴⁷ The movement, she argued, needs to be infused with Judeo-Christian principles; and the insights of women need to be welcomed more seriously into the theological enterprise of the church.⁴⁸ Such reciprocity will better enable men and women to work together to build the Kingdom of God.⁴⁹ Finally, she suggested the “Eucharist as Paschal Event can give meaning and value both to the agony of oppression, and to the agony of liberation.”⁵⁰

Dorothy Day responded to the talk with a very short address. Her anxiety about speaking before the crowds had not abated. Her concern arose not only out of her natural shyness but, as Egan later explained, because her talk “contained a criticism of the Congress organizers.”⁵¹ Day had even gone so far as to prepare a typed copy of her talk, which was uncharacteristic of her as she usually spoke extemporaneously.⁵²

In accord with the congress’ theme, Day’s response, entitled “Bread for the Hungry,” addressed both physical and spiritual hunger, explaining that those who arrive for bread at their House of Hospitality in New York City receive bodily and spiritual nourishment. The spiritual nourishment in the form of “human warmth” arises, she explains, out of the celebratory and family-like atmosphere of their house of hospitality. Those who come are not clients, but other Christs. She described the Church as her mother, who both teaches and nourishes. She thanked the Catholic Church for teaching her to recognize God in creation, which facilitated her conversion. She also brought to bear another teaching of the Church: that “Penance comes before Eucharist. Otherwise, we partake of the Sacrament unworthily.” At this point, she turned her remarks to the military mass that was set to take place on the other side of the city: “No-one in charge of the Eucharistic Congress had remembered what August 6th means in the minds of all who are dedicated to peace.” The events of August 6, 1945 inverted the Gospel message: “Our Creator gave us life, and the Eucharist to sustain our life. But we have the world instruments of death of inconceivable magnitude.” In light of the anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the continued proliferation of nuclear weapons, she urged instead that “we will regard that military Mass, and all our Masses today, as an act of penance, begging God to forgive us.”⁵³

Mother Teresa’s remarks followed. She, too, favored brevity. She spoke of Mary as an exemplar of the compassion and understanding love that we must model in

47. Myerscough, in DeMayo, 498.

48. *Ibid.*, 499.

49. *Ibid.*, 501.

50. *Ibid.*, 502.

51. *Such a Vision of the Street*, 283.

52. *Ibid.*

53. Dorothy Day, official audio-cassette from the 1976 Forty-first International Eucharistic Congress, Congress Cassettes, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Reprinted as “Bread for the Hungry” in *The Catholic Worker* (September 1976): 1, 5. Also available on the web, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/>.

order to transform the world. She explained that “God picked a woman to be able to show his love and compassion for the world.” Mary’s compassion was demonstrated when she shared the news of her conception with Elizabeth; when she went in search of Jesus at the temple; when she was moved by the plight of the newlyweds in Cana; and most especially during the passion and crucifixion of her son. Mother Teresa explained that we (and, more specifically, the women in the audience to whom she frequently addressed herself) must embody Mary’s compassion and understanding. Mary was not, she explained, ashamed of her son but claimed him as her own. In the same way, she said, we need to claim as our own the suffering human family.⁵⁴

Mother Teresa also evoked Jesus in the hungry, the naked, the homeless as one seeking not only material sustenance, but also spiritual sustenance. She said,

And I believe that great love must begin in our own home first in our own heart in our own home; my next door neighbor; in the street I live; and in the town I live; and in the world because only then he will be able to spread the meaning of Eucharist. [The] meaning of Eucharist is “understanding love.” Christ understood that we have a terrible hunger for God. He understood that we have been created to love and so he made himself a bread of life . . . [we] must eat and drink [in the Eucharist] the goodness of the love of Christ of his understanding love; he also wants to give us a means, a chance to put our love for him in a living action; he makes himself the hungry not only for bread, but for love; he makes himself the naked one not only for a piece of cloth, but for that understanding love that dignity, human dignity; he makes himself the homeless one not only for a piece of a small room, but for that deep sincere love of one another and this is Eucharist, this is Jesus the living bread that he has come to break with you and with me.⁵⁵

In both cases, Day and Mother Teresa emphasized the fact that we must make the Eucharist present in our everyday life: for the naked, the hungry, the homeless, and for peace.

Eileen Egan, who made an appearance after Mother Teresa to lead the participants and the gathered crowd in a moment of silence, brought these themes together. She reminded those in attendance of the significance of the day, saying,

As we all know today is the feast of the Transfiguration; and also the anniversary of Hiroshima. Is it any accident that on the Feast of the Transfiguration, Our Lord was suffused in a light never seen in the world before; and in Hiroshima men, and women, and children, and infants in the womb were suffused in a light that was totally new to the world, a light brighter than the sun and a light that cremated them alive.

She lamented the fact that fewer women are involved in the theological enterprise, noting in particular that women were not involved in the developing of “just war theology.” She proposed that women become more involved in theology, developing a theology of the

54. Mother Teresa, official audio-cassette from the 1976 Congress, Congress Cassettes, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

55. Ibid.

works of mercy as a counterpoint to what she called the “no longer applicable just war theology.” As she explained, “The works of mercy are all works of life; and in every war, every last work of mercy is not simply interrupted it is reversed.” For example, she said, “Instead of giving drink to the thirsty we bomb the reservoirs” . . . “Instead of preventing people from getting food we scorched the earth that produces their food” . . . and, “Instead of helping the captive, we make millions of captives.” She offered Dorothy Day and Mother Teresa as examples of women who have been able “to relate the Eucharist to real living” and who have developed by their actions a theology of peace.⁵⁶

Conclusion

The impact that Dorothy Day and Mother Teresa have made on the Roman Catholic Church—as models of the universal call to holiness—was made evident at the micro-level of the Forty-First International Eucharistic Congress held in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia in 1976. Though their participation on the August 6 panel as respondents to the topic, “Women and the Eucharist,” has been largely forgotten, it should come as no surprise given that the over-arching theme of the Congress was “The Hungers of the Human Family,” which intentionally alluded to both physical and spiritual hunger. They were a natural choice insofar as both women had dedicated their adult lives to performing the works of mercy, including feeding those hungry in both body and spirit. Consonant with the theme of the congress, they were themselves nourished by the Eucharist, the source and summit of their work among the world’s neediest people.

It is fitting that their long-term relationship, mediated by their mutual friend Eileen Egan, culminated in this moment. Both women gave witness to their unique way of uniting faith and justice in the Christian life through their personalistic responses to hunger, poverty, and disease. At the same time, their presentations illustrated a divergent approach to the hierarchy. Albeit with trepidation, Day criticized the organizers of the congress for ignoring the significance of August 6, thus illustrating how she understood her role as a member of the Body of Christ, willing to challenge members of the hierarchy out of her sincere love of a church that is always in need of reform.

Both women are presently on the path to official canonization as contemporary saints. Mother Teresa’s cause has made rapid progress. Day would no doubt be pleased that her cause has made little progress. In any event, both causes are worthy of consideration because Day and Mother Teresa contravened the old model of sanctity, which focused on being set-apart from the world in terms of both physical separation from the world and its concerns. Instead, they modeled a style of Christian living that was most suitable for their time. By deepening their transformation into other Christs through their devotion to the transubstantiated flesh and blood of the Eucharist, they commingled their lives with the flesh and blood concerns of the vast majority of human beings who live in poverty, just as Jesus did.

56. Eileen Egan, official audio-cassette from the 1976 Congress, Congress Cassettes, Ann Arbor, Michigan.