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# A Unity of Contraries: Dorothy Day and the 'No-Alibi' Rhetoric of Defiance and Devotion

Catherine Carr Fitzwilliams

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A UNITY OF CONTRARIES: DOROTHY DAY  
AND THE 'NO-ALIBI' RHETORIC OF DEFIANCE AND DEVOTION

A Dissertation submitted to the  
Department of Communication and Rhetorical Studies of the  
McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By  
Catherine Carr Fitzwilliams

August 2009

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2009

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AND THE 'NO-ALIBI' RHETORIC OF DEFIANCE AND DEVOTION

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Approved July 20, 2009

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# ABSTRACT

## A UNITY OF CONTRARIES: DOROTHY DAY AND THE 'NO-ALIBI' RHETORIC OF DEFIANCE AND DEVOTION

By

Catherine Carr Fitzwilliams

August 2009

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Janie Harden Fritz

This offering considers what I term the embedded narrative of Dorothy Day (1897-1980) as a Rhetoric of Defiance and Devotion and it is illustrated by selected metaphors associated with Martin Buber and M. M. Bakhtin. Concepts of conscience, community and the complexities associated with being authentically human are engaged within an interpretive journey of a life lived in response to the flashpoints of the last century.

Enlisting hermeneutics as a guide, Day's petite narrative is situated against a broader narrative of eight decades of economic, social, political, cultural and (for her) philosophical and spiritual changes. Her various and varying labels are explored: radical, rhetorician, journalist, mistress, wife, divorcée, single parent, pacifist, activist, agitator, convert, founder of the Catholic Worker, and 'thorn in the side of both church and state.'

This work argues that Day is a realistic idealist and a textured-by-humanity communication role model whose authenticity and courage challenges the current climate of cynicism, non-responders and failed heroes. Day is proposed as a genuine hero who demanded of her admirers that ‘they also join the work’ thus promoting praxis over piety. While Day finds an intellectual home within Gadamer’s criteria of ‘word *and* deed,’ philosophically, she is invested in Buber’s call for community and his thinking about our complex humanity. With Bakhtin, Day shares a construct of the ‘no-alibi’ conscience.

## DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my beloved daughter.

Maureen Fitzwilliams

1961-2003

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

With inestimable gratitude to Dr. Ronald C. Arnett, Dr. Janie Harden Fritz, and with heartfelt thanks to my family and the Catholic Worker Family.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

This dissertation considers the embedded narrative of Dorothy Day as a rhetoric of defiance and devotion interpreted by selected metaphors associated with Martin Buber and M. M. Bakhtin. Set against the historical moments of the twentieth century, Day now presents a hermeneutic consideration of praxis and philosophy, authenticity and obligation, and how the turbulence of eight decades of social, political and (for her) philosophical and spiritual change reflect a rhetoric of co-existing defiance and devotion.

Day continues to intrigue us on many levels, and like the *Catholic Worker* organization that continues her work, she defies simple categorization. Professor Carole Jablonski terms Day a “saintly deviant” and “a rhetorical resistor of heroic ascent [whose] unusual combination of orthodox piety and radical politics keep the dialectical interplay alive” (Jablonski 29-47).

Sister Brigid O’Shea Merriman holds that, although primarily spiritual, Day was also “both God-directed and other-directed” (viii). Merriman explains that her scholarship regarding Day addresses “the creative tensions that existed between Dorothy Day’s spiritual maturation and the religious and social context in which she lived” (ix). Gary Wills describes Day as a “Working Saint” whose spirituality was secondary to her praxis (Wills “Saint”). J. Edgar Hoover found her less than saintly. Her extensive FBI file portrays her thus: “Used by communists,” documenting “Dorothy Day [as] an erratic person who makes every effort to castigate the bureau” (as qtd. in Riegle 177).

In her daily practices, with both caution and enthusiasm, Day negotiated Buber’s “narrow ridge” (Buber, *The Way* 110). Her early years reflect a life of radical causes and

protests, an arrest and hunger strike for the right of women to vote, a tragic love affair, abortion, marriage and divorce, and a loving but ill-fated union resulting in the birth of her only child, Tamar Batterham Hennessey. In 1933, at the height of the Great Depression, and after her conversion to Catholicism, Day and her spiritual partner Peter Maurin would go on to establish the Catholic Worker Movement, later described by historian Mel Piehl as: “the first major expression of radical social criticism in American Catholicism” (qtd. in McCoy 4).

Day and Maurin decided the Catholic Worker would have three aims: first, to enact “Houses of Hospitality” to house and feed the disenfranchised; second, to publish a Dorothy Day-edited peace and justice newspaper for “the clarification of thought;” and thirdly, to establish community farms of work, prayer, and education, where “it might be easier for people to be good” (Elie, *Patron* 71). A half century of Day’s uncompromising and unprecedented blend of secular agitation and spiritual praxis would follow, seeming to echo an American version of what Russian theorist M. M Bakhtin had, in 1923, termed our “no-alibi” call to conscience (Kelly 203).

In like manner, Day’s unique sinner-saint identity elicits consideration of primal realities, often at odds with established power, what Bakhtin terms the carnivalesque (*Rabelais* 260) where response can—and should — defy accepted visages of authority. In 2001 no less an authority than the Archbishop of New York, Cardinal John J. O’Connor, proposed Day for sainthood, seeming to ignore her oft-quoted carnivalesque response to such an intention. As cited by Day bibliographer Anne Klejment and others, Day’s retort to such a suggestion was invariably: “Hell no. I won’t be dismissed that easily” (Riegle 193)

Current scholarship indicates that Dorothy Day is unlikely to be dismissed, at least in the immediate future, as volumes of ambitious efforts to finally “situate” Dorothy Day continue. , These works often find what Michael Garvey terms “a very *challenging* heroine” (Garvey, *On Pilgrimage* xi) and who, as Patrick Allitt observes, might be: ‘Too interesting to be a Saint.’ Allitt explains:

Like Saint Paul, Dorothy Day went through a dramatic conversion, she was fearless, lived a life of heroic poverty and loved the poor and went to prison for her pacifism. She obeyed church teaching, almost to the letter, even at her most defiant, she radiated spiritual integrity. She was injudicious, and even if it is tempting to call her a ‘fool for Christ’ . . . sometimes she was just plain wrong. (18).

To be sure, Day’s single-mindedness earned her criticism. She rarely regarded acceptance as a gauge of action. Allitt references this aspect of her story when he goes on to quote historian James Fisher: “Day’s *Catholic Worker* included something to displease almost everyone” (as qtd. in Allitt 18).

Day’s narrative is therefore never static. It is one of questioning and challenging the hubris of power while acknowledging our obligations toward one another. Running through this is the thematic question: *Why and how did she do it?* This inquiry serves as a guarantor of further dialogue, and by implication further considerations of complexity, ontology, paradox and potentiality. Perhaps just as important is her accessibility, since the narrative of Dorothy Day is within recent memory. Clearly, she provides a response to present-day ontological searching for what it means to respond as *truly human* within a postmodern communicative world desperate for *authenticity*. Said another way, in our

present hero-less climate of materialism and cynical response, Dorothy Day embodies, to use common parlance, “the real deal” since Day’s authenticity is associated with both “word *and* deed” (Arnett, *Dialogic* 17-19).

Narratives of authentic “saying and doing,” such as Day’s, are currently in short supply. Indeed, it is this paucity of ‘word *and* deed’ that Ronald C. Arnett and Patricia Arneson recognize when they reflect on the truth of Ellul’s statement: “We live in a time, in which the harmony of word and deed needs to be rebalanced” (qtd. in Arnett, *Dialogic* 17). This observation references similarly the hope of Hans Georg Gadamer’s statement for “the need for the Doric harmony of *logos* (word) and *ergon* (deed)” (qtd. in Arnett, *Dialogic* 17).

This disconnect between what is said and what is done has, according to Arnett and Arneson, contributed to the understandable cynicism associated with an era of “fragmented and defrocked narratives” (Arnett, *Dialogic* 17-19). Such “defrocked narratives” are surely plentiful within the current atmosphere of “neurotic guilt,” which is similar to what Buber claims diminishes the preferable “authentic guilt” that is so necessary to a “healthy call to connection and a moral story” (Arnett, *Dialogic Civility* 246). Currently our media appears to be fed on stories that joyfully expose hypocrisy, scandal and sorrow, reflecting our fascination with “finding people out.” This is not a new communicative endeavor, it would seem. Aristotle speaks to this phenomenon of “what people appear to be—and what they truly are” when he writes of “a man who pretends to greater qualities than he possesses [is] a vile person” (*Nichomachean* 1127b. p10).

I warrant throughout this offering that Day never pretended to be anything—or anyone—other than what she was. Hers is a narrative of *Authenticity*, one of corresponding words and deeds played out against the flashpoints of most of the last century. It is the embedded narrative of a lived life of response to the evolving public and private events of an era that is, for the most part, still within our collective memory.

When persons work as embedded agents within a given narrative structure, their lives take on the form of embedded narratives. One of the means by which narratives respond to questions of a historical moment is through the actions of such persons, actions which “re-envision” the trajectory of that narrative as it encounters new moments. In this sense, “authenticity” of a life emerges as the action of a person consistent with a narrative—in Fisher’s terms, narrative coherence, which must be lived out in concrete action in everyday life. Yet these actions may refigure the narrative as they meet the horizon of tradition and give it new interpretive resonance with a given historical moment.

Authenticity, as a state of being, needs to be extracted from abstract terminology and placed within concrete happenings which provide not only concepts but contexts as well. This particular offering enlists hermeneutics as a guide in uncovering and relating what Gadamer terms “concept history” (*Reader* 21) by which we are cognizant that “All expectations of the future, however, rest on experience [where] the past is at play” (*Reader* 198). Gadamer references the context of the past, present and future when he writes of “the truth of remembrance with what is still and ever again real” (*Truth* xxiv). He then metaphorically and poetically situates the authenticity of the hermeneutic experience as “gazing at a sunset while anticipating sunrise” (*Truth* xxiv).

This story, this narrative, with hermeneutics as a guide also enlists the illustrative power of *metaphor* to bring into focus the ideas and ideals that align themselves with the subject of the narrative, Dorothy Day. Thus it is Buber and Bakhtin who serve to furnish the framing metaphors and the philosophies which help illuminate and illustrate much of Day's intriguing narrative. However, it is the embedded narrative, the unfolding of a story, which claims place of primacy, and as such, the concept of narrative itself, as a term employed in a variety of contexts from the personal to the public, which is now duly considered.

## Why Narrative?

One might rightly ask: Why a narrative effort? And, by extension, how does the account of one lone woman provide us with a potential hermeneutic entrance for consideration of the public and private relationships between our flawed sensibilities and our present communicative climate of virtue contention, classified as our “After-Virtue” existence by Alasdair MacIntyre? (*After Virtue* 226). Also, in the embedded narrative of Dorothy Day, we are therefore additionally called to explore some implications of story-telling itself, its implication for communication scholarship.

Ronald C. Arnett has recognized the potentiality associated with “story-propelled people of faith.” He writes: “In the area of religion, narrative ethics has been re-visited. The response to inquiries of this kind is perhaps best expressed by recognizing the power of a story-propelled people of faith . . . each historical moment calls for the narrative of the faith in yet another unforeseen way, finding metaphors to connect the story of faith with where we are situated, permitting knowing action of interpersonal praxis to guide us together” (*Communication* 160-161).

Narrative considered within a philosophical sense is, according to Calvin Schrag, helpful because it “helps us explain ourselves to ourselves,” and, by doing so presents “differences” (89). Narratives point out how persons can differ, and by doing so, they highlight the biased ground of human existence, permitting an honoring of difference and otherness. This is what Ronald C. Arnett, Janie Harden Fritz, and Leeanne M. Bell point to when they hold that bias is everywhere and it is recognized as important. It is an admission of standpoint (Arnett, *Communication Ethics*). Calvin Schrag, in a similar

observation, argues: “seeking to understand within a context of differences is older than religion itself and it resists overtures to ecclesiastical colonization” (39).

In a related observation, Daniel Herwitz adds another remark which includes a caution about philosophy taking itself too seriously, for which narrative offers a remedy. “Philosophy turns to story-telling when it believes itself in need of instruction [about] how it, as a form of inquiry, should better be living its life when it gets off its high horse, and returns to the flux of life’s entirety” (as qtd. in Scruton 9). Philosophy of communication with its insistence on the value of lived experience, embraces the value of narrative, pointing us to a hermeneutic entrance of meaning for everyday life.

In other words, narrative provides a framing ground for lives and how they are lived, supplying the ground from which they spring, and in this mode they also employ a sense of the *exposition* of our human drama. In doing so, narratives invariably, if at all remarkable, generate interest in the particular lived experience of particular persons—the story of a given life within a larger narrative. The current culture of reality shows and the phenomenon of *Facebook* and the like, might attest that we are all fascinated with the intricacies of each other’s stories. Day’s remarkable story is one that resists neat and tidy explanations. She herself often observed: “Life itself is a haphazard, untidy, and messy affair” (Day, *Selected* xxxix).

Philosophically, Calvin Schrag, in keeping with his theory of self-recognition, has written that narrative importantly cautions against focusing more on the ““what” and less on the “who” (78). He links the “stories that we tell in our narrational experience [to] an overlapping and entwinement of scientific, moral, and artistic meanings” (32). Schrag values narrative in terms of its power and its potentiality, both in the stories of others and

the stories of the developing 'self,' believing: "the future of narrative time is the self as possibility, the power to provide new readings to the script. . ." (37).

Narrative, then, has power. James William McClendon is an admirer of narrative and regrets its tenuous hold in academia. He observes the "problem with teaching Ethics in our present age is that they have not included the study of Biography" (14). He qualifies that opinion by suggesting that, "of course, above all, the story must be human and interesting. The reader must be engaged, if not, no argument for its legitimacy will compel our attention" (203). From a perspective of philosophy of communication, biography is situated and grounded in the structure of meaning supplied by a larger petite narrative, moving the person studied beyond the status of "individual" to "embedded agent" or "person," a point implied in the work of Ronald C. Arnett on Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Arnett, *Dialogic Confession*). The temporal movement of a life, likewise, takes on narrative form, moving the discrete details of a life from "list" to "story" as the "embedded narrative" emerges (Browning, *Lists*).

The accounting of Day's life has revealed a search for such meaning. It is presented in narrative form using the metaphor "tool" to help illustrate her search. Why metaphor? McClendon says metaphor is instrumental in presenting meaning and arousing and maintaining our interest (96). This, he warrants, has been pointed out by Max Black, John Wisdom and others. John Wisdom, in particular, says: "Metaphor may be decisive in forming a judgment or guiding our action" (qtd. in McClendon 96). Therefore, it is almost expected that, in addition to metaphor, the narrative itself must also meet an essential criterion [of]: "Is it interesting?" (McClendon 96). "Interesting" from the perspective of philosophy of communication moves beyond a psychological rendering of

that which piques curiosity. A narrative that generates “interest” from a philosophy of communication perspective is one that offers the possibility of hermeneutic entrance into a narrative, an entrance made possible by a human face no longer visible physically in this world, but made real in story form through concrete actions of that person, actions emerging from an embedded narrative.

Narrative, then implies, in a sense, “exposition” of the human drama lived out while we make our way along our public and private “narrow ridges” of choice and change, living as the ‘unity of contraries’ which coincides with our humanity. In this manner, narrative, the recounting of a life story, generates interest as hermeneutic entrance into a particular personal narrative, in this case that of Dorothy Day, and by extension into the larger public narrative of the Catholic Church which is interpreted anew by her own life’s concrete action as an embedded narrative of defiance and devotion.

It is hoped that this consideration of the embedded narrative of Dorothy Day, illustrated by the metaphors of Buber and Bakhtin, may possibly initiate a call for a contemporary alternative to those who now mistrust such narratives or, perhaps, simply view them with suspicion. There is a reason for that mistrust. As Arnett and Arneson point out, we can now look back and credit the events of the McCarthy era, Watergate, Vietnam and similar events as “creating a history of deception [that] has created a cynical social structure” (*Dialogic Civility* 23).

Current disappointments within cultural, educational, political, and, most recently, financial spheres continue the inheritance of suspicion and cynicism. Although such cynicism is understandable, Arnett and Arneson believe that when it is routine and unreflective it ceases to “protect us” and instead becomes debilitating, making difficult,

if not impossible—the ideal “wedding of cynicism and hope” which takes into account “the contrasting sides of the human spirit” (*Dialogic Civility* 23). To counter routine cynicism, we need interesting stories that provide entrance into narratives framing the world with a new “why” for existence.

Day’s narrative is certainly indicative of the “contrasting sides of the human spirit” and she stands up to scrutiny in no small part because her “clay feet” are joyously exposed. Thus, her story is one which aspires to being accepted into what Arnett and Arneson define as: “Narratives [t] begin with one voice [and] that make enough sense that others begin a similar practice” (*Dialogic Civility* 304). From the perspective of rhetoric and philosophy of communication, and as a model of *praxis* for those seeking a standard bearer of care for others, Dorothy Day permits the emergence of authenticity and *praxis* over both certitudes and cynicism.

Carol Jablonski is right when she terms Day a “rhetorical resistor.” She observes that it is “the dialectical interplay of orthodoxy and rebellion that marked Day’s life [which] keeps alive a rhetorically evocative counterpoint to more literal ways of remembering her” (29). Perhaps this “doubt” in situating Day might even provide a threshold for the legitimization of doubt itself, to combat what Michel Foucault says is “the self-imposed legitimacy denied to anyone else—by those who find identity within a kind of perverse unwillingness” (*Ethics* 112).

In other words there is a qualified *value* in embracing doubt; doubt has its role to play. “Doubt forms the basis of our life as effective deed-performing and it does so without coming into contradiction with theoretical cognition” (Bakhtin, “Toward” 45).

*Certainty* is no friend to the evolving hermeneutic experience. Doubt was a part of Day's persona also, addressed by the daily recitations of favorite Psalms, particularly Psalm 131: "I have stilled and quieted my soul" (Ps131). During her correspondence with Thomas Merton she wrote: "I am often full of fear and doubt about my final perseverance" (Jordan, *An Appetite* 17).

This particular effort, then, has three thematic aspirations. First, it presents the narrative of Dorothy Day, a particular human story within a larger narrative tradition, her life as embedded narrative, as situated within the historical moments of the last century. Second, the thinking of Martin Buber and M. M. Bakhtin is presented within selected metaphors, allowing for a hermeneutic entrance into Day's communicative rhetoric of devotion and defiance. Third, some of the implications of Day's contemporary significance are presented in the hope of keeping alive a dialogue of authenticity and potentiality, a dialogue which warrants a realistic and human "hero" to emerge as an embedded agent living an embedded narrative, embracing as true the observation of Hannah Arendt: "In order to go on living, one must escape the death involved in perfectionism" (Arendt, *Almanac* 2).

## **Methodology**

I employ an interpretive methodology to examine the life of Dorothy Day and the controversies and meaning surrounding her life and work. The next section provides a brief introduction to Buber and Bakhtin, two philosophers whose work will provide a lens through which to view Dorothy Day. For each thinker, I offer a synopsis of his selected metaphors that will serve to illuminate the narrative of Dorothy Day. These metaphors

also engage a preview of their initial engagement with Day and serve as illustrative precursors for the unfolding of her narrative within the chapters of the dissertation.

Also included in this first chapter is a preview of the titled chapters and their contents to present a preliminary introduction of how each of the following chapters is structured around the illustrative metaphors. The metaphors of Buber and Bakhtin then serve to introduce the individual chapters, are referenced throughout the presentation of the narrative itself, and play an integral part within my interpretive analysis at the close of each chapter.

This dissertation, is, again, primarily an embedded narrative which relays Day's life story within an informal chronological order, illustrated and interpreted by the thinking of Bakhtin and Buber. To provide additional context and insight, I employ also the work of scholars, theorists, commentators and others who contribute to understanding Dorothy Day and the implications she suggests for us in this current challenging and diverse historical moment. Interpretation plays its part throughout.

## **Interpretation**

Since this work is an *interpretive* effort, it is important to consider, before we meet Buber and Bakhtin and then proceed to Day's narrative, some aspects of interpretation itself, specifically as it relates to knowledge, understanding, and seeking and presenting "the truth" through hermeneutic interpretation. Simply stated the question is: how is it that we "know" and then relay that "truth" to others? This is the hermeneutic concept which has been academically considered by many, over many historical moments, from interpretations of early texts and gospels to more recently, the thinking of Hans Georg

Gadamer who sought to “rehabilitate prejudice and the place of tradition” (Gadamer, *Truth* 484).

In other words, we are not, as John Locke points out, the *tabula rase*, the blank tablet (Cambridge, *Locke* 508). We understand and interpret because we have already interpreted something else, thus taking part in what Gadamer views as a fluid hermeneutic approach to knowledge. Gadamer writes: “Hermeneutic reflection, on the conditions of understanding, makes it quite clear that this type of understanding can be articulated in a reflection which neither starts at zero nor ends in infinity” (Gadamer, *Reader* 28)

Yet what else is involved in understanding, both as premise and praxis? This is the subject of “autobiographical reflections” in which Hans Georg Gadamer addresses understanding itself and makes interpretation part of this process. Gadamer explains in this manner:

Over the years what I have tried to teach, above all, was hermeneutic praxis. Hermeneutics is primarily a practice, the art of understanding and of making something understood to someone else. It is the heart of all education that teaches how to philosophize. In it what one has to exercise, above all is the ear, the sensitivity for perceiving prior determinations, anticipations and imprints that reside in concepts. (Gadamer, *Reader* 21).

Practical reasoning speaks to hermeneutic reflection, and Gadamer contends that language plays its important part within the “hermeneutic problem.” In his “Autobiographical Reflections” chapter of *The Gadamer Reader*, Gadamer writes that this “problem” arises because we do not have a common language that means the exact

same thing to all. Thus “the possibility of reaching and understanding between rational beings is sought but not guaranteed through a form of the Socratic dialogue where questions, verifications, and productional increments aid in reaching at least a modicum of knowing exactly what the other means”(Gadamer, *Reader* 25)

Suffice to say that Gadamer provides a way of understanding ‘Understanding’ itself through a form of constructive hermeneutics: the idea that we can interpret (and reinterpret), seek the truth and at same time admit to our prejudices and allow for tradition. For Gadamer, “the criterion of ‘truth’ is, then, worked out retrospectively” (Thistleton 115). This is the part which research then plays. The hermeneutic researcher forages, finds, judges, and disregards—and searches anew: seeking out many memories, facts, understandings, perspectives and then hopefully arriving at an interpretation which honors: “. . . a discipline of questioning and inquiring that guarantees truth” (Gadamer, *Truth* 484)

Storytelling and narrative play a large part in hermeneutic interpretation. Much of the work done by this researcher over the last few years has resulted from not only the expanding Day scholarship but also from visits to Maryhouse in New York and stories and conversations with many Catholic Workers, particularly Bill Griffin, Joanne Kennedy and Jane Sammon. They and others have been invaluable in furnishing details left incomplete as a result of Dorothy Day’s reticence and modesty. No doubt she (Day) would be amused, if not amazed, at the attention she now receives. The Dorothy Day interpreted within this dissertation and by this author aspires to meet Gadamer’s ideal of: “What is morally imperative is not in judging others but in the assumption of [the] truth of the standpoint of the other person” (Gadamer, *Truth* 29).

Interpretation, then, is a “sticky wicket” to use an archaic phrase. However, it is more or less the only “wicket” we have in taking what we “know and understand” and transcribing this as Interpretation. This concept is evidenced further along within this dissertation when Day’s “definers” are presented within the fifth chapter of this particular effort. These various scholars and “interpreters” call on their own metaphoric methods to illustrate and ‘define’ Day. However, for us, the indigenous metaphors which we now consider to illustrate, illuminate, and in a sense, interpret Dorothy Day are those of Martin Buber and M. M. Bakhtin, and it is those philosophers, along with their “Day connections” which we now present.

### **Martin Buber**

The three selected metaphors, which aid this offering, are three which are closely associated with Martin Buber. They are “community,” “the narrow ridge,” and “the unity of contraries.” Buber taught through these three metaphors during a long life, which, like Dorothy Day, reflected complexity, hardship, and faith. In 1938, Martin Buber (1878-1965) left Nazi Germany to make his home in Palestine, and there he served as professor of social philosophy, earning a reputation as an exiled philosopher and a proponent of the Jewish homeland. In the late nineteen forties, Buber supported ‘undertakings of mutuality’ in the government sponsored communities of the newly formed State of Israel. He describes the kibbutz as “. . . the hallowing of the everyday—the redemption of evil through the creation of human community in relation to God” (Friedman, *A Life* 282).

Buber, therefore, shares with Dorothy Day a belief in community and the value of encounter. Understandably, his view is from a Talmudic perspective of people living together with an intention of harmony and communal welfare, one that differs in

implementation, but not intent, from Day's aspirations for a Christian community which she envisioned, which appeared in keeping with Franciscan ideals of holiness and aligned with Benedictine hospitality (Coles xii). For Buber, the kibbutzim experiment is critically important since it embodies his thinking regarding community, dialogic teaching, and encounter. Buber observes: "There are two forms, indispensable for the building of the human life, to which the originary instinct, left to its own, does not and cannot lead. They are sharing in an undertaking, and entering into mutuality" (Buber, *Between* 113).

Robert Coles notes the mutuality which Day, in like manner, also espoused: "Day sought to live in a community of people devoted to the moral teaching of the Hebrew prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos and Micah and of course those of Jesus of Nazareth" (LL 5). Moreover, Coles comments that the fellowship of the early Christians also provides a template for Day's contemporary communitarian aspirations, which is the type of religious faith not only espoused, but actually lived (Coles xii).

After community, perhaps the most well known of Buber's metaphors is "the narrow ridge." It is a metaphoric phenomenon described from the perspective of a philosopher, dialogist, and mystic. In its dialogic formulation, it relates to the "in-between" and the "third" which prompt consideration of encounter, and by extension, the complexities of the life of response. Buber writes: "In its most powerful moments of dialogue, where in truth, deep calls into deep, it becomes unmistakably clear that it is . . . the third which draws the circle round the happening . . . on the *narrow ridge* when I and Thou meet, there is the realm of the 'in between'" (Buber, *Man and Man* 246).

Maurice Friedman, in his book, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue* explains the “narrow ridge” as the “in- between” of complex decision, which involves purpose, and nuance, choice and change. Friedman says Buber has an insistence on both “the concrete” and “the concrete complexity and paradox of existence” (Friedman, *Martin* 1). Buber, in his role as mystic, observes: “Inscrutably involved, we live in the currents of universal reciprocity” (Buber, *I and Thou* 65).

Human complexity is addressed by Day’s journey of choice and change along the ‘narrow ridge’ both before and after her conversion. Day describes her search for completeness, a search affected by ‘*The Long Loneliness*.’ Much has been made of her choice of that title for her one and only autobiography. Harvard psychiatrist, Day friend and biographer Robert Coles interprets the “long loneliness” of Dorothy Day as an “existential longing.” He says: “Day hungered for answers to the big questions of *how* one ought to live this life, where and in what manner, and for what purpose” (LL 5-6).

Perhaps it might be said that the “narrow ridge” is where we walk but within the “unity of contraries” is where we live. Maurice Friedman, in his book, *Encounter on the Narrow Ridge* quotes Buber’s 1948 book:

According to the logical conception of truth only one of two contraries can be true. But in the reality of life as one lives it, they are inseparable. The person who makes a decision knows that his deciding is no self-delusion; the person who has acted knows that he was, and is in the hand of God. The *unity of contraries* is the mystery at the innermost core of dialogue.

(as qtd in Friedman XXX).

Day was certainly familiar with Buber and admired him (*Loaves* 224), and, in many ways her story is one which demonstrates how we can be simultaneously both secular and spiritual. Day writes: “I don’t draw a distinction in my mind between secular idealism and idealism in the service of God” (Coles, *Radical* 25). Like Buber, Day acknowledged we inhabit a moral milieu of less than perfect choices, noting “there is that love-hate business in all of us” (Little 144). Buber scholar Avraham Shapira quotes Buber as saying: “Conscience is something found within us . . . only a tool, indeed imperfect, but capable to some degree of heeding the absolute demands that come to me from time to time. The believer calls that absolute authority *God* . . .” (Shapira 174).

Day, by her very contrariness, lends legitimacy to the paradox ideal explored by Buber within his “unity of contraries” and within the often enigmatic and contradictory choices made on the “narrow ridge.” It is paradox, enigma, conscience, and now the element of absurd protest, which now finds a philosophical home within the thinking of our next contributor of metaphor: Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin.

### **M. M Bakhtin**

Although Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin finds his identity primarily as a literary theorist, much of his thinking has been expanded in recent years beyond his original renowned theories regarding what was termed *dialogism*. As a Russian Orthodox Christian before the 1917 revolution, and a veteran of exile and prison afterward, Bakhtin understandably steers clear of explicit mention of religion in referencing rules of behavior in finding meaning. Instead, he identified himself as a “social anthropologist,” one associated only with a “feeling for faith” (Fletcher 5).

Even so, Bakhtin's "no alibi" theory ignites the unavoidable demands of reciprocal consciousness, a theme found within the lived life of Dorothy Day. Along with this theory, Day's embedded narrative, particularly in the area of protest, aligns itself with Bakhtin's observations regarding the absurd nature of protest responding to our primal realities: his thoughts on what he calls the carnivalesque.

In the carnivalesque metaphor of Bakhtin, simply stated, this is where absurdity challenges authoritarian "truths" and absurdity wins. "The feast grants a right to Folly" (*Rabelais* 260). In Bakhtin's *Rabelais and his World*, he describes the time-honored tradition of carnival, by which medieval rules were "turned inside out" by often bawdy mock-kings and jesters, fueled by primal sensibilities, and expressed (albeit temporarily) through absurd revelry and folkloric humor (*Rabelais* 260).

In this manner, Bakhtin views how the carnivalesque "tricks" the establishment, through absurdity and protest, to discover how "things might yet be." Aileen Kelley interprets it as "exhibiting a primal sense of truth" through "liberating laughter" which "frustrates all attempts to enclose human beings within the confines of systems" (Kelly 196-197). Bakhtin's *Rabelais*, asserts: "We do not hear the voice of the people and cannot find and decipher its pure and unmixed expressions" (*Rabelais* 474). In other words, too often we unthinkingly follow "the rules," placing blind obedience ahead of what might be commonly termed "following a higher call."

Dorothy Day certainly demonstrated the "voice of the people" and often incorporated a Bakhtinian carnivalesque form of irony as a vehicle for stating her case. This portrayal is evidenced in the 1973 Bob Fritch photo of the indomitable Dorothy

pictorially depicted as a “weak old woman” arrested by gun-toting deputies while supporting Caesar Chavez’s efforts to organize the United Farm Workers (Forest 123).

Absurdity, then, and sometimes parody, as idealized by Bakhtin, and as demonstrated by Day, finds a cathartic and liberating laughter in the defiance of the totalitarian aspects of unquestioned adherence to authority. For Bakhtin: “Fear is the extreme expression of narrow-minded and stupid seriousness, which is defeated by laughter [and] complete liberty is possible only in the completely fearless world” [thus] “Laughter liberates us from external censorship” (Coates 135), a sentiment shared by Dorothy Day and lived out within her appreciation of humor and absurdity. The New York Post reported that her early sixties civil defense protests were: “Laughter in the Park” (Forest 100).

Bakhtin’s second metaphor, that of the demands of unavoidable reciprocal conscience, addresses a conscience of decision making which has evolved from post-Enlightenment thinking, where “reason and decision inform action” (Thistleton 74-75). This theory is also reflective of Kantian thinking which, according to Roger Scruton holds: “Conscience also coincides with the Golden Rule: ‘Do unto others as you would be done by’” (Scruton 285-286).

For Bakhtin, these theories are manifested within our “no-alibi” condition, by which we are bound by unwritten rules of conscience, the type which then demands response, without exception, in dialogue, and by extension, in life. Bakhtin argues: “A philosophy of life can only be a moral philosophy [because] a life that has fallen away from answerability cannot have a philosophy; it is in its very principle fortuitous and incapable of being rooted” (“Toward” 56). It follows then that, for Bakhtin “pure solitary self-

accounting is impossible” (“Toward” 56). In Bakhtin’s early essays, particularly his “Author and Hero” essay, he speaks to the concept of “the non-alibi of Being.” He insists: “A place for God is opened up [when] I overcome in myself the axiological self contentment” (*Art and Answerability* 144).

In his “Toward the Philosophy of the Act” essay Bakhtin goes on to further explain how our “non-alibi in being” resides in each of us (Bakhtin, “Toward”). So, for Bakhtin, the idea of non-response is therefore unacceptable. Additionally, if we attempt to shift our personal responsibilities on to ideologies and systems, Bakhtin exhorts that: “We become imposters and pretenders” (Kelly 203). Day, as well, thought that we really have no other choice but to respond to encounter with responsibility. Throughout her life she lived out that metaphor.

It is the within the embedded narrative of Dorothy Day that we find reflected Bakhtin’s “no-alibi conscience” and it is within her defiant demands for economic and social justice that we find the mirroring of Bakhtin’s ideals of absurd protest found within the power of his metaphor of “the carnivalesque.” These metaphors, like those of Martin Buber, serve as philosophical and metaphoric lenses which in turn, aid in both the telling of, and the understanding of, Day’s embedded narrative. Arnett discerns this point by observing: “Metaphor is the linguistic implementer of narrative; it points the communicator in a given direction in concert with appropriate historical necessity” (Arnett, *Interpersonal Praxis* 141).

So, it is these five metaphors: Bakhtin’s “carnivalesque” and his “no-alibi” of conscience and Buber’s “community,” the “unity of contraries,” and the “narrow ridge” which are enlisted to illustrate a hermeneutic entrance into the rhetoric of defiance and

devotion of Dorothy Day. There is yet one other contextual reason narratives like Day's are significant: It is because they cause us to consider our own individual lives. "Their lives give witness to their vision, even as they challenge the depth of our own" (McClendon 110).

As an overview of how this effort is contextually constructed, a chapter by chapter preview is now presented to briefly acquaint the reader with some key constructs which additionally help to weave the fabric of the embedded narrative of Dorothy Day.

### **Preview of Chapters**

This offering engages Day contextually. After this first chapter which has provided a brief overview of the theory and methods used, her narrative then unfolds within the succeeding five chapters. Each chapter is introduced by exploring briefly the metaphor which best illustrates Day's narrative at that point in time and each chapter ends with an interpretive analysis which serves to further flesh out the implications of the life events and historical moment considered. Since Day and the twentieth century were birthed at approximately the same moment, her story is played out against a dramatic background of some of the critical changes of the last century. These provide Day, as a significant rhetorician of communication, frequent and ample opportunities for her distinctive brand of defiant and devotional response.

Chapter Two is titled "Conscience," and it considers the first thirty years of the life of Dorothy Day within a general construct of the concept of response to conscience, specifically as witnessed within M. M. Bakhtin's metaphor of our "non-alibi conscience"—his term for the inescapability of response to "the other." This part of her story includes her early influences, her family background, education, and her initial

encounters with radicalism, her personal disappointments and her struggles with the “long loneliness.” It is within these exciting and turbulent early years of the last century, where Day’s “call to conscience” emerges, depicting her as a conscience-driven rebel, journalist, bohemian, and finally a reluctant convert who finds, after many false starts, an authentic synthesis for her spirituality and radicalism.

Chapter Three, “Community,” presents Day as illustrated and considered through Buber’s metaphor of “community.” It covers Day’s meeting and subsequent spiritual partnership with Peter Maurin and their experiment of “living out the Gospels” through the Catholic Worker organization which they then established at the height of the Great Depression. The decades which follow situate Day as a controversial figure, engaging the public community with her journalistic efforts and her unique and relentless approach to public protest. By mid-century, her motives and her “defiance and devotion” were well known. They were examined in an unwelcome *New Yorker* article, which termed Day “a modern day saint,” causing Day, with characteristic contrariness, to state: “I will not be dismissed that easily” (Riegle xiii).

The fourth chapter of this offering, “Communication” is illustrated by Buber’s metaphor of the “unity of contraries,” which depicts Day in her role of communicator. It uncovers Day as a complicated communication figure: as an editor, journalist, author, a devout Catholic and yet a defiant and often imprisoned agitator. As a Pacifist, Day’s rhetorical responses to three armed conflicts are duly examined, as well as her journalistic efforts in reaction to the social, economic and cultural changes of the times. In her last decade, Day’s continuance of unfiltered responses to cultural changes is also explored, as well as her response to feminism, and the difficulties inherent in being “very human” yet

labeled “religious.” Her involvement with a controversial method of worship, the “Lacouture retreat,” is scrutinized, both as an influence in her life, and an irritant after her death in November of 1980.

Chapter Five, “Defining Day” summarizes the Day narrative and goes on to delve into Dorothy Day’s journey along what Buber describes as “the narrow ridge.” This, simply stated, is a path of decision, choice and change, involving the human condition. This chapter reviews how she is presently interpreted; her thinking, her controversies, potential sainthood and her influence are revisited within the comments of several “interpretive and defining” scholars, including biographers Sister Brigid Merriman, Robert Ellsberg, Robert Coles, Jim Forest, Elaine Murray Stone, David Scott, June O’Connor and Rosalie Riegle. Additionally, Day’s family contributes their thoughts on how Day should be “defined.”

Chapter six is titled “Potentiality” and is the final chapter of this offering. It endeavors to consider some implications of what Day can mean to us today, in our present historical moment which is sadly lacking communication figures such as Dorothy Day. Within several private and public venues, Day’s “value” for us today is explored. Then, in keeping with the premise that Dorothy Day’s humanity can potentially provide a counterpoint to our current cynicism, several scenarios are duly explored where her place in the Academy as a communication role model is explained and recommended

Implicit throughout this offering is the hope that further Dorothy Day scholarship might then subsequently spark the type of academic thinking which might promote her embedded narrative as not only addressing Day as a religious icon, but also within a context of her “authenticity and her humanity.” Such thinking might then acknowledge

the premise that growth comes not from hard and fast truisms, but rather, like the narrative of Dorothy Day, in evolvment which allows for the imagination of what yet might be. As Hans Georg Gadamer informs us: “Ultimately, it is Imagination, not Method, which leads to knowledge worth knowing” (Gadamer, *Reader 75*).

As we now present the actual chronological life and life events of Dorothy Day, we aspire to present her respectfully and honestly; paying equal tribute to her complexity and to her simplicity, her defiance and her devotion. In this way her embedded narrative speaks to an effort to provide, not only a life story, but also, as Gadamer has aspired to: “Knowledge worth knowing” (Gadamer, *Reader 75*). We begin Day’s chronicle by first considering Day as illustrated by Bakhtin’s “no-alibi of conscience.”

## Chapter Two

### Dorothy Day and ‘the No-Alibi of Conscience’

How we act in response to one another, particularly to those in need has prompted M. M Bakhtin to make a philosophical connection among conscience, responsibility, and praxis as inextricably linked components for living a moral life. “A philosophy of life can only be a moral philosophy...a life that has fallen away from answerability cannot have a philosophy, it is in its very principle fortuitous and incapable of being rooted” (“Toward” 56). Moreover, Bakhtin warrants that, in fact, we have little choice, but to recognize the needs of “the other” and, in truth, “no alibi” for not responding. “Bakhtin insists that a properly ethical relation to the other and the acceptance of genuine responsibility requires the presence of a loving and value-positing consciousness” (Bell 131).

Dorothy Day, whose embedded narrative we now initiate, explains the communication principle more succinctly: “We are our brother’s keeper, whatever we have beyond our own needs, belongs to the poor” (Day, *Loaves*. 92). It is this ideal of Conscience that serves as a template and an inspirational construct in which her early formative life events are examined: her choice of heroes, lovers, influences, controversies and friends, lived out in response to the turbulent historical moments of the early twentieth century.

Day and Bakhtin’s embrace of conscience are then re-visited at chapter’s end to provide an interpretive analysis of this intriguing first part of the life of the woman who Thomas Merton has indicated was “the conscience of the church, [because] Day spoke up where church leaders failed to do so” (Merriman 121). Her embedded narrative begins

at the end of the nineteenth century: a time of promise, hope and change for the new American century.

Dorothy Day was born into a “non- religious” family in the Bath Beach section of Brooklyn on November 8, 1897. Her parents were John Day, an itinerant newsman and sports reporter, and Grace Satterlee Day, who were married in 1895 at the Perry Street Episcopal church in the Greenwich Village section of New York City. The marriage produced five children and the family, according to Dorothy Day’s description, was not particularly religious or even occasional church-goers, even though theirs was a home where certain behaviors were expected.

In her 1951 autobiography, (noted throughout this work as LL) *The Long Loneliness*, Day recalls: “Very early, we had a sense of right and wrong, good and evil, and helping others. My conscience was very active” (LL 17). She explains: “We did not search for God when we were children; we took Him for granted” (LL 17). The vacuum created by the seeming indifference of her parents to religious instruction had an effect on Day’s memories of early childhood.

“I did not think of Jesus as God. I had no one to teach me, as my parents had no one to teach them” (LL 21).

Although prayer was only a small part of her early schooldays routine, it was used in earnest during Dorothy’s experience of the San Francisco earthquake of 1906. The Day family had relocated to California in the hope of establishing her father as a sports reporter. The natural disaster was terrifying for the eight year old Dorothy. “The earth became a sea which rocked our house [and] when the earth settled our house was a shambles, cracked from the roof to the ground” (LL 19). This “world of catastrophe”

witnessed by the youngster had a significant positive effect however when she participated in “the joy of doing good, and in the sharing of whatever we had with others” (LL 21).

John Day refused Red Cross relocation aid, choosing instead to sell the few remaining household possessions and head to Chicago where steady employment continued to elude him, as did his dream of authoring a “best seller” (Stone 6). Day’s father was, by most accounts, an elusive and complex figure. Dorothy remembers him as “proud to have made the Saturday Evening Post [but] even more proud of his identity as co-founder Florida’s Hialeah racetrack” (LL 26).

From her father Dorothy received her love of the written word, but not his distrust of “foreigners’ and agitators.” “He hated and distrusted change [especially] the radical movements which my sister [Della] and I would eventually become involved with” (LL 26). The relationship of John Day to his children, particularly his daughters, was never close. Dorothy recalled: “He carried a Bible with him and read Shakespeare, his writing about racing and racetracks were filled with Biblical and Shakespearean allusions” (LL 26). The home atmosphere was insular; friends were rarely permitted to visit “because it interfered with my father’s privacy.” Dorothy contends, that: “Thanks to my father I was a child until I finished high school” (LL 25).

In the *Windy City* of Chicago, the Day family’s reduced circumstances allowed for a small apartment over a tavern on thirty-Seventh Street. Grace Satterlee Day appears to have been a woman who tried to provide some gentility in a home which now included John Day Jr., the treasured baby of the family. The apartment was only two blocks away

from Lake Michigan where Day would often take her younger siblings to stroll, but rarely to swim, as two neighbor children had drowned there (Forest 9).

The neighborhood included “railway tenements” occupied by large Catholic families which John Day dismissed as: “R. C’s who belonged to the religion of washwomen and cops” (Day, *Duty* 626). Upon witnessing a neighbor woman, Mrs. Barrett, on her knees at prayer, the impressionable Dorothy was struck with an unfamiliar emotion: “I felt a burst of love which I have never forgotten, a feeling of gratitude and happiness that warmed my heart” (Forest 9).

Day’s budding curiosity about her neighbors and their religion christened a search for knowledge about the saints. Her friend Mary Harrington “knew about the saints, who I had never heard of.” In these stories of conscience and martyrdom, Day uncovered what she termed: “a thrilling recognition of the possibilities of the spiritual adventure” (LL 22).

Biographer Elaine Murray Stone views this as a period of Day’s life as formative. She posits the theory that Dorothy was not sufficiently understood as a child, neither by her distant father, nor by her overworked mother (Stone 8). Yet it was not a childhood entirely devoid of happiness. Day and her sister Della enthusiastically play-acted “being saints” (LL 25) finding both amusement and comfort in the rituals of their neighbors. “In the deprived conditions of a Chicago slum, it was [observing] religion which brought Dorothy Day her solace” (Stone 8).

An additional source of comfort for the young Dorothy *Day* was her voracious reading. Biographer and former Catholic Worker Jim Forest notes that from age ten Day had become a “passionate reader [which was] a habit that accompanied her all her life” (Forest 11). Reading was an essential of childhood life and its effects were real and

immediate. “For Dorothy, literature was an instrument through which her religious sensibilities were awakened and reawakened, and her awareness of social needs strengthened” (Merriman 25). Much later, in reply to how she might like to be remembered, Day connects her reading and her religion. She says: “I’d like people to say ‘she really did love those books’ [and] she tried to live up to the moral vision of the church and some of my favorite authors” (LL 4).

### **Reading: Conscience as Inspiration**

Although by most standards quite modest, the Day residence was a literary home with “trash” books excluded, and replaced by the works of Edgar Allen Poe, Victor Hugo, Robert Louis Stevenson, Shakespeare and Charles Dickens (LL 25). At the urging of the local Episcopal minister, the Day children were baptized in the Episcopal Church where the Day brothers were quickly enlisted to sing in the choir. Their sisters, especially Dorothy, found the newness of the religious worship stimulating, particularly those rituals which involved singing: “I had never heard anything so beautiful as the *Benedictus* and the *Te Deum* [and] wanted to cry out for joy” (Forest 10).

Dorothy informs us that the Psalms quickly became her favorite source of lifelong inspiration (Day, *On Pilgrimage* 3). They become her source of inspiration and comfort, mentioned often in her diaries and public writings. Even as an elderly woman, Day continued to be thrilled at their interpretations, noting in 1977: “C. S. Lewis’ chapter on Scripture in *Reflections on the Psalms* is just wonderful!” (Day, *Duty* 547). Sister Brigid O’Shea Merriman, O. S. F. is a Catholic nun and Day biographer who explains Day’s thinking in this manner: “The sure confidence in God’s mercy which found its way into

Day's spirituality was based on a positive anthology which runs through the Psalms" (Merriman 103).

In her personal reading the young Dorothy Day was drawn to themes of temptation and redemption, social injustice, and vivid descriptions of the plight of the poor Her "heroes" were found in the works of St. Augustine, Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, and, in particular, within the works of the Russian Prince, Peter Kropotkin. (LL 36-39).

Day's fondness for reading the Great Russian writers is well documented. Jim Forest notes that "Kropotkin was the first of her treasured Russian writers, which include Chekhov, Gorky and especially Tolstoy and Dostoevsky [and] the last two she will read, year after year, until the last week of her life" (Forest 15). In Kropotkin Dorothy had located a real person, a Russian scientist who had renounced his aristocratic origins for writing about revolutionary class struggles (Forest 12). In *The Long Loneliness*, Day explains how Kropotkin and Sinclair motivated her:

Kropotkin especially brought to my mind the plight of the poor, the worker, and though my only experience of the destitute was in books, the very fact that 'The Jungle' was about Chicago—where I lived—whose streets I walked upon made me feel, from then on, my life was to be linked with theirs, their interests were to be mine; I had received a call, a vocation, a direction to my life. (LL 38).

With Kropotkin as an initial entrance into "revolutionist" reading, the schoolgirl Day then went on to research the heroes of the Haymarket martyrs of 1887 and the Molly Maguire's of coal mining lore (LL 46-47). These icons and others of the emerging modern labor movement engaged and inflamed the young conscience of Dorothy Day and her autobiographical reminiscences testify to her early ardor. Day wrote of those

discoveries: “They were martyrs! They had died for a cause. [and] my heart thrilled at the women who led the first strike to liberate women and children from the New England cotton mills” (LL 46-47).

Dorothy Day was an excellent student. An upturn in the Day family’s financial fortunes led to a new address and an expanded personal reading list which included a second-hand copy of the *Greek New Testament*, which she promptly translated from Greek to English (Forest 12). At sixteen she won a scholarship to the University of Illinois at Urbana. It was a two hour train journey from home and a place where the liberating college life allowed for camaraderie within the campus writers club (Day, *Selected* 220).

Exposed to new ideas and new people who shared with her a praxis-oriented idealism, Day and Jewish friend Rayna Simons soon joined the local chapter of the Socialist political organization. Why the Socialists? “They were the only ones who were doing anything. . .the landlords, the political affiliates, all professed *Christians* were rotten to the core!” (Day, *Selected* 220).

After the family’s 1916 move back east to New York, the nineteen year old Day, armed with a two-year college education, obtained a job as “girl reporter” for *The Call*, a Socialist newspaper at five dollars per week. She may have been hired by other newspapers but her disapproving father had in advance “warned them off” (Forest 17). This is the father to whom present day historian Garry Wills (and others) ascribes the quote: “Dorothy was the nut of the family” (Wills 45). The historical moment was one, for the young reporter, that offered opportunities to see firsthand the pulse of urban life. Day’s personal and professional observation of New York’s desperate poor brought

feelings of desolation—what Day references as her first real experience with “the long loneliness” (LL 51).

This “loneliness” is a periodic sadness that will haunt her for her entire life; she mentions it frequently in her writings and titled her autobiography *The Long Loneliness*. Today, the postmodern writer might at least momentarily hesitate over that term as a form of self-identity, in light of its association with what we might now term “clinical depression.” For Day it appears it was less of a chronic condition and more of a form of “manageable melancholy,” never evidenced as standing in the way of her conscience-driven activities. Robert Coles terms it “an existential longing for what was to come” (Coles 64). Toward the end of her life, Day will write: “I am still much tempted to depression [but] I am a pipsqueak compared to Miriam (a friend) who has come out of four years of depression!” (*Duty* 591).

Low spirits were rarely found, however, in her social life as a young reporter. Writing, reading and exuberant discussions permeated the exciting Greenwich Village scene of the period surrounding the ‘roaring twenties’ in which Dorothy Day discussed, among other things, conscience and its role within the public sphere of journalism and writing. Mel Piehl writes that Day’s “gift for friendship, along with her personal sensitivity, and striking good looks earned her a reputation among New York’s intellectuals” (Piehl 13). However, Dorothy Day was even at that time of her youth, somehow “different.” She was not a reporter of just the factual happenings of the exciting era: “What distinguished her [Day] was the intensity of her ‘seeking’”(Piehl 13).

She became friends with people who will later become well known: for instance, writers Eugene O’Neil, John Don Passos, Hart Crane and the then essayist for Life

magazine, Malcolm Crowley. She quickly bonded with Crowley's girlfriend, the bohemian artist Peggy Baird. The female friendship of Day and Baird was a mutually valued and supportive constant for them for the rest of their long lives.

Less comfortable with the "liberals of the arty crowd" (Forest 18) Day recalls she preferred instead her radical associates who were answering their call to conscience and trying to change the world. Among them were the members of the International Workers of the World: the "Wobblies" activists. Day shared their admiration of "Joe Hill," the labor organizer who had been executed by a firing squad in Utah, but whose "song" was heard on every picket line (Forest 19). The "vocation" which she had felt as a call of conscience now called for action: "I wanted to go on picket lines, to go to Jail, to write and to influence others and [by doing so] make my mark on the world" (LL 60-61). Religion faded into the background somewhat: "I was in love with the masses who had replaced the Christ who was two thousand years dead" (LL 46).

Anne and Alice Klejment, compilers of a 1986 Day bibliography, observe that many of these associates joined the Communist party in hopes of creating a better social order. The Klejments also relay Day's regret that she never met the often arrested anarchist Emma Goldman. Goldman, who was later deported, worked during the same approximate time period, for a New York Journal called *Mother Earth* which advocated noncompliance to WWI military conscription (Klejment xi).

Later in the century when Day initiated the Catholic Worker Movement, the same Emma Goldman is identified as an "amazed anarchist" at the novelty of Catholic radicalism. Goldman is reported to have commented: "This is a new one on me. I have never heard of Catholics being Radical" (Klejment xi).

## Conscience and Radical Response

In the decades to come, arrest and imprisonment, would become a commonplace experience for Dorothy Day. However, in the historic moments surrounding WWI, she was, as yet, still an idealistic, young and somewhat naïve journalist whose developing conscience demanded response and participation, as well as reporting. Furthermore, at this time the harsh reality of what it meant to be both conscientious and radical was only starting to materialize in the life story of the woman who, later in the century, would be described as “the most influential American Catholic in one hundred years” (Forest 156).

In early 1917 Day had been clubbed by policemen during a New York riot (Forest 21) and later, as a reporter for *The Call*, she was arrested at a protest with the Industrial Workers of the World. (Day, *Writings From Commonweal* xii). Both were frightening experiences. For Day, it was her eighteen day incarceration in the fall of the same year which would remain burned into her consciousness. “Never would I recover from this wound. . . this ugly knowledge I had gained of what men were capable of in their treatment of one another, the ugly sense of the futility of human effort, triumphed over by the mighty” (LL 79).

This “ugly knowledge,” painfully obtained, was an allusion to how, along with Peggy Baird and thirty-seven other suffragettes, Day was arrested for protesting for the right of women to vote. The location they had strategically chosen was directly in front of Woodrow Wilson’s White House. They were sentenced to Occoquan, a prison known for its brutal treatment of its inmates (Scott, *Praying* 29-30).

Conscience and radical response differed vastly in actual practice compared to altruistic theory. Day lasted for eight days of a hunger strike, finding comfort from

isolation and deprivation only in a “rediscovered Bible” (LL 83). Almost a half-century later, the consequences of her first real experience as a “prisoner of conscience” still brought forth painful and complex memories: “I was ashamed by my suffering [because] again, my rejected religion helped me when I was brought to my knees” (LL 83).

Sister Brigid Merriman interprets Day’s anguish thus: “The source of her pain was threefold: first she felt a sense of shame for turning to God in despair; second, she realized the need for personal conversion before any revolution could be successful; [and] finally she suffered in solidarity with the entire human family” (Merriman 14).

Day’s return to New York elicited a wild abandon to a freedom matched by the exuberance of the WWI era. Since conscription had reduced the ranks of male reporters, Day found herself in a position of prominence within the journalistic community, particularly the community of journalists whose writings went against the popular sentiments of the time. As one of her last interviews with the declining leftist newspaper *The Call*, Day interviewed Leon Trotsky who then returned to Russia to become a participant in the November revolution and subsequently a leader of the USSR. (LL 64).

When *The Call* became *The Masses*, Day was re-hired and initiated a close friendship with Mike Gold, a co-writer who “would sing both in Yiddish and English” (Forest 22). Gold would later become editor of the Communist newspaper, *The Daily Worker*. Another friend was Agnes Boulton, and she and Day found an apartment together before Boulton married Day’s literary cohort and drinking companion, the playwright “Gene” (Eugene) O’Neill (Forest 30-32).

Their heady lifestyle of the “roaring twenties” emerged, often at saloons like the “Hell Hole” a nickname for the Golden Swan, a place where Day fondly recalls:

“No one ever wanted to go to bed and no one ever wished to be alone” (LL 84).

Often, after a long night of drinking, O’Neill would recite the Francis Thompson poem, “The Hound of Heaven” which describes God’s relentless pursuit of each person’s soul. This “hounding of the soul” by a saving presence fascinated Day—with the “inevitability of its outcome” (LL 84). It is this “inevitability factor” which is echoed within Bakhtin’s “no-alibi conscience,” a concept linked with Day and more fully discussed at this chapter’s end.

### **Love and Conscience**

Although Day was an eager participant in New York City’s vibrant literary and social scene, she felt also a need to respond more fully in an immediate way to her “call of conscience.” Affected by the poverty of what we now might term “street people,” she was struck also by the brusque treatment of them by the police, and the not much better missionary stance of local charity organizations (Stone 31). Translating her radical response into a form of praxis which would also satisfy her conscience, Day temporarily took leave of her journalistic endeavors. She thought if she were more skilled she might then combine her love of humanity with a much-needed paying job. Not yet twenty-one, Dorothy Day entered nursing training at King’s County hospital, “a decision which would affect the rest of her life” (Stone 32).

At the busy city hospital, Dorothy Day met and fell desperately in love with an orderly by the name of Lionel Moise, who, among other things, had been an actor, sailor and a rewrite man for Ernest Hemmingway at the *Kansas City Star* (Forest 35). Dorothy loved fiercely but not wisely. Her personal conscience which held pre-marital sex sinful was ignored and replaced by an intense committed love, of which Moise was either

unable or unwilling to return. Day moved in with him and when she became pregnant, he insisted she terminate the pregnancy by (a then illegal) abortion. Biographer Elaine Murray Stone writes: “While she [Day] was having the procedure, he packed his things, left her forty dollars, and moved out, leaving a note that said she should find somebody rich and marry him” (Stone 33).

A “fatal attraction” is how another biographer, Jim Forest, describes the Day-Moise relationship, since even this does not end her pursuit of Moise who had quickly left New York. Forest quotes the emotionally fragile Day as saying “she wished her death would coincide with moment Moise stopped loving her” (Forest 36).

The aforementioned Sister Merriman is yet another Day scholar who has written an extensive biography of Dorothy Day. In it Merriman writes that included in this period of Day’s early conflicted life, there is the possibility of one (or two) suicide attempts “which confirm the turmoil she was experiencing” (Merriman 16) and “it also explains Day’s compassion for suicide victims who she knew at various points throughout her life” (Merriman 231).

A few months later, Dorothy Day, seemingly following Moise’s advice, married Berkeley Tobey, a wealthy founder of the Literary Guild, who was twenty years her senior. The “rebound marriage” lasted one year, some of it spent in Europe where Day started her only novel, *The Eleventh Virgin*. David Scott calls the book “a painfully transparent autobiographical novel” and Robert Coles describes it as the “wretchedly plotted account which Day will later confess to wanting to find and burn every copy” (Coles 6)

Day's return to Chicago, still contrarily still in pursuit of Lionel Moise, was a disaster. She was arrested, along with Moise's current girlfriend Mae Cramer, for being inmates of a "disorderly house," a legal term for a house of prostitution. Her cell-neighbor this time was a drug addict who howled constantly and beat her head against the bars. After two days the charges were dropped and Day, now finally disillusioned with Moise, left Chicago with friend Mary Gordon for New Orleans (Forest 39-41).

Her radical conscience was now tempered by painful experience. Day now knew the disappointments of an abandoned lover, the miseries of imprisonment, and the emptiness of a life devoid of meaningful worship. It was her devotion to reading the Scriptures which provided her a lifeline (Forest 39-41). She was beginning to awaken a conscience which now involved spiritual response. Her life would soon change to include a welcome "natural love," one she will credit as leading her to a synthesis of spiritual and radical response: what this dissertational offering has termed "a rhetoric of devotion and defiance."

#### Spiritual Response to Conscience

In New Orleans Day obtained a by-line on the *New Orleans Item* and actually became a "taxi dancer" to lend authenticity to her investigative reporting. One of her stories was titled: "Dance Halls flooded by Dope and Drink" (Forest 41). While in New Orleans, Day felt the call for a more spiritual form of response within her life. She went to various churches, but her favorite was down the street from the apartment which she shared with friend Mary Gordon, who was also a communist and the person who gave Day her first rosary (LL 108).

The church where Dorothy went to pray was the St. Louis Cathedral. She found herself going back often to attend mass and to observe the ritual of Benediction in which the Holy Eucharist was displayed from the high altar (Forest 41). Day felt a longing for a community in which she would share her ideas of conscience. She felt the dawning intuition that “Catholicism was something rich and real and fascinating” (Forest 40).

In true journalistic mode, Day researched the Roman Catholic mass, the rituals, and other facets of Catholic doctrine and worship. She spoke with her co-workers, one of whom lent her a copy of a book by Joris K. Husysmans. Within this book, and others which she researched, Day found her initial introduction to the lives of the saints, the early Christian martyrs, the history of monasticism, the oblate tradition, and the mysticism associated with the historic Catholic Church. Day was pleased with what she learned. Merriman interprets Day’s thinking at that time in this manner: “She [Day] thought she may have uncovered an approach to spirituality which might eventually incorporate her radical conscience with a deeper form of spiritual response” (Merriman 73).

Merriman then additionally claims that it is improbable for Day, at this point, to have understood fully the intricacies of either the Catholic Church or even the complexities of the Joris Husymans work: “Like many others of her era, Dorothy searched for a sense of solidarity with others, and for direction in integrating various aspects of her life, both of which she found [eventually] as a member of the Catholic Church” (Merriman 73). However, this eventual membership in the church was not to take place for several years hence, since in addition to a heightened spirituality, Day also

received word that her novel had been purchased by Hollywood and her much desired return to New York was now economically possible (LL 109)

In the spring of 1924, Dorothy returned to New York to her circle of friends which included former Occoquan cellmate Peggy Baird who had married Malcolm Crowley. Day resumed her active social life. At a Greenwich Village gathering, she was introduced to the biologist-anarchist-atheist Forster Batterham who was a brother-in-law of philosopher Kenneth Burke. Forster's sister, Lily Batterham Burke, was Burke's wife and a friend of Dorothy Day, as well (Forest 42). Day remembers: "At that time Kenneth was translating and editing *The Dial* and writing the first of his strange books" (LL 114).

### **The Costs of Conscience**

Forster Batterham and Dorothy Day began an intellectual and physical relationship which soon developed into what Day, in the parlance of the time, termed a "common law marriage" (Scott 17). They moved in together, first in an apartment in the city, and then into the beach retreat on Staten Island which Peggy Baird had persuaded Day to buy with the earnings from Day's novel. Day was now the wife (albeit common-law-wife) of "the man I loved" (LL 134). Beach living for Dorothy and her partner, as she describes it, was idyllic and full of the human interactions of good but eccentric neighbors, including a lion tamer and several bootleggers (purveyors of illegal liquor), and close and interesting friends (LL 118). Day's brother John came to stay for a while and frequently her sister Della came to visit (LL 129-132).

Prohibition had become the law of the land, even though homemade liquor was readily available at the bungalow parties which became Day and Batterhams' social life. Jim Forest describes the neighborhood and the experience as "a writer's hermitage,

encompassing the four happiest years of Dorothy Day's life" (Forest 62). Here, only a ferry ride away from Manhattan, Day read, went boating, walked the beach, fished, and studied the stars with her beloved Forster (LL 113-127)

By now, secure in her personal relationships, Day was somewhat less of a radical. "My radicalism at that time was confined to conversations and community weekend beach parties with Communist friends. I was not a card-carrying member but I admired the dedicated lives of party members" (LL 115). Now, she began to feel within herself a budding, yet insistent, call to spirituality and the type of conscience which lent itself to working with and for the poor (Coles, *Radical* 43).

Her former comrades had extolled "sharing the wealth," and that idea had appealed to Day. However, it was a book of essays by William James which awoke in Day the idea that poverty, when combined with a religious vocation, might be an even more worthy personal philosophy. The idea of the "unbribed soul" (LL 119) began to make sense to her, even though it was an idea not shared by her lover, Forster Batterham (Forest 43).

Forster Batterham helped Day combat her "long loneliness" and she credits him with what she termed "natural happiness" (LL 113). "He used to insist on walks no matter how cold or rainy the day and this dragging me away from my books, my lethargy, into the open, and into the country, made me begin to breathe. If breath is life, then I was beginning to be full of it because of him" (Forest 43). Their relationship was in keeping with their bohemian community, and yet Day was not completely satisfied. "I was happy, but my very happiness made me know that there was a greater happiness to be obtained from this life that I had ever known" (Coles, *Radical* 42).

The community which now began to appeal to her was the Catholic Church which she had researched during her stay in New Orleans. Day knew that this was a flawed institution, full of past mistakes and, at least in her present estimation, a church which showed little interest in radically changing the sources of poverty and injustice. Much later in her life Day will tell Robert Coles how she was gratified when she came across the thinking of Romano Guardini who had fervently cautioned: “One must be in a state of permanent dissatisfaction with the Church” (Coles, *Radical* 51).

This notion of “challenging authority,” while at the same time “belonging,” made sense to Day, even though talk of religion recoiled her partner. Nevertheless, she, much to the consternation of Batterham, started to attend daily mass, and “say” the Rosary on the beads given her by her communist roommate in New Orleans. “Maybe I didn’t say it correctly, but I kept on saying it because it made me happy” (Forest 45). She re-read *Imitation of Christ*, the *Lives of the Saints*, the Bible and *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Scripture also continued to sustain her, particularly her beloved Psalms (Forest 46).

In 1925, Dorothy Day realized two things: first she was pregnant, and second Forster Batterham would never marry her. As an anarchist, he refused to be associated with state or church (Stone 45). While satisfied with their “natural love” and their “common-law marriage” to this point, Day now realized that her spirituality and desire for Baptism for her child were two insurmountable obstacles which would shortly change her life forever, and there was no “going back.”

“Moral Combat” is how Day described childbirth in an article for *The New Masses* (Coles 9). When Batterham heard of plans to baptize Tamar Teresa he left, returning

intermittently to a more religious, and less satisfactory, partner (LL 148). Day was torn, knowing that if she were to embrace the Catholic religion, its gain would mean a major heartbreaking loss as well—of a lover, the father of her child, and of the companionship and sensuality of that relationship. He and she live in their beach cottage but he refuses to be “a hypocrite by marrying her.” Day is not without regret that this newfound vocation would rob her of her partner when she writes: “ I loved him. It was killing me to think of leaving him” (LL 148).

“It was not that I had grown tired of sex, as radical friends used to insinuate, it was because through a whole love, both physical and spiritual, that I came to know God . . . .the sexual act itself was used again and again in Scripture as a figure of the beatific vision” (LL 140). She writes in her candid autobiography of the sensuality which was hers and Forster’s:

I loved him in every way, as a wife and even as a mother. He came in from the pier smelling of seaweed and salt air; getting into bed cold with the chill November air. He held me close to him in silence loved him for the odds and ends he had to fish out of his sweater pockets I loved his lean cold body when he got into bed, smelling of the sea, and I loved his integrity and stubborn pride.

(LL148).

Day relates her extraordinary dilemma: “It got to the point where it was the simple question of whether I chose God or man” (LL 140). The situation was indeed life-changing and the outcome is well known: “It was not that she denied her love for Forster or any other person but rather that no human love alone could satisfy her hunger to be united in Christ” (Merriman 167).

Finally, after months of tension, and a diagnosis of a “nervous condition” from the Cornell clinic, Day locked Batterham out for the last time “making an end to the torture we were undergoing” (LL 145). Shortly thereafter, Dorothy Day was baptized into the Rites of the Catholic Church (LL 147).

Day and Batterham will fairly sever their connection at this point, even though, remarkably, he will in 1959, enlist Day’s help in caring for Nannette, his dying companion and Dorothy’s successor (*Duty* xviii). In the years to come Batterham will be a largely absent parent to his daughter Tamar, meeting with her only at holidays, yet Tamar will walk with him at her mother’s funeral mass in 1980 in keeping with Dorothy’s request (Riegle. 111-114).

Tom Cornell manages the Catholic Worker Farm in upstate New York. He remembers watching Batterham join his grandchildren and the intellectuals of New York City at a later celebration mass offered at St. Patrick’s Cathedral. In his interview with Rosalie Riegle, Cornell remembers thinking: “What is going on in this guy’s mind? He loved Dorothy in a way no one else did [and] she never really got over him. What does he think when he walks into this space, hears the choir, looks at the Cardinal and twenty-three priests? All for this woman” (as qtd. in Cornell 115).

### **Devotion and Defiance: Conscience Synthesized**

To be sure, Dorothy Day, in her early years of her conversion, was not a “humble Catholic.” With the termination of her relationship with Batterham, Day proceeded to fill her private hours seeking understanding and knowledge from a variety of texts. She writes of finding agnostic Williams James more inspirational than the pious saints suggested by her spiritual advisor, Sister Aloysia. She describes herself as “reluctant,”

and “still seeking” (Merriman 21). As a student of history Day was aware of the “frequent dichotomy between the doctrinal ideals of the Catholic Church and their human implementation by church members” (Merriman 21).

Day thought the church she was entering had done good work in addressing the *after-the-fact* need for “charity,” but, drawing on her Socialist background, she now envisaged a practice which would provide a conscience-inspired response to address the “causes of the poverty and injustice [and] the kind of response that would also allow for dignity and worth” (LL 110). Such plans do not come into early fruition, however, because as a working mother, Day must first provide for herself and for her young child.

The next few years finds Dorothy Day writing for *Commonweal*, and *The Sign*, both Catholic publications, and adjusting to life as a single parent. In the late twenties she accepted an offer as a “dialogue writer” for *Pathe* in California. The salary was one hundred and twenty-five dollars a week (Forest 53). Yet, Hollywood was not Day’s favorite place and when her contract was not renewed, she and young Tamar journeyed to Mexico, avoiding the dawning and the early devastation of the Great Depression, and living inexpensively in Mexico City, and then, somewhat primitively in Xochimilco. The illness of Tamar forced Day to return to the New York, and there she witnessed and wrote about the devastating effect of the wide-spread unemployment (LL 156-162)

Day estimated the numbers of the unemployed at twelve million. “In New York on every vacant lot down by the river, there were *Hoovervilles*, collections of jerry-built shanties, where the homeless huddled in front of their fires” (Day, *Loaves* 4). Official statistics indicate that twenty-five per cent of American workers were unemployed or

under-employed, a situation worsened by the flight to urban areas by families who had lost farms from foreclosure or crop failures (Smiley, *Great Depression*)

On December 8, 1932, Day, as a reporter for *Commonweal*, witnessed the absence of Catholic leadership at a large Washington D. C. demonstration for workers and farmers relief. The demands of the “hunger marchers,” as Day termed them, reawakened her radical conscience. She noted many of the “ragged and rugged” were communists and were her former comrades (LL 166).

Saddened at her inability to “do something,” Day visited the under-construction Shrine of the Immaculate Conception on the campus of Catholic University. There, she prayed that, if God would show her the way, upon her return to New York, she would “do something with her life that will please him and honor her commitment to his works” (Forest 55). She asked that the “vocation” she might be granted would include an outlet for her literary talents, and a full and real praxis response which will somehow help the poor and those affected by injustice (Forest 55).

The “answer” to those prayers appeared the following evening at the Lower East Side apartment shared by Dorothy, Tamar, and Dorothy’s brother John and his wife and child (Merriman 29). Peter Maurin, dusty and disheveled, arrived and insisted on waiting for Dorothy’s return from the nation’s capital. In what seems to be a nod toward Bakhtinian carnivalesque sensibilities, John Day Jr. was taken aback by the rants and disheveled appearance of the talkative French eccentric who spoke of the Christ of conscience and response (Day, *Loaves* 6). Dorothy Day, amused, later reported: “John feared he was one of the crackpots from Union Square” (Day, *Loaves* 7).

Day and Maurin will shortly establish the Catholic Worker community: an unprecedented American-based organization, now worldwide, which will have as its cornerstone what M. M Bakhtin terms our “no-alibi conscience.” Nancy Roberts, another Day biographer, views Day as truly representative of the spirit of Christ’s teaching: “Dorothy Day was one of the Catholic Church’s most devoted consciences, never chiding the church for what it taught, only for its failures to live up to its teaching” (Roberts 106). As we close this first chapter, the implications of Day’s life up until this point are further considered and interpreted within the framework of the illustrative metaphor most closely associated with M. M. Bakhtin: “The No-Alibi of Conscience.”

### **Interpretive Analysis: Dorothy Day and ‘The No-Alibi Conscience’**

Privileging the first thirty years of the narrative of Dorothy Day is what M. M Bakhtin has termed our “no-alibi conscience.” This is a specialized form of conscience which demands not only the recognition of “the other,” but also warrants an inevitable answerability of responsive praxis. Day, as demonstrated by the choices she made within this first chapter, and the moral philosophy she embraced, actually lived out this Bakhtinian metaphor: “A philosophy of life can only be a moral philosophy...a life that has fallen away from answerability cannot have a philosophy, it is in its very principle fortuitous and incapable of being rooted” (“Toward” 56).

From her early days as a budding radical, through her personal and professional experiences, Day felt an inescapable presence, a nagging voice recalling perhaps the “Hound of Heaven,” which her companion O’Neill had recited in their bohemian “Hell Hole” of lower Manhattan. This “hounding,” this “inevitability,” is the part of Bakhtin’s

thinking which extends the idea of recognition of “the other” into response and responsibility and subsequently accountability for the same said *Other*.

Bakhtin’s metaphor of conscience and response therefore provides an illustrative metaphor for the first part of Dorothy Day’s life: a life which now appears in perfect alignment with Bakhtin’s clarifying statement which addresses the place of God within the paradigm. “Pure solitary self-accounting is impossible. A place for God is opened up [when] ‘I overcome in myself the axiological self contentment’” (*Author and Hero* 144).

The Day-Bakhtin comparative construct does not end with their mutual demand for responsibility and accountability. Both Bakhtin and Day had also been imprisoned: She, for ideals of radical protest, he, for “ideas which might ferment rebellion”(Kelly 194). In 1929 Bakhtin was arrested for essays which he had written in the early days of post-revolutionary Russia which were later determined by the Stalinist regime to be potentially subversive and promoting faith and the ideal of individual conscience (Kelly 194).

In approximately the same time period of the early nineteen twenties, both Day and Bakhtin had come to realize what he will articulate as faith-filled destiny when he famously asserts: “There is no alibi for being” (Morson 31). In this statement Bakhtin, like Day, admits that to be alive is to be responsible. Rooted in this same ideal is Day’s adherence to her beloved Dostoevsky’s character of conscience, Aloysha, who says: “We are all responsible for each other, but I am more responsible than others” (Levinas, *Reader* 1).

This last statement articulates the extraordinary life and indeed, situates the conscience and communication message of the embedded narrative of Day. By realizing that conscience invoked recognition, and recognition then invoked response, Day had

been brought to the ‘accountability’ aspects involved in encounter: a concept further explored by Emanuel Levinas later in the century within his philosophical writings about the unavoidable response to the “face of the other” (Levinas, *Reader*).

Day, however, had always possessed a yardstick of sorts by which she (both pre and post conversion) used to determine the “ethical ought.” Anne Klejment relays that Day, more than once, said: “Conscience is supreme” and then illustrated her belief by concurring with John Henry (Cardinal) Newman who was reported to have said: ‘If I have to choice who and what to dedicate a toast to [a choice of] either Pope or Conscience, I would then choose conscience’ (as qtd. in Klejment 298).

Thus, this ‘no-alibi’ conscience was situated in Day’s early response to the injustice found in the denial of a woman’s right to vote, and it was found additionally within her involvement in other “radical” causes such as public pacifism and the concept of organized labor. Post conversion to the Catholic Church, she unapologetically retained her allegiance to the radical “conscience” aspects which she had embraced as a young Socialist, even though she embraced the ideas of “not giving scandal” by her distanced public alliance with her former comrades (Stone 57).

Before we leave this second chapter which has explored Dorothy Day and the concept of conscience as a sense of consciousness in keeping with Post-Enlightenment thinking, it may be a worthwhile side issue of sorts to also consider somewhat the overall idea of conscience. To be clear, the conscience referenced in this work is the type of conscience *that knows the needs of others* and can choose (or not) to respond. It is not “conscience” which *determines what is right and what wrong*.

Henry Sidgwick in his 1874 work, *The Methods of Ethics* alludes to conscience by admitting we make decisions according to what one ought to desire not necessarily what one does desire (Sidgwick, *Methods* 507). However, to love oneself to the exclusion of anything or anyone else is mostly unhappy egotistic: “He is made to feel the discord between the rhythms of his own life and larger life” (Sidgwick 499).

Another thinker about conscience is found in the earlier personage of Bishop Joseph Butler (1692-1752) who is credited with refuting the view that all motives can be reduced to the desire for pleasure or happiness. (Cambridge, *Butler* 109) The idea explored was that “conscience-driven acts” are meritorious if practiced, but also perhaps tinged with emotion and egotism. Butler’s analysis of conscience is that it is “superior principle” connected with “principled reflection,” and at the same related to a juxtapositional tension between benevolence and indulgent self-service (Cambridge, *Butler* 110).

Bishop Butler considered the intricacies of self-love, settled principles of benevolence, and the factor of human motivation. Was response to conscience in actuality, either a form of prideful self-satisfaction, or was it conversely, a connection with the divine, a fulfillment of a spiritually inspired altruism? The alleged incompatibility between this dichotomy was considered by Butler who could not confirm or deny the inaccuracy of either argument, earning for him the dubious distinction that he is responsible for the differing value systems and vacillations of ethical theory in our modern world is less than absolute (Thistleton 81).

In the final analysis, however, Butler aligned himself with thinking that while conscience has aspects of self-service, it is primarily situated in our best intuition and

character. It is best explained by its relationship to “our instinctive God-given conscience [and that is what] makes moral agency possible” (Cambridge, *Butler* 110)

In more recent times the traditional ideal of ‘conscience’ appears to find an intellectual home as a connective in accepting or refusing our responsibility and obligations toward one another, particularly those less fortunate than ourselves (Rickaby, *Catholic Encyclopedia*) and it is within this frame of reference which Day’s response to conscience is considered.

The conscience-based community which will shortly be co-founded by Dorothy Day could not have been foretold as she made her way home from her Washington D. C. assignment. She loved the church which she had joined, yet it really had no outlet for her particular brand of response to the problems which she had formerly addressed as a secular radical (Forest 55). Mel Piehl explains her situational quandary with this quote: “The Catholic Worker Movement, which Day and Maurin which will establish, would become a unique branch of Catholicism which had not existed before” (Piehl 24)

So, on that winter day in 1935, on her doorstep in New York, she found Peter Maurin waiting, the person with whom she will go on to establish an community which has been described in myriad ways, perhaps most descriptively as: “An adventure . . . a radical Christian movement and community which still represents an ongoing effort to live out the gospel in community, with the poor, and in the service of peace” (Ellsberg, *Saints’ Guide* xvi).

The next chapter provides a continuance of the Day embedded narrative as she goes on to co-establish a community which Chris and Wayne Barrett describe as “an

extraordinary lay movement community which departed from the centuries old Catholic custom of religious orders in meeting the needs of church and the world” (Barrett 1).

To aid in the telling of this next part of Day’s life, we initially enlist the thinking of Martin Buber regarding his metaphoric ideals on the concept of *community*, since it is “community” which will allow for not only a home for Day, but also a vehicle for the enacting of her vocation of defiance and devotion.

## Chapter Three

### Dorothy Day and Buber's Metaphor of Community

Martin Buber observes: "There are two forms, indispensable for the building of the human life, to which the originary instinct, left to its own, does not and cannot lead. They are sharing in an undertaking, and entering into mutuality" (Buber, *Between* 113). "Men who long for community [also] long for God" (Buber, *Reader* 251).

"A longing for God" also pervades the narrative of Dorothy Day. This longing was a real presence in her life, evidenced within her early diaries and her autobiography which she significantly titled *The Long Loneliness*. In her early years, she had felt comradeship but not real spiritual kinship with the community of activists who had shared her views. Throughout a tempestuous youth, marked with disappointing personal relationships, Day had frequently sought the comfort of friends and friendships. Now, after her decision to convert to Catholicism, she was spiritually comforted but still devoid of the mutuality of purpose which much of her former life had experienced. Even though supported emotionally by her child, her brother John, and her sister Della, Dorothy still felt a vacuum that even her new religion did not ease. It was a longing for community, since, as her one biographer tells us: "Dorothy could not bear to be alone" (Stone 45)

Asher D. Biemann tells of what is surely a similar longing for community when he discusses Buber's observations about the place of God and the place of community. Biemann asserts: "The realization of God, for Buber, amounted to the realization of humanity" (Buber, *Reader* 7). Day, by this time had "realized God" but had not yet found a deep sense of solidarity within her new religion (Coy 2). She needed someone who shared her view that radicalism and spirituality were not such strange bedfellows. Day

became enamored of the following quote which she used to remind others of the duality of holiness and praxis: “There is nothing so radical, or so subversive, as Christianity” (Scott, *Praying* 21).

By the early thirties, Day had given up most of her old comrades as close associates, finding her new religion somewhat more focused on patient forbearance and personal salvation than in advocating change of the social order through communal activities (Piehl 17). Therefore, she was more than a little skeptical of the role of American Christianity, particularly the passivity of the Catholic Church. “Rather than strengthening man for involvement in this world,” Mel Piehl writes of Day’s observations, “she thought religion seemed to confirm [a sense of] weaknesses and a form of self centeredness” (Piehl 17).

Within the Catholic Worker movement, Day will come to find not only her vocation in working for the poor and for peace and justice, but she will also find the love and kinship of a much-needed community. The last lines of Dorothy Day’s autobiography explain this thought further: “We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love, and that love comes with community” (LL 286).

This third chapter of Day’s ‘rhetoric of defiance and devotion’ develops within this context of Day’s Community: its participants, costs, conflicts, motives and its more than abundant controversies. While Dorothy Day, in the capitol of the United States was praying for a community which would allow her access to mutuality of purpose, on the other side of the Atlantic, Martin Buber, was planning his dream of a homeland populated by those who might recognize the personal experience of the “I-Thou” encounter which then might be translated into the public experience of communal living. While not

suggesting Buber as a constant Day mentor, Day, herself, later described Martin Buber as “admirable for his community experiments in Israel” (LL 24) and she often identified him as “the only modern writer who held out a hope for a modern voluntary community as a place where men and women could live in love and the happiness which God intended for them” (Day, *Selected* 174).

Martin Buber, as early as 1919, had witnessed the societal changes brought about by the postmodern era. He then suggested “what is needed is the rebirth of community” (Buber, *Reader* 249). And since “Community is grown relatedness,” he laments the replacement of the “organic” with forms of the “mechanical way of living” (Buber, *Reader* 245). He, without reservation, names the loss of community “the problem of our time” (Buber, *Reader* 251). Buber’s insistence on the premise that the longing for God and the longing for community are intertwined within the lived life resonates with the Day embedded narrative as well. Clearly, this is a premise that transcends the manner of worship and theological belief. Buber unequivocally states: “the ideal of community involves the realization of God” (Buber, *Reader* 256). Perhaps anticipating the growing darkness of WWII, the German Buber additionally observed the ill-considered primacy of cold science over humanity, noting: “Human reasoning rationalizes behind the backs of humanness” (257).

Humanness, then, is a theme shared by both Buber and Day as a necessary ingredient for true community which, for both, meant something far deeper than merely a collective group of like-minded individuals living together. Buber described the *kibbutzim* as “the hallowing of the everyday, [allowing for] the redemption of evil through the creation of human community in relation to God” (Friedman, *A Life* 282). Earlier, Buber had

observed community as a place where “we can hallow and approach God, [because], if not there, then [He is] nowhere” (Buber, *Reader* 257). Day sees Christ in her fellow humans, particularly those who are suffering.

Embedded within both the narrative of the American Dorothy Day and that of the German Martin Buber is, therefore, quite naturally, the idea of *encounter*. Buber, in fact, declares: “All actual life is encounter” (Buber, *I and Thou* 62). Day similarly writes: “Our greatest need is for mutual charity, love and loyalty to one another” (Day, *Duty* 30). Day, within this historical moment of the American Great Depression will find her community in her Catholic Worker Family. Buber must wait until the state of Israel is established in mid-century. Seeming to echo Day’s early political convictions, Buber writes: “True socialism is real community among men [and women] direct life relations between *I and Thou*, and a just society and fellowship” (Friedman, *A Life* 212).

Justice and fellowship are only briefly examined within the first encounter of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, on December 13<sup>th</sup>, 1932. Later, when these two persons examined why George Schuster, the editor of *Commonweal* recommended Day to Maurin, they will both recognized` the validity of Schuster’s observation that Day and Maurin should meet because “both of you think alike” (Forest 56). In the next few days the two found that this observation was more than basically true, and similarities in their thinking far outweighed their differences.

Their conversations and subsequent actions led to establishing an American experiment in holiness and activism which would be, in fact, the living out of the Christian directives of the Works of Mercy. The movement will be named The Catholic Worker and will in turn name its journalistic arm, its newspaper: the *Catholic Worker* as

well. It continues its work today and it stands as a tribute to the combined dedication of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. However, before we explore the “Worker,” in the light of all its identities, and in particular within the embedded narrative of Dorothy Day, we must first introduce its co-founder, Peter Maurin. Who, by all accounts, was a simple and holy man, even though he was also often an object of sisterly worry for Day (*Duty* 50). Indeed a true European eccentric, Peter MaurinDay was to become Dorothy Day’s spiritual and “business” partner, her teacher and her mentor. Their extraordinary “business” would be to “right the wrongs” of the historical moments through the establishment of an unprecedented organization dedicated to a spirituality, community and conscience.

### **Peter Maurin: Communitarian**

Day describes him as ‘an ex-Christian brother’ and a “Peasant of the Pavements” (LL 169) who “was a man of vision, no more afraid of the non-Catholic approach to problems than St. Thomas was of the Aristotelian” (LL 170). Day found him fascinating though slightly overpowering, later writing her wry impression was that ‘he was one of those people who could talk you deaf, dumb and blind’ (Roberts 32). Undeterred, and apparently unconscious of the reticence of his audience, Maurin related his ideas on the “art of the human contact” and vociferously claimed that “the surest way to find God, [and] to find the good, was through one’s brothers” (LL 171).

Maurin was convinced Day would share his views since he had read her articles in *America*, *Commonweal* and *The Sign*. He told Day that “he was looking for apostles to share his work” and compared her to “a modern-day Catherine of Sienna” (LL 172). By now, Day, like her brother John the evening before, was somewhat taken aback by

Maurin's enthusiasm, tinged by what she thought was a bit of naiveté. Realizing her hesitancy, Maurin quickly assured her "we would not have to do these things immediately on a grand scale" (LL 173).

So, overcoming her initial reactions, Dorothy Day found his convictions contagious and convincing. His statement that "all men have great and generous hearts with which to love God" (LL 171) was a principle which she could ultimately believe in—even within a century of cynicism. This capacity for human goodness and shared respect for a faith filled life were the two points that Day could use as a starting point for their proposed spiritual partnership (Stone 54). "A peculiar radical" is how Jim Forest describes Peter Maurin, noting that he was more of a "worker-scholar" theorist than Day, whose interest was rooted in the present not the past, the here and now of strikes, the solutions for the workers and the poor, and the immediacy of providing shelter (Forest 61).

Rosalie Riegle believes that the combination of Day and Maurin instituted "a movement, a school, and a continuing presence which perhaps could not have been made from the chemistry of any other individuals" (Riegle 32). Unlike Forest, she believes that it is not totally correct (as many have) to interpret Maurin as the dreamer and Day as the worker. Riegle thinks that the continual reference (by Day) to Maurin as "a philosopher" is in reality a directional to the aim of his "Easy Essays" that: "We must make the kind of society in which it is easier for people to be good" (Riegle 32)

Maurin's "Easy Essays" which appear even today in *The Catholic Worker* newspaper, are poem-like, asking the reader to "be like St. Francis and give up superfluous possessions, [and] offer their services and ask people for help" (*Catholic Worker* Spring 4 2009). Work plays a significant part in this vision of how one might

live, as does teaching. In a recent article about Maurin, current Catholic Worker writer Jim Reagan writes about the CW duality of theory and praxis. “Peter Maurin said that we must all become worker-scholars to keep workers from becoming superficial and [conversely] the scholars must become workers in order to [avoid] becoming overly academic” (Reagan, *Catholic Worker* 4 Spring 2009.)

Day never lost her admiration for Maurin, even though as biographer Nancy Roberts points out: “Soon he [Maurin] would be relegated to a role of elder statesman and theoretician’ and Day, as matriarch of the Catholic Worker would carry out the practical work of the Catholic Worker community” (Roberts 36). Sister Brigid Merriman concedes that while Maurin and Day were co-partners, it is also significant that he was, for Day as a convert, a willing and knowledgeable teacher. Merriman writes that Maurin had been influenced by European Christian Personalism, a movement mainly associated with Emmanuel Mounier, a French thinker who promoted a communitarian civilization where, “As God intended, both the person’s autonomy and a call to unity were equally respected” (Merriman 53-55).

Day believed this approach valid, but had, to this point, been primarily motivated by her “love of the masses,” her largely unguided reading of Scripture, and her interpretation of the Matthean verses which require serving Christ through His Works of Mercy (Merriman 25-29). Maurin brought a broader interpretation of the teachings of the church which Day had come to love, and a continental understanding of Marxism and other secular philosophies. Seeming to echo the thinking of Buber, Peter Maurin ascertained: “The Communitarian Revolution is basically a personal revolution. It starts with the ‘I’ and not with the ‘They.’” He continues: “We is a community while ‘they’

are only a crowd” (Coy 226). This thinking inspired the observation of one of the essayists who Patrick Coy interviewed for his *Revolution of the Heart* book. Dominic DiDomizio asserts: “The spirit of community was, and remains therefore, the underlying assumption of the Catholic Worker vision of social change [hence] Catholic Worker spirituality is profoundly communitarian” (as qtd . in DiDomizio 227).

In what may have been a coincidence, at the time of Maurin’s entry into the life of Dorothy Day, she had avidly been reading the life of Rose Hawthorne, granddaughter of the author Nathaniel Hawthorne, who had founded a chain of cancer hospitals by starting off utilizing her four room New York apartment (LL 170). So it may have appeared as serendipitous to Day that this ‘man of vision’ who expounded on the Works of Mercy, Church history, and the Thomistic doctrine of the common good had arrived—literally and figuratively on her doorstep, shortly after her prayerful entreaty to God, in which she had “asked for a sign” of God’s future plans for her.

### **The Catholic Worker Community**

Day and her spiritual collaborator Maurin’s “movement,” they decided, would be made up of three sub-sections and would be named “The Catholic Worker”” It’s aims would include community, communication, and hospitality. The newspaper, also titled the *Catholic Worker* would have as editor and chief essayist, the now well-known Day and would feature spiritual and societal concerns. Secondly, they would create a series of agronomic communities and farms to help feed the poor, and create a self-sufficient and scholarly society. The third part of the plan would establish “Houses of Hospitality” in keeping with the medieval ideal of hospitality (Elie, *Patron* 71). The Catholic Worker concept would, by embracing voluntary poverty and living with the poor, manifest a

Franciscan attitude toward money and a Benedictian approach to hospitality (Merriman 83-84).

Anyone who is exposed to the story of the inauspicious beginning of what will eventually become a “major political-ethical and radical movement” (Piehl 4) is struck by the almost comic parallel of many of the “let’s put on a show” movies of the same historical moment, in which (like the Day-Maurin ideal), the similarly idealistic Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland succeed simplistically: unfazed by Depression complexities or more than a modicum of reality. In both cases, the Hollywood ideal and the New York reality, amazingly, and against all odds—it actually works, even unto the first decade of the next century.

Literary work first, Day and Maurin decide. The first 2500 issues of the *Catholic Worker* newspaper were distributed in Union Square Park on the first of May, 1933. Because of her personal spiritual quest and also her frequent trips for fundraising, Day subsequently named her column “On Pilgrimage.” Circulation grew to 150,000 within 12 months (LL 182). It sold for a penny any many were given away free (Stone 55). It was also distributed from a wagon pulled by an old horse, who “Big Dan” the driver insisted was also Catholic since “it genuflected when the nag was driven past St. Patrick’s Cathedral” (LL 184). It is this newspaper and the contributions from those who supported the community, plus monies from Day’s magazine articles, books and lectures which will help provide for the Catholic Worker message for the next half century.

## **Houses of Hospitality**

Next, the destitute and the homeless had to be helped. Day biographer and former Catholic Worker, Jim Forest, writes that Day's small apartment, "with its proliferation of mulligan stew and coffee" was, in fact, "the seed of the many houses of hospitality to come" (Forest 66). Soon after the start of the newspaper, Day rented a series of often vermin infested apartments and houses in the lower East Side, starting with a small apartment for ten destitute women, and then a house for men. By 1936 the effort had expanded to a larger location on Mott Street which housed the printing operation (Forest 67).

Even though the environment was not in keeping with even the most liberal ideas of child-rearing, Day and her young child Tamar made their home in an apartment on the third floor. Child care was a constant problem and "Dorothy would often ask the people on Mott Street and her sister-in-law, Tessa Day to care for Tamar" (as qtd. in Hennessey 109). The results of the Catholic Worker were immediately significant: by 1936, the New York houses fed eight hundred people a day and housed as many as possible. By 1937, there were thirty-three other Catholic Worker houses which were in existence nationwide (Forest 67)

Statistically, over the years, the Catholic Worker has operated out of 120-185 Houses of Hospitality (never termed homeless shelters) throughout the world (Riegle 7). In response to the unpopular three month strike of New York dockworkers, a special Catholic Worker house was opened on the West Side. Day remembers that they "fed thousands of idle seamen daily" while concurrently "running up a debt of three thousand dollars" (*Loaves* 41).

In a 1934 entry in Day's diary, she notes that the New York Houses of Hospitality are welcoming places for *all* who need help. "We are an international community" (*Duty* 2), noting that the "down on their luck" guests which she shares supper and housing with were: "Turkish, French, Irish, Polish, Lithuanian, Italians and American" (*Duty* 2). The two best known of the "CW Houses" which are still functioning are St Joseph's on First Street and Maryhouse on Third Street in the lower East Side. It is at Maryhouse where Day will die almost a half century later (Riegle 181).

In 1935, pursuing Maurin's dream of an "agronomic university," the Catholic Worker rented a twelve-room farm on Staten Island, followed by two locations in Easton Pennsylvania and then another location at Newburgh, New York. Day fondly remembers: "Farms like ours began to dot the countryside, [they opened in] in Aptos, California, in Cape May, New Jersey, in Upton, Massachusetts, Avon, Ohio, and in Detroit, Michigan; Dozens sprang up as Catholic Workers, many of them young couples, were trying to live in community" (LL 228).

The volunteers and the "guests" at the CW farms were not all Christian. Day writes of a Jewish worker who wore a rosary around his neck and recited the Psalms in Hebrew. Even though Day identified him as "a mad friend," she saw that "he had the gentleness of St. Francis, helping in the garden at the Staten Island farm [because] he feels he can look at the plants with love in his eyes and make them grow" (LL 223).

While noble in purpose, this part of the expansive rural Catholic Workers experiment proved difficult to maintain. Later, Day will write that these farms were not like the state supported *kibbutzim* movement which Buber had envisioned and supported (LL 224). Instead these farms were hard places in hard times, and even though some still

continued to function, Maurin's dream of an agronomic community, full of hoe-wielding scholars and compliant and eager workers, could not sustain itself.

Most eventually shifted the focus from self-sufficient "holy communes" to mini-farms, retreat centers and places of study and respite. Personality disputes, inexperience with farming, insufficient funding, and "the difficulties in hanging on to property" were just some of the factors. Day recalls, somewhat wryly, that many early Catholic Worker "farmers" found (after a brutal bucolic work week) "the reason for cities and relief roles" (LL.228-235).

### **Community and its Costs**

Funding for the Catholic Worker presented major challenges. Yet Day refused financial help from organizations, even Catholic Charities. "Cardinal Spellman did not ask me to do this, nor did the mayor of New York. . . It is living from day to day, seeing Christ in all who come to us and following the Gospel" (Day, *Loaves* 90). Day believed that "what the state has given the state can also take away" (Riegle 64).

Much to the dismay of volunteers and staffers like Tom Cornell, Day refused a \$65,000 grant from the Ford foundation at a time when the newspaper was almost totally out of operating costs (as qtd. in Cornell 65). Why? Cornell says: "Day was against Ford because of their treatment "way back when" of their assembly line workers." Cornell, originally aghast, later thinks Day was shrewd in doing so because in addition to keeping with the ideals of Catholic Worker, Day also knew this would "turn off" the small donations which, when added up kept the Worker going year after year. Also, Cornell remembers the "ten dollars that my father-in-law sent the CW houses every few months

represented an identification of giving which Day felt was part of the movement” (as qtd. in Cornell 65).

Day entrusted her community to the Lord and the generosity of those who wanted to aid her in her work. Robert Ellsberg reminds us that “she never was *successful*—nor did she want to be” (as qtd. in Ellsberg 65). She realized there were influential people who would help her mount “campaigns” but she rarely asked for help, trusting in her God for help. “She just stayed close to her vocation, which was the Little Way of St Therese and kept on going” (as qtd. in Ellsberg 65)

This vocation, this community has, over the years, had to make specific appeals to supplement the donations of the many who feel connected with the community, be it the contributors of the “many nuns, priests and bishops” who support her with small but consistent giving or the sometimes totally unexpected windfalls which Day seems totally surprised by (as qtd. in Rodgers 160). The donors which kept the early Catholic Worker going were varied, such as consistent checks from writer Evelyn Waugh for “Dorothy Day’s Soup Kitchen” (Roberts 51) There is never any extra, of course, barely enough to keep going.

Yet “keeping going” is what the Catholic Worker continues to do. In her 1963 book, *Loaves and Fishes* Dorothy Day says with a combination of her wry humor and optimism. “We pray for the help we need [and then] somehow, it comes.” She wryly notes: “The wolf is not at the door, but he is trotting alongside” (*Loaves* 90-91).

The “wolf, trotting alongside” is a fact of life within the Catholic Worker, both then and now. Then, despite Day’s protestations to the contrary, the continuance of their dream and vocation appeared to be more the province of the practical Day, the activist,

than Maurin the aesthetic scholar who will die in residence at a Catholic Worker farm in 1949 (LL 277).

### **Community and Conflict**

Some describe the Catholic Worker as “living out the Gospels” (McCoy), while others, like Janet W. Parachin describe it as “an engaged spirituality, by which a commitment combines spiritual resources with intentional acts of compassion and justice in response to the needs of the world” (Parachin 250).

Others view it as an extraordinarily long-lived Catholic radical community: starting with its response thirties to the poor of the Depression; its active place as labor supporters and pacifists in the forties, and then its evolution in the fifties into a peace and justice protest organization seeking and an end to war by “living as ‘active’ pacifists” (Stone 5).

Some have questioned its place in the postmodern world, noting that the Catholic Worker of today faces different challenges within a world that differs drastically from the world of the Great Depression era, when Day and Maurin sat at her kitchen table and worked out their ‘grand plan.’ Day scholar Rosalie Riegle has written a book in this century (2003) which includes among other things a valuable “cast of characters” within a selected biographies section of those associated with the “Worker” (Riegle 199). Riegle provides insight into the real and relatable Dorothy Day by interviewing “those who knew her,” including interviews with her daughter and granddaughter

Riegle insists that the tenets of Maurin and Day are particularly significant today in presenting a “back-to-basics” approach which is presently, in our new century, very much in short supply. She believes that Day lived not “by the rules,” but rather by “deep references” which then allowed those around her to grow, not intimidated by holiness—

although “Day, undoubtedly, was holy” (Riegle 7). Like the author of this particular work, Rosalie Riegle has a bias for Day’s humanity and her affinity for demonstrating the humanity of Christ. “In allowing for the human side of Jesus Christ to shine through in all of us, Dorothy Day placed all in touch with the Christ” (Riegle 7). Regarding the everyday work of the movement, (of which Riegle now belongs) she has this to say:

They [the Catholic Workers] hear and act out the message of Dorothy Day which is her faithfulness to God who lives in the poor and within disenfranchised. They stand in radical opposition to the materialism of contemporary life and they support the clear connections Day drew from her spiritual life and nonviolence. (Riegle 7).

That is not to say, however, that particularly in the early days the Catholic Worker, it was free from the conflicts which, as both Day and Martin Buber acknowledge are part of all human organizations; the petty jealousies and insistence that “all be set right.” One of the longtime Catholic Workers, Stanley Vishnewski, observed that the houses of hospitality were often “really houses of hostility,” noting that Day would have to arbitrate many arguments in which various combatants would demand the exile of the other troublesome “guest” (as qtd. in Cornell 23-24).

To these conflicts, Day’s refereeing skills came into play. She told the warring participants: “Someone else will come in and take their place and it is better to deal with the devil you know than the devil you don’t” (as qtd. in Cornell 23-24), thus seeming to act out Martin Buber’s embrace of his role as “meliorist” over idealist (Buber, *Social and Religious Thought* 185).

In the cities and the farming communities the Catholic Workers “came and went.” But while they were there, they like Day and the other CW volunteers, embraced voluntary poverty, the tenets of pacifism, and the community “rules” which depending on the ability and the capacities of the guests, were either followed or ignored. The work of the volunteers and the staff was to serve the poor, and live in community. Easy to say, but not easy to do—at least not year after year.

As Dorothy Day approached the mid-point of her life, dealing with a daughter, a troublesome “household,” and the criticisms of many, her resources of patience were often strained. Day writes that: “Every now and then I would look at him [Maurin] and groan: ‘Why did you have to start all this, anyway?’” (LL 236).

“All this,” of course, was a challenge because many of the people accepted by the Worker (and refused by anyone else) were to be pitied and yet capable of doing harm, a difficult challenge to anyone’s endurance and compassion quotient. Day not only preached community, but she also taught by example that forgiveness and patience were key to living out a vocation which involved unpredictability.

There were those who had severed the ties with their own by unacceptable behavior, including a Eastern European alcoholic priest who “saw Day and her community as communists” and when “he tied one on, he would often appear outside the CW location house and hurl invectives up to Dorothy. Day, [who] of course, refused to call the police”(as qtd. in Rusk 91).

Forgiveness is what marks the character of the community and the Catholic Worker movement. This is the belief of Patrick Jordan, a former Catholic Worker and subsequent Day scholar. He relates “the most remarkable thing was the sense of forgiveness within

the community. Dorothy believed in ‘forgiving ‘seventy times seventy’’ (Jordan 91). Jesuit priest, Father Richard McSorley, agrees with the Jordan assessment and says in his work as Director for the Center for Peace Studies at Fordham University, he has often used Dorothy’s quote about “the real test of our love for God is the love we have for those [who are] the most repulsive human being that we know” (as qtd. in McSorley. 90).

### **Community and the Church**

The church hierarchy and Day had an often complex relationship. This complexity speaks to her not being a “cradle Catholic” and not being intimidated by apparently anyone or anything. That said, Day also loved her adopted religion with the devotion reserved to those who find acceptance within a community of thinking which finally matches their own. This did not stop her however from publicly proclaiming: “Though she is a harlot at times, the church is our mother” (Barrett 3).

Day had come to the conclusion that oftentimes the church had been negligent in its treatment of the poor and the disenfranchised. Not in all cases, of course. She granted the huge contribution to civilization which the Church has made. But she felt less confident about the methods which were used in the past, and the bureaucracy of the Church which still played its part in present church politics, seemingly focusing on administration and not on devotion (Coles, *Radical* 157-160).

For the most devout Day, the main focus was on the people who needed her help, help given freely not only in the name of the Christ, but also in the name of humanity. Day decided that by living out the Works of Mercy she would have to follow the dictates of her conscience and not the hard and fast tenets which spoke to “all the intrigue in those layers and layers of [Church] officeholders” (Coles, *Radical* 157).

Significantly, however, it was the usual way of Dorothy Day not to turn her back on the Church, but instead she decided to make the Church, like her daughter, her family and her friends, the object of her fervent prayers. In an interview with Robert Coles she remembers this was not always an easy task, particularly before her meeting Peter Maurin:

I remember those days, That is before I met Peter Maurin, I was on the brink of losing my faith, having only recently becoming a Catholic. I was very upset at what I saw—the church’s apparent indifference at so much suffering. In [the early days of the Depression] people walked the street, hundreds and hundreds of the, looking dazed and bewildered. They had no work. They had no place to go. Some groups tried to help them, but neither the state nor the church seemed as alarmed as ‘my radical friends. (Coles 13)

Day’s Catholic Worker community was a beacon for those priests who had been shunned by their own dioceses, including Father Pacifique Roy who was a “hitchhiking Canadian priest” (LL 251) who reminded the often harried Day that: “A community of Christians is known by the way they love one another.” Day realized the dichotomy of this “loving” within her often contrary community and replied sardonically: “Well, no one can say that about us” (Day *Loaves* 60).

In helping Father Roy and others like him, Day earned the disapproval of some authoritarian ecclesiastical figures (Stone 93), a situation which quite easily might have led to her being ostracized, as was the case with priest peace activists like the Berrigan brothers (Day, *Writings from the Commonweal* 167). Chris and Wayne Barrett make the

distinction between Day and the Berrigans by writing succinctly: “Day was never a church pariah” (Barrett 3).

Robert Coles maintains that Day was a complex Catholic since she never really gave up her anarchist tendencies, yet she loved the rituals and the institutional authority of the Catholic Church (Coles, *Radical* 157). Day confided to Coles that in her travels across the country, she appreciated the community and continuity which the church offered, the ability to find a Catholic church, “always near a bus station,” in which she would slip in “and try to settle a few things going on in my life” (Coles, *Radical* 158).

Day, to be sure, was no lock-step follower. Amazed at the lethargy of the average Catholic layperson, she wanted to share with everyone what she had learned. Patrick Coy’s book of essays on the “Worker” includes a Mel Piehl piece which explores Day, with her insatiable reading and her journalist training, diligently researching church teaching and finding that the public and private spheres were “fair game” for revitalization (as qtd. in Piehl 210). Day was astounded at what she had found in her research.

She wrote:

I speak to show the tremendous freedom there is in the Church, the freedom most cradle Catholics do not seem to know they possess. They know a man is free to be a Democrat or a Republican, but they do not know that he is free to be a philosophical anarchist by conviction. They do not know that cooperative and communal ownership can live side by side with private ownership of property (as qtd. in Piehl 210).

It is likely that Day probably won few ardent admirers of her “revelations” within the already overstrained Catholic New York hierarchy of the Depression era when she published and pronounced that “according to canon law, the duties of the bishops were to take care of the needy, particularly through hospices and houses of hospitality” (Day *Writings* 57).

Later in the century, Day extolled to her readers and listeners not only the teachings of the church fathers, but also, “because she was an inspired storyteller, her talks at various CW venues would also include the thinking of contemporary figures like Edith Stein and Dietrich Bonhoeffer” (Coles, *Radical* 143).

This Catholic Worker community and their band of communal activists were officially sanctioned by no one, and to the dismay of some, they had identified themselves as *Catholic Workers* without any official church approval. Day appeared often not to care, preferring, instead for quite a number of years to “only maintain a tenuous tie with the Catholic Church” (as qtd. in Piehl 182).

When asked by the diocese to remove the word “Catholic” from her masthead, she handily finessed her way out of an ultimatum and later said: “I don’t think they (the

clergy officials) really wanted us to do that” (Coles, *Radical* 84). They knew Day would not go quietly. “We were going to go to Saint Patrick’s [and further demonstrate], and take advantage of America’s freedoms, so we could say what we thought and do what we believed to be the right thing to do [which was to] seek the guidance of the Almighty” (Coles, *Radical* 84).

Thus Day separated the role of the official church from the role of public advisor. In doing so she earned a reputation of, as Catholic Worker Tom Cornell puts it, “a thorn in the side of the Catholic Church” (as qtd. in Cornell 198).

### **Community and Controversy**

Robert Coles’ point of reference on this “Day versus Authority” scenario is addressed concisely when he writes: “The relationship with Francis Cardinal Spellman of New York became the stuff of legend in her lifetime” (Coles, *Radical* 83). The official church rarely responds to Day’s activities and challenges, although it is known that the clerical hierarchy wishes Dorothy would “stick to her soup kitchens and charity work” (Sammon). Day is just as equally adamant that what she does is not charity. “*Charity’: a word to choke over. Who wants charity?’*” (Forrest 50-51).

Historian William Fisher has likewise pointedly observed: “Day’s Catholic Worker was successful in earning the disapproval of just about everyone” (Allitt 18). This included Cardinal Spellman, who Day, in a 1949 editorial, in effect, called a “strikebreaker.” This particular piece of the “stuff of legend” is Day’s refusal to back away from justice and “go along with” the actions of her church. Day’s frequent public challenge to the church was to not only preach social justice, but also to practice it (Forest 93).

In 1949, the Catholic Archdiocese, who owned the massive King's county cemetery, was "struck" by the small gravediggers union who wanted the advantages of their organized labor brothers: better wages and working conditions. Cardinal Francis Spellman told the press that the men were communists, and he refused to meet with them (Forest 94). Day wrote the cardinal, but her letters for "the dignity of these men" were ignored. She then organized a picket line at the Madison Avenue office of the archdiocese. As bodies were literally piling up, Cardinal Spellman ordered his young seminarians to cross the picket lines, enter the cemeteries, and dig the needed graves. Day was outraged and, seemingly ignoring the problem of piled up corpses, stepped up her support of the strikers (Forest 94).

In a Bakhtinian carnivalesque manner, seemingly fearless of the powerful clergyman, Day wrote a series of columns which compared Spellman (her own cardinal) unfavorably with Cardinal Mindszenty and Archbishop Strpinac, two other clergy who at that time were imprisoned in communist held countries. Day wrote: "These two other princes of the church are lying in jails suffering, and here in our present peaceful New York, our own cardinal enacts an ill-advised exercise of so overwhelming a show of force against a handful of poor working men" (Elie *Patron* 180).

Cardinal Spellman did not react publicly (at least not then) to Day's very public criticism, and within a month the defeated workers returned to the graveyard. Day will later recall: "It is true that Cardinal Spellman had no great love for some of the things we wrote in *The Catholic Worker*, or said in public [however] there was no way that he was going to 'call me' on a doing something I did not want to do, [especially] if it was not a religious matter" (Coles, *Radical* 83).

Day never, in any way, publicly disassociated herself from the church she had come to love. Instead she used the “weapons’ of the spirit,” for which could hardly be criticized. She “confessed” to Robert Coles some years later: “We did pray a long time for Cardinal Spellman [and] if he had ordered us closed, we would probably have gone to St. Patrick’s and continued our praying there, night and day, until the Good Lord took us or [somehow]settled the matter” (Coles *Radical* 85).

In the same interview, the concept of spiritual leaders and political leaders is discussed, and Day retrospectively elucidates the difference, saying:

He (Cardinal Spellman) is our spiritual leader, but he is not our ruler and not someone whose every word all Catholics must heed. (82-83)No one in the church can tell me what to think about social, political or economic problems without getting a tough speech back. [Just] leave me alone and tend to your acreage and I will take care of mine. (Coles, *Radical* 83)

In the nineteen fifties, this was thinking few Catholics would have entertained, let alone publicly voiced. Day, however, was not your average Catholic and she may also have been additionally affected by the strong military association between Cardinal Spellman and the armed forces. He was a high-ranking member of the Catholic Church and offered strong support to the defense department. Day, in talking with Robert Coles in a much latter interview explains: “He [Spellman]was no Pacifist, he was a member of the church militant [who] would have marched on the Kremlin, which he thought was the center of atheism” (Coles, *Radical* 86).

Jim Forest describes Cardinal Spellman as “outspoken in his views of the Red Menace” and “a staunch supporter of obedience within the church” (Forest 94). Day

appeared to respond to such veiled references to her, when she assured her readers that she, like Cardinal Spellman, “does not agree with Communism tenets.” Although she finds it worthy of note that: “Capitalism and communism share the military passion, often justified by talk of manifest destiny” (Coles, *Radical* 86). This is a rare rebuttal by Day regarding her reputation as a former socialist and her brief flirtation with the Communist Party. She recalls, quixotically, in her 1952 autobiography that: “I was not a good radical” (LL 59). Later, she takes strong exception to well-known columnist and muckraker, Westbrook Pegler’s criticism of her as a “former comrade” who “now wished to be with the poor” (LL 59).

Over the years Day had accrued friends in high places. Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of the President Roosevelt, had worked with Day behind the scenes, particularly in the field of union organizing (Stone 63). In 1946, one of Day’s editorials was graphically titled *Blood on Our Coal* to elicit much-needed support of John L. Lewis’ labor strike (Ellsberg 251). After Roosevelt died, Day found less affinity with the new president Harry Truman, in no small part because of his handling of the American war effort in WWII.

As a pacifist, Day and her community had demanded the “war machine” be halted, thus defying the national fervor which followed the 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. She further explained to Robert Coles that she believed the “just war conditions, laid down by St. Thomas were never, throughout history, fulfilled” (Coles, *Radical* 101).

Saddened at the 1945 dropping of the atomic bomb, Day wrote an editorial scathingly criticizing President Truman. In it, she dramatically (and metaphorically) senses the “[v]aporized Japanese as dust we will breathe into our nostrils in the fog of New York City” (Ellsberg 266). Carole Jablonski suggests the Truman criticism was an

example of Day as “humble ironist,” noting as pertinent that *irony* was the dominant motif of Day’s response (Jablonski, *March* 2000)

Ironic or not, such rhetoric no doubt was added to her earlier (1941) FBI file in which J. Edgar Hoover suggested to the Special Defense Unit that: “Dorothy Day should be considered for custodial detention in the event of national emergency” (Forest 128). Day was aware that she was the subject of surveillance by the government. However, she decided not to worry about and it certainly did not hinder her activities. In a further nod to Bakhtinian sensibilities, Day will later term the efforts of the FBI in compiling her files not as particular hubris, but rather as “simply idiotic” (as qtd in Ellsberg 173).

### **Community and Absurdity**

Further evidence of her controversial status emerged in 1957, when Dorothy Day, then in her sixties, went to jail several times, rather than take part in what thought was a ludicrous New York City civil defense exercise. What happened was this: Day, her protesting Catholic Workers, and several other activist groups thought they would make a stand against the powerful weapons race, and also what they considered as absurd the idea that one could “hide” from radiation which had destroyed the Japanese cities of Nagasaki and Hiroshima a decade before. The official reason for the exercise was, in the event of an atomic attack, New Yorkers should follow the merged megaphones signage to the nearest underground location or subway stop to find safety (Forest 97).

Physicist David Caplan, also a protester, pointed out that “in order to avoid to survive, one would have to be far deeper submerged than in a subway tunnel just under the street.” In 1955 and again in 1957, Day and her followers chose jail (30 days for the second offence) because “we will not be drilled into fear” (Forest 98)

Fear apparently was not one of Day's misgivings, since the years of the forties and fifties provided ample opportunities for 'backing down' which, of course, she never did. "Dorothy's disobedience seemed like a kind of urban ritual, like painting the green stripe down Fifth Avenue of St. Patrick's Day" (Forest 98-100). The local government officials suspended their civil defense raids after the *New York Telegram* suggested the drills would promote safety "only if the enemy were planning on dropping marshmallows" (Forest 98-100).

Day never refused shelter to those who needed it, but in writing about it, her tone is often wondrously amused. In one instance, referencing the difficulties of running what today's vernacular would term a "homeless shelter," Day writes of how sad she is that "Today we had to send Mary O'Connor away to Bellevue" (a psychiatric hospital). (*Duty* 39).

Mary O'Connor had been with Day and her New York City community for almost a year after wandering in from the streets, "hungry, unbalanced, dirty and distraught" (*Duty* 39). At first, three meals a day and clean sheets seemed to improve Mary's demeanor. However, "during the last four months Mary has been chasing imaginary pursuers all night with a broom, attacking us with plates (poor aim) and kicking those who walked by." The final straw comes when "Mary surrendered the broom but would not give up the scissors" (*Duty* 39)

In another instance, Day appeared amazed that other members of her "suburban" community might balk at accepting the troublesome "guest" who might be refused help and shelter elsewhere. At the upstate Catholic Worker New York "Tivoli" farm, Day recalled how police "dropped off" a drunken young prostitute who was refused shelter by

all other “charitable” organizations in the area. “No convent, no hospital, no charitable family in the parish, would have her” (Day, *On Pilgrimage*. 201). This troublesome “guest” proved too much, even for Day and her staff. Day notes: “She tried to seduce any man she came in contact with.” Finally, the girl ran away, taking with her what she could steal. Day is disappointed, both in the young girl, and in the relief she feels upon her departure. She frets over this and similar “failures.” Constantly self-critical, she writes: “Failures, these are the things that overwhelm me” (Day, *On Pilgrimage*. 201-203).

### **Community Changes and Challenges**

Most would not agree with Day in her appraisal of her actions as “failures,” however, staffing and change make for a never-ending challenge. The Catholic Worker community inevitably changes: they embrace the current problems of the day, and people come, “serve their time” (always unspecified) and most move on to other things (Roberts 5), including establishing similar movements in keeping with Day and Maurin’s idea of a fluid, yet inspirational experience. *The New Yorker’s* Dwight Macdonald once described the CW community as “a university, constantly taking in freshman and graduating seniors” (Roberts 5).

This idea of necessary change is addressed also by Martin Buber within his thinking about community. “The realization of community, like the realization of any idea, cannot occur once and for all time: always it must be the moment’s answer to the moment’s question, and nothing more” (as qtd. in Buber, *The Way* 178).

Day discerns this point regarding the “in the moment” response and she wisely knew that the CW movement must be “fed” constantly “by new participants” (Roberts 12). Day laments: “If we do not keep indoctrinating, we lose the vision [and become]

merely philanthropists doling out palliatives instead of operating from a strong intellectual base” (Roberts 12). This base is reinforced and expanded even further by the continuous Friday evening round table discussions (Roberts 13).

This “indoctrination,” or “round table discussions,’ as Day termed them, it, appears to have been somewhat similar to what we might think of, in today’s vernacular, as round-table discussion in which “brainstorming” might be used to hear and witness ideals and actions.

These were meetings which challenged the place of Christian activism in meeting the problems of the historical moment. They took place (and still do) on Friday nights either at the Lower East side New York location of Maryhouse on Third Street, or St Joseph’s on First Street. Back then, the early discussions included various intellectual topics, for instance, the history of pacifism, the concept of a Just War, and the nature of salvation (Roberts 14-15). Currently the contemporary topics addressed are: “A Spiritual Response to Global Warming,” and “War and Peace: An Update” (*Catholic Worker*, May 2009).

This participation, along with the *Catholic Worker* newspaper, allowed for the sharing of Day’s community with others, and as Nancy Roberts points out, the participants in the discussion groups and meetings over the years were as varied as French philosopher Jacques Martian, English historian Hillarie Belloc, the Berrigan brothers, and Columbia University’s Parker Moon and Carlton Hays (Roberts 14-15).

This intellectual flow of scholarly thinking and academic input allowed for Day to feed her curious mind within a community of like-minded people, yet, while these participants went back at the end of the day to homes of comfort and families, Dorothy

Day returned to her duties in the sacrificial life which has caused many to wonder yet again: Why would she do it?

The ‘answer’ to such inquiries are rarely addressed by Day, at least in her public writings. This of course, does not stop inquiries of why would Day live, in community, such an uncommon life of personal piety and public chaos?

In the introduction to the 1997 edition of *The Long Loneliness* Robert Coles relates Day’s reply to the question he asked her regarding “a connection with her life’s origins and its eventual outcome” (LL 2-3). To this inquiry, Day’s reply is characteristically simple: “I guess I spend my life trying to account for it [injustice] and trying to change things a little . . . and that is what I believe people like me ought to try to do. We have been given a leg up in the world, so why not try to help others get a bit of a break too!” (LL 2-3).

“A leg up...because others deserve a (similar) break” are typical of Day’s simple version of why she does what she does. Then, after twenty years of community living, sacrifice and celibacy, and an unquestionably unique life, Day was profiled by Dwight MacDonald in a 1953 *New Yorker* article which she despised. It opened with: “Many people think that Dorothy Day is a saint, and will someday be canonized.” Not amused, Day scoffs at such talk and retorts back: “I would not be dismissed that lightly” (Riegle 193).

This enigmatic quote is the subject of much conjecture. To say “dismissed” indicates a state of dissatisfaction with something. But the question is: what is Day really saying? Patrick Jordan believes it relates to is Day’s distrust of the limelight and her fear that “official sainthood” is connected to a simplification of her life’s work. Jordan’s other

suspicion is that Day may have been apprehensive about how emphasis on her early life might overshadow the Catholic Worker experience, therefore “taking the good out of all that” (Jordan, *Appetite*.17).

Another outlook on the question of why Day is reticent is explored by Sister Brigid Merriman who bluntly writes: “Some saintly biographies are insults to her intelligence’ and therefore not in keeping with realist part of Dorothy Day” (Merriman 174).

The aforementioned Catholic Worker and author, Rosalie Riegle writes in her book *Dorothy Day, Portraits by Those Who Knew Her* that the Catholic Worker community which Day co-founded, and in essence always managed, “now numbers [in 2003] approximately one hundred and eighty ‘chapters’ worldwide” (Riegle 7). Riegle points to houses of hospitality in Australia, New Zealand, Germany and England, whose occupants are, in a certain sense, twenty-first century Catholic Worker ecologists: they are trying to live out Maurin’s simple dream of living off the land. In this manner they are attempting, per Maurin’s inspiration, to live in what, all those years ago, Peter Maurin termed a “green revolution of self-sufficiency” (Riegle 7).

Other Catholic Workers who live in the suburbs and cities may be ministering to victims of AIDS, or perhaps helping undocumented immigrants and their families.

Depending on the need, the community responds in kind (Riegle 8).

On a personal note of observation, even a brief visit to a CW location will reveal to the visitor their efforts which are in helping the poor and which are equally infused with a contemporary response to peace and justice. This is what unites “the Worker” and the offshoots which the CW has parented. In this respect they stand as living legacies to Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. They align themselves with like-minded other

organizations which aid the disadvantaged and the needy, along with those who lobby for the end of war and those who insist on the primacy of human rights.

Robert Coles remarked that some years ago, when he asked members of his Catholic Worker New York location how they would classify or define the experience, the replies varied from “this is like the army” to “it is like a Trappist monastery” and finally the observation of an Israeli worker-visitor: “This is just like that of the *kibbutzim* I left back home” (Coles xviii).

Patrick Jordan takes the descriptions a bit further. He believes: “The Catholic Worker movement has tapped into the spirit of the Christian gospel with remarkable zest, applying the spirit of the New Testament to the social issues of the time . . . its effects are still being felt” (Jordan, *Writings* xi). Lutheran historian, Mel Piehl, likewise points out the potentiality of Dorothy Day’s Catholic Worker when he terms it a “historically significant spiritual movement [which] positively addresses the spiritual dilemmas of a period, and thereby opens the possibility of new cultural approaches to religion” (Coy 4).

As if this description of this community was not enough, Piehl in his writing, points out that even though the ideal of the Radical Gospel had long been held as an ethical end, it had, all too often, been thwarted by social and moral complexities (Piehl. 94) Piehl also notes the ground-breaking and unlikely historicity of the Catholic Worker movement when he writes: “It became one of the first Roman Catholic efforts since the Reformation to advocate a through-going radical Gospel perfectionism in social life” (Piehl. 95). As an historian, Mel Piehl continues his observations by referencing the unlikeliness of a community which enacted not only the charitable obligations of a Saint Vincent DePaul

Society, but also the intellectual radicalism which, until then, had been seen only in the scholarly capitals of European academic institutions (Piehl 40-44).

Europe, of course, and particularly Germany was the intellectual breeding ground for many philosophers of the postmodern epoch (Cambridge, *Continental* 180). For Martin Buber, in particular, this is the location where his ideals on community incubated within the ideal of community. This work claims, as it is hopefully clear by now, that Martin Buber's metaphor of community, in many ways also informs and illuminates the embedded narrative of Dorothy Day, not only because they were both community builders at approximately the historical moment, but also because their efforts engaged constructs of both spirituality and community living.

Day established a community which was birthed in the slums of New York City, yet shared the *kibbutzim* ideal propagated by the Zionist Buber in his dream for the state of Israel. Day, as stated earlier, was familiar with Buber, both as a philosopher and an advocate of community and after reading *Paths to Utopia*, she exclaimed: "What a wonderful book" (*Duty* 133). Community, as stated earlier, was something which Day had sought her life long, not only to abate the "long loneliness," but also to find and give meaning and purpose to her human journey.

Merriman says it in this manner: "In becoming Catholic, Dorothy sought not only a profound relationship with God, but also a sense of community and a means of engagement with social reform" (Merriman 20). Maurice Friedman says of Buber: "He believed in the loving relation with the people we live with, and meet." Friedman then quotes Buber as saying: "God comes into the world [when] we meet the world with the fullness of your being [then] you shall meet Him" (Friedman, *Martin Buber* 16).

Just as Buber viewed community and “meeting God” as essential in “the fullness of being,” Day in like manner, realized the dual aspects and needs of our existence. Within her humanitarian community of the Catholic Worker and within her personal dedication to Christ and His precepts of peace and justice, she found the community which was also her vocation. Throughout most of her adult life, Dorothy Day expressed a “long loneliness;” in her early days as an activist, and in her life as a member of what Jim Forest described as her Staten Island “writer’s hermitage” (Forest 42). Now, within the historical moments of the thirties, forties, and fifties, she finds a harmony of sorts within the workings of her Catholic Worker Community. Robert Coles has termed this “Day’s search for completeness” (Coles, *Radical* 62).

Day, now at the mid-point of her life, has found that, again like Buber, community is essential to her human vitality. Also like Buber, she now embraces, and I argue represents—our human condition, a condition of fragile human failings, good and bad judgments, and an authenticity made even more intriguing by its complexity. This is an observation shared by some Day scholars, but not all. Depending on one’s “vantage point,” Day as communitarian takes either a place of primacy, or a place of particularity.

The place of primacy is the interpretation of Catholic nun, Sister Brigid O’Shea Merriman. Merriman views Day as secondarily seeking community, but primarily Merriman claims Day’s narrative has to do with her intense search for spirituality. “Day’s search for community was tied in to an insatiable yearning for spiritual wholeness and union” (Merriman 83). According to the Merriman purchase, Day’s place in community was, of course, important also, but it has three aspects which brings it closer to a spiritual identity than to a societal one. Merriman thinks it works like this:

“First: it [community] is one that makes Day less lonely, two; it takes responsibility for *the other* and three; it also respects the uniqueness of each person” (Merriman 83).

Merriman then goes on to conclude: “Day’s Catholic Worker community is in keeping with the ideal of St Francis, the ‘Personalist’ and St. Benedict, the ‘Communitarian’” (Merriman 83).

As a final point regarding community, it is Buber’s thinking then which provides illustration for interpreting this part of Day’s embedded narrative and brings a counterpoint to her need for, and participation in, community, in particular the Catholic Worker community which she co-founded. This is summarized further in this next interpretive analysis which now ends this chapter. In the chapter following this interpretive analysis, we look again to Buber; this time to help illustrate Day’s complexities within what Martin Buber has termed his metaphor of “the unity of contraries.”

### **Interpretive Analysis: Dorothy Day and Buber’s Metaphor of Community**

When asked for the main implications of the requirement of community, Martin Buber was unequivocal in noting it must have a “center” and within that center is found an originality which is “something divine” (Buber, *The Way* 156). In other words, for Buber—and I argue for Day as well—the ideal community is made up of persons who relate to one another like spokes of a wheel, but who have at its core what Buber terms a “common relation to the center [which] overrides all other relations” (Buber, *The Way* 156). The “originality” Buber references was, for Dorothy Day, found in her love of God and her vocation to serve him in community. By experiencing God as her mainstay, Day was able to fortify the notion that laypersons were the equals of the clergy, and had the

same obligations. This was an idea whose time had not yet come since this was pre-Vatican II, an era where the clergy were almost the exclusive purveyors of interpreting how the poor and the disadvantaged were to be treated.

Regarding the community of pacifism, particularly in America, this was a poorly understood premise and an underused ethic for a country which would be involved in every major military conflict of the “American century.” Robert Coles, Day biographer, points out, this was a time when “the clergy could be depended upon to support the military” (Coles 86). So, it may be that the boldness of the Catholic Workers who lived out the Works of Mercy, including “Blessed are the Peacemakers,” and chose poverty and peace, may be difficult to fully appreciate in our current climate of sanctioned protests and organized charities.

Yet for Day and her followers, they represent not only the teachings of the Christ Gospels, but also, in a certain sense, they also embody Buber’s Talmudic thinking about community where a “craving for real relationship points to God [just as] all craving for God points to real community” (Buber, *Reader* 251). Buber, then within a form of juxtaposition, takes a page from Day’s praxis notebook when he additionally speaks to the reciprocity necessary for true community. He focuses less on theory and more on praxis, saying: “Help is no virtue. But [it is instead] an artery of existence. To really help someone, however, the helper must live with the other: only help that arises out of living with the other can stand before the eyes of God” (Jordan, *An Appetite* 15)

Mel Piehl puts forth a slightly different ‘take’ on the principle of living in community. Like Buber, he agrees that “help” must in fact be lived, and in fact embraced but for him he observes:” Dorothy Day always insisted that the Works of Mercy are

neither paternalistic charity, nor formal religious duty, but an opportunity for expressing freely the given love at the heart of Christian faith” (as qtd. in Piehl 212). In other words, these ‘opportunities’ were the welcomed-by-Day opportunistic events which provided access to the meaning of the fully lived life, thus enabling a fuller realization of what it means to be truly human within a context of shared interdependency and mutual motivation.

The Catholic Worker and other communities of similar purpose and sincerity belong to a class of those who sacrifice themselves in such a complete manner that the twenty-first century mind, as stated earlier, may find admirable, yet also baffling. They are not religious clergy, yet they imbue holiness; they are not social agents in the sense of the Salvation Army; yet they feed and house the hungry and the homeless. They are not of the Communist or Socialist persuasion, yet they communally share and expect others to contribute “each in their own way.” In short, Day has provided us with the conscience of community and a community of conscience.

They are “the peacemakers” and they monitor violations of human rights worldwide. For instance, the “Good Friday Agreement” in Northern Ireland is currently scrutinized by Jane Sammon, the current “leader” of the New York Catholic Workers. Sammon was a colleague of Dorothy Day and, as a fellow activist and columnist and an invaluable asset for the Day researcher. Sammon is also intrigued by “rhetoric.” So much so that, in a playful juxtaposition of the word “Rhetoric,” she by-lines her *Catholic Worker* column as ‘Ric Rhetor’ (Sammon). In every issue of the *Catholic Worker*, (explored more in the next chapter) the various current voluntary columnists address the

arms race, the world debt, domestic violence, and “the danger of a society where a person’s worth is determined by their class, race or sex” (Coy 364).

In community, Dorothy Day clearly wed devout faith and defiant social action. She co-founded, and for almost half a century was the mother of the Catholic Worker family. It may be that initially she was looking for an answer to assuage the “long loneliness” associated with her pre-Catholic Worker life, yet she also sought a meaning for her life which transcends religious thinking, and which Buber explains as:

‘Man wishes to be confirmed in his being by man, and wishes to have a presence in the being of the other . . . He watches for a *Yes* which allows him to be, and which can come to him only from one human person to another’ (Buber, *The Way* 108).

Thus this “Buberian” observation—I have decided that if Bakhtinian is a word, then so is Buberian—of community now ends this chapter in which Day has been framed within the metaphor of Community. What presents itself now for our consideration is Dorothy Day viewed as a form of the “unity of contraries,” yet another Buber metaphor. This metaphor speaks to the complexities of our human existence, competing “goods” and conflicting “truths” Our interpretive journey now continues by establishing Day within her embedded narrative as a significant and current communicator figure who challenged the hubris of power, practiced skillful and effective rhetorical skills, and now represents a very real human—and humane picture of inspiration for us within our present historical moment.

## **Chapter Four: Communication Day as Buber's "Unity of Contraries"**

Day as communicator is considered within this chapter which is illustrated and illuminated by Martin Buber's "unity of contraries." Buber's metaphoric observation regarding the complexities of the lived life is referenced here when he speaks of dialogue, and by extension, about communication, encounter, and identities. He posits: "The unity of contraries is the mystery at the very core of dialogue" (Buber, *The Way* 111). This metaphor advances some implications of Dorothy Day as a communication figure who, intriguingly, is both devout and defiant, and perhaps most importantly, an authentic very "human" human being, whose diversity of roles: journalist, protestor, convert, movement leader, parodist, and imperfect parent now continues to unfold in the second half of the twentieth century. We begin by identifying how the "unity of contraries" is situated within her embedded narrative.

"The unity of contraries" is, according to Buber scholar Maurice Friedman, a metaphor by which Buber acknowledges "the integral unity of Life and thought without sacrificing the complexities and paradoxes of existence" (Friedman *A Life*). By this statement Buber makes purchase for the intricacies of the human condition; that oftentimes we, without being cognitively engaged in the details, we are able to say and do things which speak more to our humanity than to the certainty of "rules." Day, in keeping with Buber's "unity of contraries," could hold more than one opposing view of "rules" and observe the validity of both. For instance, when a non-Catholic "friend" pointed out the excesses of the "big mansions, black limousines and air-conditioned offices of the prelates and popes," Day responded with agreement. "I told him [you are] right,

absolutely right” (Coles, *Radical* 76). The “friend” knew that Day was Catholic and Day says: “He tried to push me into admitting: ‘You can’t have it both ways.’” Day replied simply, yet defiantly: “Yes I can.” She explained how “I can go to church and pray to God [and at the same time] “be flushed with anger” (Coles, *Radical* 76). Day knew this “answer” would not satisfy her listener, this seeming refusal to “choose a side.” What she meant was that she could agree that the lives of some clergy were ostentatious: and contrarily, she could also fully embrace these men as ministers of her beloved Catholic faith—even though she was “flushed with anger.”

In another seemingly disparate unity of sorts, the fifteen year spiritual and professional partnership of the chronically ill Peter Maurin and the dynamic Dorothy Day indicated that he and Day were often at odds, yet functionally very much in accord (Forest 61). Maurin was a peasant, Day a city woman; he viewed workers as agricultural farmers, and in Day’s head “worker” most probably meant “striker.” Maurin is heard to comment: “Strikes don’t strike me” (Forest 61). Maurin wanted to evangelize since he was a natural teacher (Forest 57). Day, while viewing their message as partly evangelical in nature, disagreed, saying: “I have never wanted to lecture people. I have hoped to act in such a way that I will be reaching out to others who may never be part of the Catholic Worker movement” (Jordan, *Appetite* 13). What is more, Day, unlike the usual religious constituent, contrarily declined to position the Catholic Worker as an organization actively seeking converts. “We are not rounding people up, you know” (Coles, *Radical* 156).

In the Coles book *Dorothy Day: A Radical Devotion*, Day confides to Robert Coles that while we are all called to be teachers to one another, the idea of promoting a point of

view that diminishes the sincere valid belief of another is not totally in keeping with her mission of “exemplifying the Gospels” (Coles 112). Even though she is an opinion journalist, she pointed out to Coles the hubris in pointing out to others “opinions of what is intrinsically right or what is wrong” (Coles 114). Instead, she warrants attention must be paid to Praxis. “The real issue is what we are trying to do here—it is not a matter of devils or angels. Do we really understand our intentions well enough to be able to explain them to others?” (Coles, *Radical* 114)

Robert Ellsberg quotes Day’s well known remark “Don’t call me a saint” (Day, *Selected* xviii) and points to the difficulties of simplifying definitions, because when speaking about Day, Ellsberg insists that one is called to the realization: “She was a *sign of contradiction*, an example of holiness, not easily domesticated and therefore, perhaps, an example of particular relevance for our time” (Day, *Selected* xviii). The unity of contraries is likewise expressed in her twin identities as “devoted and defiant.” David Scott points out that: “She [Day] loved the Church [and was] eternally grateful for the gift of Faith’ (Scott, *Praying* 22). Yet, even though Day’s beloved church saw Communism as Godless, Day repeatedly identified Mike Gold, editor of the *Communist Daily Worker*” as her “oldest and dearest friend (Day, *Little* 150).

Within this “unity of contraries” Day maintained friendship, if not kinship, with others whose views and associations were polemically opposite to those which she appeared to hold dear. In addition to Gold, and even though this was the “McCarthy era,” Day truly and publicly valued the long friendship of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, the sometimes jailed Secretary of the American Communist Party. Day wrote the eulogy for Flynn’s funeral and as a gesture of their unlikely but consistent friendship; Flynn left her

small estate to the Catholic Worker (Forest 155). Day and the Jewish philosopher, Hannah Arendt, were co-contributors to *The Sign*, a Catholic magazine, and in an ecumenical gesture, Arendt also donated her late husband's belongings to the Catholic Worker (Coles 165).

“Dorothy Day who could drink longshoremen and gangsters under the table” (*Duty* 227) is the way old friend Malcolm Cowley writes of Day in his memoirs. Robert Ellsberg notes, that while she bitterly resented the Cowley story, Day did not deny its accuracy. (*Duty* 227) Day responded to “the Cowley revelation” by only admitting to a confession of “flinging roses with the throng” (*Duty* 227). The pious Day became a Benedictine Oblate in 1955, and attended mass and received the Eucharist daily (*Duty* xvii) even though in her later diaries, Day admit that what she had “like Augustine,” only after much reluctance, eventually admitted the similar realization that “my heart is restless until it rests in Thee” (*Duty* 135).

Coexisting love and dissent, reminiscent of the Buber “contraries” metaphor, existed also within the personal life of the Day sisters. Dorothy Day and Della Day Spiers had a complicated but loving bond. And even though Dorothy identified them as “close through their lives and constant friends to one another” (Forest 142) and confidants from early childhood (*Duty* 647), they were not above the love-hate relationship shared by some siblings (Forest 143). Della was, by all accounts, was a supportive figure in the often difficult dramas which inhabited the life of her sister Dorothy. It was Della who took Dorothy to the hospital to deliver Tamar (Stone 43) and throughout Dorothy Day's diaries; it is Della's home which is referenced as a place of refuge for the overworked Dorothy. There is however one very substantial obstacle to total sisterly affinity. Della

Day Spiers was an ex-employee and a lifetime supporter of the organization which would come to be known as “Planned Parenthood” (*Duty* 648). Dorothy, even though she had terminated a pregnancy, held the view, which in today’s vernacular, is termed “Pro-Life.”

Della felt contraception was a good idea, particularly for her niece, Dorothy’s daughter, Tamar Batterham Hennessey, who had produced eight children in an eight year marriage to fellow Catholic Worker, Dave Hennessey. Dorothy resented the advice so freely given by her sister. Dorothy’s journal entry reveals that upon receipt of such “advice,” presumably given to Dorothy, but in reality to be redirected to Tamar, Dorothy Day “firmly walked out” of Della’s house, ignoring the “apologizing sister Della who was chasing her” (*Duty* 648). In early 1980, when Della died, Dorothy Day began her column in seeming tribute with: “How one misses a sister” (*Duty* 648). Before ending the column of accolade, the ‘brokenhearted’ matriarch of the Catholic Worker finds, however, that she cannot resist the temptation to include one last sisterly thrust. Day concludes her reflection with the comment: “Every day I miss her. Only her devotion to Margaret Sanger and birth control divided us” (*Duty* 648). Thus, the woman who refused to be identified as ‘saintly’ tells of both her affection for her deceased sister, and at the same time, inserts a communiqué of disapproval for the entire world to see.

In a somewhat related incident about the responsibilities related to sex and conception, Day showed her support of the strict interpretation of the Catholic Church’s view on artificial birth control. In a column responding to the evils of contraception and abortion, Day wrote (in a rare reference to the termination of her pregnancy) that “my viewpoint has been earned by sad personal knowledge” (*On Pilgrimage* 228). One cannot but wonder if this confessed knowledge, which was undoubtedly sad and deeply

personal for Dorothy Day, was perhaps influenced by the time period of her abortion. Both Jim Forest (37) and Mel Piehl (14) point out that Day was six months pregnant at the time of her abortion, therefore adding yet another stratum of “the unity of contraries” within the embedded narrative of Dorothy Day.

### **Day as Communicator**

Day was a rhetorician and a linguistic sharer of both the familial and the theological; her countless columns reveal a communicator who was, as Patrick Jordan says, a “gifted reporter,” whose “eye for human particularity” addressed the social and economic inequities of the “grimmiest of centuries” (Day, *Writings from* xiv). It is this Dorothy Day, in the context of communicator, which we now continue to explore, as the sixties and seventies present their culture and controversies which, in turn, allow for Day as communicator to react and respond.

Dorothy Day loved language, and observations of its use. She wrote that Alexander Solzhenitsyn complained about people in USSR not capitalizing the words: “Lord and Creator.” This caused Day to ponder: “Isn’t it hard, even for us, to use words seriously? Do they not embarrass us as Americans? As though we were exposing ourselves, laying bare our souls” (*Duty* 516). Patrick Jordan writes that Day was an observer of daily realities and a dedicated journalist. However, this is yet another area visited within her contrary nature. Jordan says: “As a rhetorician, she was never one attracted to intellectual constructs or rhetorical formulations” (Jordan xiv). Jordan writes in his introduction to *Dorothy Day, Writings from the Commonweal*:

To issues both great and immediate, Dorothy Day she brought her full attention. . . By doing so she changed lives and made History. . . She was a gifted reporter

[and] while she was impatient with political cant and systemic injustice, she also revealed her qualities of personal delight and vulnerability . . . At its best Dorothy Day's writing is bracing, evocative and instructive. (Jordan xiv).

As another former editor of Day's newspaper, Robert Ellsberg recalls how several other editors urged Dorothy Day to "be logical" and "get to the point." Day, with characteristic aplomb, replied that her writing was logical enough, since: "I go from one paragraph to the next." (Day, *Selected* xii). Robert Ellsberg is Day's most prolific biographer and he recalls the challenge of editing Day's work, because the Day column was sometimes eight pages long, encompassing political and economic editorials, personal observations, spiritual meditations and periodically, reports from her retreats and travels (Day, *Selected* xii). Day wanted her journalistic efforts to be read, yet at the same time, Ellsberg suspects she felt: "All the time given to writing, and especially to careful revision and editing, impressed her [Day] as time stolen from her other responsibilities, like caring for the extended Catholic Worker family that was so demanding of her attention" (Day, *Selected* xi).

Still, readers of the *Catholic Worker* could not wait to read what Dorothy Day was currently "on about." Elaine Murray Stone tells us that the circulation of the *Catholic Worker* newspaper before WWII was 190,000. After Pearl Harbor, Day visited one of the Japanese internment camps in California. Her subsequent column was titled: "We must cry out against this injustice." This and other "unpopular" causes caused circulation and support to significantly drop during the war years. After the war, the subscription base shrunk to 25,000 (Stone, 71-81). Time, changes and cultural tolerance, if not partial acceptance of Day's philosophies has helped to increase the number of readers over the

succeeding decades. Ellsberg notes that in 1983, three years after Day's passing, the circulation of the *Catholic Worker* newspaper was back up to 100,000 (Day, *Selected* xvi). The price continued to be just five cents, as a mark of respect to its original position as a paper of the poor.

In addition to the duties of the *Catholic Worker* newspaper, Day was a frequent contributor to other publications. Fellow *Commonweal* contributor, the previously mentioned British writer Evelyn Waugh (Day, *Writings from* 105) could be depended on for his checks to Day for "her soup kitchen." Waugh apparently was unaware that Day was responsible for much more than doling out soup, although she did that on a daily basis as well. The well read Day, who could equally and easily quote Aristotle, Aquinas, Lenin, Voltaire and Augustine, reminisced that her fellow author Waugh had also cautioned her against stirring up class warfare. He had asked: "Don't you think the rich suffer too?" (Day, *Writings from* 105).

In a foretelling of the problems of the next century, Day succeeded in making her managing editor at *Commonweal* more than uncomfortable, when in 1948, she wrote: "The American oil companies in the Arab countries are selling their souls for profits [and for] enough oil to supply most of the world until the year 2000" (Day, *Writings from* 101-102). She voiced her own views on the motives for wars, shown by her statement: "Let's not talk about God and country. The battle is for this world, for the possessions of this world" (Day, *Writings from* 101-102). "American interests and the army," Day insisted, "have sold their Christ for the goodwill of the Arabs [while] beating the drums for a war with Russia." Then she prophetically wondered if this situation might eventually be a

source of conflict, a prospect which will pose the Day question: “Is this is a ‘thing worth fighting and dying for?’” (Day, *Writings from* 101-103)

Commonweal Editor C. G. Pauling published the Day article under the cryptic title ‘Things worth Fighting For?’ even though he also published his addendum listing his “surprise at her [Day’s] passage where she lists the reasons—all blindly selfish—for which men go to war.” He thinks such thinking unworthy of Day, who “with her vaunted reputation for being aligned with human heart,” could even suspect that either the Americans or the Arabs might be capable of waging a war over oil and profit. Pauling closes his editorial comment by writing: “This could not have been written by Charles Pèguy [and] perhaps it should not have been written by Dorothy Day” (Day, *Writings from* 103).

Much of the writings of Day now appear to have, at least in partial measure, now materialized; a fact not lost on Patrick Jordan when he include the above entry for inclusion within his 2002 compilation book of Day’s *Commonweal* columns. Jordan pointedly ties in her spiritual land secular duality within the historical moments in which Day’s life evolved: “Day was a reporter of the daily realities for whom faith, hope and love were tested in the roiling crisis of her Catholic Worker experience, her travels, and her witness” (Jordan xix).

Day’s rhetorical and journalistic offerings are thought-provoking, persuasive, observant, and based on her historical and spiritual assessments. Perhaps most importantly, her columns, journals, diaries and her books represent an informed but unpretentious authenticity, which, in my mind, secures for her a place as not only a religious communication figure but as a person who is capable of being significant to the

specific field of Rhetoric and Communication as well. During her sixty year career, Day's communicative offerings were undoubtedly of the radical persuasion, yet her spirituality and love of her fellow human beings were the driving forces behind her observations and opinions. These unfiltered offerings could be, as previously demonstrated, frequently prophetic, often profound, and in all cases, undoubtedly indicative of her particular brand of intelligence, humor and authenticity.

### **Authenticity and Communication**

Day balanced her "profundity" with often humorous, even darkly funny parodies which revealed the authentic lived life of the Catholic Worker, particularly at the Houses of Hospitality. She wrote of the eccentricities of the "guests" which often called for Day's ignoring certain peccadilloes and odd behaviors; particularly within the obvious preference of the animal genus over the human as valued companions.

"Franciscan spirit grows hereabouts" she remarked dryly, referencing the "liberation" of her personal washcloth and towel to its new use as "a comforting blanket for the house cat who the guest insisted had a bad cold" (Roberts 75). Nothing was safe from the hands of the often mentally challenged yet good-hearted occupants. When Day's blanket from her sparse personal bedroom went missing, another animal lover was questioned. This person, after much questioning, finally confessed to Day that the blanket which Day used to warm her at night could be found out back: "comforting and covering the hide of the horse that helps us deliver our Manhattan bundles" (Roberts 75).

Confused, or perhaps, in some sense comforted by journalistic articles such as these which gave entry to this "quaint" side of the experience of living with the poor, some unwitting soul asked Day if this was not a romantic way to live, or in fact "was it not a

holy experience?" Day replies pointedly that: "There is nothing holy about rats and roaches, but something is very unholy about the way we regard those who suffer from such things" (Riegle 32). Regardless of rebukes such as this one, and references to inner-city vermin, Day's dedication awakened incredulity in some and doubt in others, not only in her specific historical moment, now past, but also for us, as Day scholars today. Where do we look for something which will "separate out" Day from a postmodern hair-shirt eccentric to perhaps a manifestation of the niggling doubt that what she has found, has either passed us by, or perhaps even more frightening, is what may be expected, in some measure from all of us?

The "test of sorts," advocated by Martin Buber lies at the "center" (or centre, as Buber writes), both of genuine dialogue, and by extension, the actions of individual persons. Buber scholar, Laurence J. Silberstein, quotes Buber's "Knowledge of Men" within such a frame of reference. Silberstein notes that Buber always looked for "the centre," the "stamp of the spirit" which determines if "the appearance of altruism" is self-serving or if it is true concern (Silberstein 152). Buber's "test of sorts" for genuineness is evidenced in his thinking about "man" (meaning men and women, of course). He writes: "To be aware of a man, therefore means, in particular to perceive his wholeness as a person stamped by spirit: it means to perceive the dynamic centre which stamps his every utterance, action, and attitude with the recognizable signs of uniqueness" (Silberstein 152). Day, clearly passes that "test" with flying colors, Her wholeness, her center was not to communicate her goodness, but to help the poor by actually living poor, eating poor, and helping administer to the temporal and spiritual needs of those who were, in the vernacular of today, "marginalized."

This authenticity of Day's embedded narrative plays out also in Day's perseverance and half-century dedication to her "guests" who were: "the bums, the homeless, the prostitute, the dirty, the unwanted, the drunk and the hopeless" (Stone 117). This was a "guest list" which appears to have demanded in equal parts the grace of God and remarkable stamina. Undoubtedly, Grace was Day's companion but we can not "see" it. On the other hand *Stamina* we can and do observe. It was the natural mainstay of this freely chosen and tenacious life, of Day's vocation, which was not for a year, or even a decade, but for decade after decade—almost fifty years of a life daily consumed in helping the poor. When reminded of the Biblical adage that: "the poor will always be with us," Day quickly responded: "Yes, we know that, but we are not content that there should be so many of them" (Forest 67).

Thankfully, Day possessed a strong constitution since the "menu" at the Houses of Hospitality was meager at best, relieved occasionally by gifts from local convents and from the rectories of friendly priests and sympathetic food merchants (Forest 66). Later in life, at the age of eighty-one, Dorothy's humor expresses her "appreciation" of the diet of the poor. In her communication, which is part satire and part a veiled plea for culinary variety, Day relates: "We had hard, baked potatoes and cabbage, [again] for supper over an indefinable spiced meat," [so] "I am now leaning toward vegetarianism" (Roberts 75). This, and stories like it, allowed the rhetoric and communication of Dorothy Day to persuade, inform, and in frequent regularity, also amuse her readers.

### **Day's Rhetoric as Communication**

The *Catholic Worker* newspaper was Day's pulpit for not only rhetoric which amused and gave insight into her human experiences but also it was (and is) a source of

the catechismal material from the papal encyclicals, the gospels, and the lives of the saints which sought to guide the moral conscience(Coy 8). Nancy Roberts, in a similar observation, says Day's "advocacy journalism sought to convey the need for both spiritual and social change" (Roberts 57). That said, the paper per Day's cautionary editing, was never overly intellectual, even to the point of cutting back on the contributions of the well- known Thomas Merton. Day's editorial cutting shears clipped an esoteric piece of his, explaining: "Too long a center article by Merton. . . after all we are a layman's paper, for workers, not men of letters" (Roberts 59).

As a lecturer, Dorothy Day was in constant demand. This allowed her to visit numerous United States venues of the Catholic Worker movement, universities which welcomed her message and local New York City locations, such as Carnegie Hall (Duty xxvii. As an experienced rhetorician Day feels qualified to offer her advice to other speakers. For instance, when she hears the secretary of the peace organization, *Pax Christi* speak, Day observed that: "Joe Fahey, who I am personally fond of, is very good, but he talks too fast and tries to cram too much material into his speech" (Duty 576), Day would speak on many subjects. However, on some others she was notably reticent. Her early association with the Socialists and her brief membership in the Communist Party served to feed the lingering suspicions of those who would come to hear her speak (Coles, *Radical* 170). In her autobiography, *The Long Loneliness*, Day recalls one early friend who observed: "Dorothy was never a Communist, for that, she was way too holy" (LL 12). Day, as the reluctant theorist, would rarely publicly rehash her early days, preferring instead to concentrate on the gospels and the Sermon on the Mount as vehicles for the material of her social justice and peace talks. As a follower of St. John of the

Cross, Day spoke about sacrifice, justice and charity. Here Day offers this brief assurance of her Catholic affiliation: “The Marxist emphasis regarding liberation theology is not at all congenial with the Catholic belief in John of the Cross and others of that tradition” (Coles, *Radical* 170).

Robert Ellsberg, as Day’s most prolific biographer, believed she possessed “a marvelously complex mind” [and was] “an able journalist and essayist” (as qtd. in Coles xiii). He furthermore makes his case that Dorothy Day presents possibilities for us even after death. He interprets Day as: “A Christian pilgrim whose body is gone” [but whose] “soul presses round us still” (as qtd. in Coles xvi). In 2008, Ellsberg titled his treasure trove of a book: *The Duty of Delight: The Diaries of Dorothy Day*. The “Duty” of the title is from a Ruskin quote which Day had often shared with Ellsberg. It refers to the obligation we have as humans to find not only holiness but happiness as well (*Duty* xxi). Ellsberg had researched the Day papers at Marquette University in anticipation of the anticipated expiration of the twenty-five year ban. A fortuitous call to Maryhouse then additionally produced her last year’s diary, a 1980 journal which included entries up until a week before she died (*Duty* xxi)..

The private worrisome and anxious Day reveals herself to the reader of *Duty*. Ellsberg, as editor, writes that in doing his research, he was continually reminded of the Thomas Merton observation that: “Sanctity is a matter of being more fully human” (as qtd. in Ellsberg xx), a proposition which Ellsberg finds fundamental within both Day’s spiritual and temporal journey. He writes: “For Dorothy Day holiness is not a state of perfection, but a faithful striving that lasts a lifetime [within] small ways, the practice of forgiveness, and the compassion we enact with one another” (Ellsberg, xx).

Ellsberg recalls that even as a shy nineteen year old new Catholic Worker in 1975, he knew he was meeting in Dorothy Day a “woman to whom everything was a form of prayer” ( xxii). Day appears to speak with her Creator in the manner one might speak to a loving parent or teacher. In the following she seems to be working out a new way of communicating with a God who will undoubtedly help. Day offers this short prayer:

Dear God, I will try this as an exercise—to write my meditations down, since I am often sidetracked. I find myself saying, over and over again: Oh God, Oh Lord, make haste to help me. O Lord Jesus, show me mercy with every breath I draw [because] I believe You are a personal God, who hears even my trivial speech, so I will tell you I love You, I adore You, and ask that my choices show that love—from my waking thoughts until I lie down to sleep (*Duty* 175).

Day certainly had to draw on her personal sense of a “grace connection” with the divine in her efforts to explain her less than welcome positions over the years, perhaps the most unpopular of them all was the issue of how to communicate effectively the principles of pacifism to a country, and indeed a twentieth century world, so sadly inured to war and violence.

### **Pacifism and Communication**

Pacifism seemed a more or less palatable position for the American public during the thirties when Day and the Catholic Workers were denouncing Franco, and also feeding and housing the poor of the Depression. This was to change in the late thirties when Hitler’s war clouds of WWII prompted the *Catholic Worker* newspaper to urge Catholics and others to “refuse to take part in any modern war” (Roberts 122).

Indeed, as early as 1935, the CW had discussed the concept of conscientious objection in the tradition of the Quakers, suggesting furthermore that the weapons of ‘modern war’ were especially immoral because they involved indiscriminate attacks on civilian populations (Roberts 122). In 1940 Day and Joe Zarrella testified before congress that Catholics, like Quakers, should be exempted from military service (Coy 78).

The historical moment of that particular time was one in which Catholic clergy, particularly, Chicago’s Father Coughlin, was openly preaching that “the Jew is the culprit simultaneously responsible for domestic capitalist depression and international Communism” (Roberts 123). In an open letter of response to Father Coughlin in its May 1939 issue, the *Catholic Worker* vehemently declared: “If a real wave of anti-Semitism sweeps the United States, or if in the future Jews are persecuted here, as they are in Europe, you, Father Coughlin, must be ready to assume a goodly part of that responsibility” (Roberts 123).

In 1936, Day responded to what she then recognized as a growing atmosphere of religious intolerance and a tendency of the American public to be gullible. A writer on the *Jewish Examiner* had warned Day of an insidious, yet commonly accepted campaign to discredit the Jews and blame them for much of what was wrong in the world. Her reply to him appeared in the April 1939 issue of her newspaper where she made her views abundantly clear:

A writer for the *Jewish Examiner* warns us that we must be always on guard against the anti-Jewish feeling cropping up at any time. We intend to follow his warning and spike every rumor and whisper that reaches our ears. It is not enough to appreciate the fact that these small time organizations engaged in this

despicable business of spreading hate are composed of mentally diseased morons.

We must inform the healthy minded bystanders of true Christian teachings on this subject. (Roberts 123)

“Mentally diseased morons” as descriptive rhetoric, represented Dorothy Day the communicator at her bluntest, serving to call attention to the moral aspects of standing quietly by as Hitler’s persecution of the Jews became more well known. However, this led to a form of the proverbial two-headed sword for the pacifist Day, since soon the public factual accounting of the invasion of Poland and *Kristallnacht* (the Night of the Broken Glass) caused many, worldwide, to acknowledge war was now almost inescapable. This upset the pacifist Day who could intellectually understand the appeal to not only to defend the persecuted, but also to put an end to aims of Nazi world domination (Riegle 201). Patriotism preceded the rush of men wanting to “join up” (Riegle 201).

“Fighting back for the Free World” became the emerging popular mantra, much to the dismay of Dorothy Day and her staff. It was a seminal moment for *Catholic Worker* says co-editor Eileen Egan, who then went on to establish the American Peace Association, the harbinger of *Pax Christ* (Riegle 201). Pacifism did not fit well into the then current American historical moment, although for Day and her followers, the message was clear: “Modern war was incompatible to the religion of love” (Roberts 125).

Those who had been supporters of Day found it increasingly more difficult to continue their support in light of the news from Europe and the 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor. In late December, a few weeks after “the day which will live in infamy,” Bishop

Edward Mooney sent a letter to President Roosevelt on behalf of all the American Catholic Bishops, promising the support of all Catholics in the newly declared war (Roberts 127).

Ironically these same Catholic clergy had commended Day's previous *Catholic Worker* article which had, some time before, condemned Hitler's persecution of the Jews, and warned of the fate of German Cardinal von Faulhaber, who was "frequently in danger of arrest and personal harm" (Roberts 122-123).

Day was in a quandary how to phrase her response to FDR's declaration of war since already many of the Catholic Worker local chapters, including the one in Pittsburgh and Seattle had quit distributing or even reading the adamantly pacifistic *Catholic Worker*. In Los Angeles, when the paper arrived from New York, it was burned by Catholic Workers who felt Day's pacifism unpatriotic and inappropriate for the times (Roberts 133). Day's letters to all the CW houses stated simply that she realized it was difficult to adhere to total CW policy and yet she urged them to remember: "We are still pacifists. Our manifesto is the Sermon on the Mount, so we must try to be Peacemakers" (Roberts 128).

The temptation to go along with the patriotic fervor proved understandingly irresistible to many, and to those who left the movement, Day wished them well. One Worker was Chicago's John Cogley who said that even though "he had tried very hard to see Day's point," it finally dawned on him "that it was too simplistic and even sentimental," adding that Day's unyielding and uncompromising views made it an extra burden for those who after examining their consciences, [a stalwart of Day's teaching], had decided to join the armed services and defend their country (Roberts 134)

This period of the Day narrative of the forties started the infamous FBI file of the general Catholic Worker movement and the specific FBI investigation of Dorothy Day. (Roberts 139). In post-war 1946, the Catholic Worker movement joined with other pacifist organizations such as the War Resisters League, the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Committee on Nonviolent Revolution. All opposed the continuance of taking young men into the armed services in a time of newly won peace (Roberts 139).

However, President Harry Truman, now well thought of for ending the war, elected to draw America's young into combat positions to have in place a fighting force to oppose the Communist's power plans which had soon replaced those of Germany and Japan (Roberts 142). The mood of the country was darkly suspicious, allowing also for the questioning of patriotism and blacklisting those who faintly "smelled Red." No less than Senator Joe McCarthy dubbed Dorothy Day "Moscow Mary" and "he hinted darkly of the connections between Day and the Red menace" (Roberts 142). Day rode out this storm, as she did every other one, never backing down from controversy and noting in her diary that while she has a "spirit of respect" for every living creature, I have not kept this spirit of respect for Joe McCarthy" (*Duty* 184).

In her 1952 autobiography, written to refurbish the coffers of the then largely unpopular Catholic Worker movement, Day muses that countless times, she and her staff have been asked the rhetorical question: What would you do if an armed maniac was to attack your child?' To this querulous inquiry, Day replies: "'Restrain him, of course, but do not kill him, confine him if necessary. But perfect love casts out fear and love overcomes hatred" (LL 279). This sentiment is not welcome in mid-century America, which now viewed the name of Dorothy Day as a synonym for controversy.

## **Protest as Communication**

Controversy continued to be Dorothy Day's life's blood, evidenced by the 'matter of taxes.' Day never paid what she considered an unfair tax. In 1960, in an article titled "This Money Is Not Ours," she wrote about her insistence that the city take back approximately thirty-six hundred dollars "refunded" to her as "interest" from the eminent domain takeover of two Catholic Worker locations (Day. *Selected* 293-297).

Day anticipated (rightly) that her readers, many of them people who had donated to the Catholic Worker, might be confused (Day. *Selected* 293-297). She explained that it was not the choice of the Worker to move, and besides, as Personalists, the idea of either charging or paying interest was contrary to their beliefs. By only paying taxes she deemed just, she was the nightmare of the IRS. Since she refused to term her organization a charity, her tax assessments were confusing to say the least (Day *Selected* 311).

In what can only be termed a Bakhtinian episode of resisting authority, Day's 1972 article: "We Go on Record" relayed her position to an IRS letter which stated the Catholic Worker owed almost \$300,000 in federal taxes. In a combination of simplicity and guile, and in keeping with her local populist beliefs, Day had paid regional but not Federal tax. The threat of foreclosure on Catholic Worker Houses of Hospitality and the newspaper loomed. Her steadfast refusal to "incorporate" or apply for 'tax-exempt status' was, according to Day, perfectly reasonable, since: "How does one pay federal tax on efforts to enact the works of mercy?" (Day *Selected* 311).

Fortunately, Day had good lawyers and good friends of quiet influence. A few months later, she then joyfully communicated to her readers: "Good news! We received an absolution from the U. S government." She editorializes that: "It was a good

confrontation.” Day and her lawyers convinced the government that “you cannot kill an idea, no matter what steps the government might take.” The IRS appears incredulous at Day’s statements that while the CW volunteer accountants keep records of donations, no one is ever paid a salary. As for her clothing, “the clothes are from donations, but my shoes are from my generous sister Della” (Day. *Selected* 313-317).

Funding was achieved by contributions from the public and from her stipends paid to Day from her various lectures. Day, the public speaker, was skilled at delivering her message. She was often asked to attend conferences and rallies significant to the peace and justice community. At a 1963 Danville, Virginia mass rally she spoke and also heard Martin Luther King’s speech in which he described the brutal actions of the local police force in resisting the Congress of Racial Equality’s efforts to register “coloreds” to vote. Day, as one of the main speakers at the CORE sponsored event, sympathized with the plight of the organizers. She told the crowd their struggle was “basic to the Peace movement in general” (Day *By Little* 326-329).

After returning to New York, she wrote in a passionate column that ‘the weapons of these non-violent protestors are similar to the ancient Apostles’ and she then praised the martyred Medgar Evers, who “with foreknowledge of his doom’ responded to his martyr’s call” (Day *By Little* 327-329).

Nancy Roberts, another of the league of Dorothy Day scholars, relates a story of the poet Claude McKay who, in the twenties, had witnessed Day’s wrath against racism firsthand. It seems that at a social gathering of the staff of the *Masses*, a Southern editor uttered, not once but twice, the “N’ word. Most at the gathering of educated journalists were merely embarrassed and looked away, but McKay says this young Dorothy Day

went against the prevailing tolerance of intolerance. McKay relates: “Dorothy rose to the occasion and threatened to slap the face of the offender if that word were uttered again” (Roberts 21)

Day used her newspaper experience to establish and maintain the *Catholic Worker* newspaper for close to a half century, aided by such varied literary talents such as journalism students from the Ivy League and the “non-Catholic Christian anarchist activist Amman Hennacy” (LL 266) who joined the CW organization in the early fifties. Hennacy was a veteran anarchist, but not a “veteran,” since as early as WWI; he had been jailed for refusing conscription. Day describes him a “the positive pacifist” (LL 266) and it appears that his place at the “Worker” evolved into a sort of “agitator in residence.”

Hennacy, who Patrick Coy calls a “One Man Revolution” had been born in Ohio to Baptist parents and was influenced a Quaker grandmother (Coy 134). Like Day he had been a Socialist in his youth and was a radical and ardent pacifist all his life. He was an accomplished *Catholic Worker* newspaper writer, a fearless protestor and was imprisoned over thirty times for his uncompromising activism (Coy 64).

In his years at the New York Catholic Worker (1952 to 1961) Hennacy was Day’s faithful and fiery colleague, even becoming Catholic for a few years with Day as his godparent (Coy 156) After his move to Salt Lake City to establish the Joe Hill House of Hospitality, he died in 1970. He had suffered a heart attack while protesting at the state capital against the death penalty. It was Hennacy and others like him, plus the changing tenor of the times, which caused Day to bring the Catholic Worker pacifist ideals even more vehemently to the public attention than she had in the thirties and forties (Coy 158).

The historical moment now was the fifties, the time of the McCarthy hearings, the House Committee on Un-American Activities, and the “blacklisting” of anyone with a Socialist or Communist background. Day, and her editor ( and fellow convert) Bob Ludlum, strove to remind their readers: “The Catholic religion is not in opposition to pacifism” citing “the early rule of the church proclaimed that one who is baptized should not shed blood” (LL 269).

To this, Dorothy Day added her own studied observation “Even Augustine distinguished between coercive government and directive government” (LL 268).

Words like this do not serve Day well, although as an expanded rhetorician and communicator, Day often let her actions speak for her, particularly within her frequent prison stays. This was a period in twentieth century history where “protest” had not yet been elevated to the status found a decade later in the student protests against the Vietnam War. So it is clear that Day was a postmodern pioneer in the phenomenon of civil disobedience and public protests. Throughout this historical moment, Day, and her league of “Workers” were repeatedly arrested and jailed in New York prisons for sentences up to thirty days (Roberts 152). The charges were generally for refusing to disperse and also for violations of the newly enacted Civil Defense Act (Roberts 150).

A public relations “victory” of sorts was achieved by Day in raising the consciousness of the public to the emerging military-industrial machine and to the time honored principle of civil disobedience. Nancy Roberts writes that by these actions: ‘Dorothy Day stands as one of the major advocacy journalist-activists of U. S. history [and] like Henry David Thoreau and Eugene Debs, she combined journalism with civil disobedience in a vital, effective way’ (as qtd. in Roberts 129).

A special edition of the *Catholic Worker* was issued in July 1957. The banner headline read: “Dorothy Day Among Pacifists Jailed.” The inside pages quoted Day as saying this action was necessary not only to combat the psychological fear which these drills promoted, but also as opposition to war and to reminding the public “we must do penance for the atomic bomb” (Roberts 152).

Day’s protest efforts and frequent prison terms in the name of pacifism and civil disobedience hardly go unnoticed by others, and their support is welcomed, if for no other reason than to show that democracy allowed for dissent. In 1957, after one of her many arrests, representatives of America’s three religions: Edward Skillin of the *Commonweal*; John C. Bennett co-chair of Christianity and Crisis organizations; and Rabi Eugene J. Lippman of the Union of Hebrew Congregations joined in her defense (Roberts 152). *The New York Times* published their concerns, and then, within their editorial pages, they pointed out that: “American society honors the tradition of dissent which Day and her followers witnessed” (Roberts 152).

Day scholar Carole Jablonski’s title for Day during this period is “Day as humble ironist” (Jablonski. “Contested Legacy”). Jablonski speaks to the idea that Day used irony within her writings from prison to make her point, particularly by calling attention to the “humble activities of those who protest an unjust law or practice.” By this approach Day thus uses her imprisonment for refusing to take part in a Civil Defense practice to inform the public about her stay in prison; thereby enacting an “effective communication position” (Jablonski. “Contested Legacy”).

Jablonski goes on to point out that Day’s “rhetorical posture’ shows in her editorial “Thoughts from Prison,” in which Day reports on her arrest, imprisonment, and the

attitudes of not only her fellow prisoners, but also, by inference, the attitudes of the general public. This causes Jablonski to note that Day portrays herself; first, as “foil for the public,” acknowledging a law has been broken, then as “foil for the prisoners” who have a sense of superiority. They, at least, are not there for protesting, but for real crimes (Jablonski 42). Day thereby questions the complacency of the “outsiders” who do not realize the closed compartments of their righteous minds. Jablonski concludes: “Thus, readers are to infer that those who are *free* are no better than those who are incarcerated” (Jablonski 42).

Throughout the fifties, the sixties and the Vietnam War, Dorothy Day and her followers were met with yet more opportunities for “protest as rhetoric,” evidenced by a new phenomenon: the widespread burning of draft cards (Forest 116). Biographer Jim Forest knows whereof he speaks, he had been discharged from the Navy as a conscientious objector and quickly joined the CW family in 1961 (Riegle 201). In his later biography of Dorothy Day, Forest writes of the atmosphere of the sixties: “Never in American history, had so many been engaged in public opposition to their country’s military activities” (Forest 116). In 1965 the Catholic Worker was instrumental in establishing the Catholic Peace Fellowship which concentrated on educating Catholic students and others about Conscientious Objection (Forest 116-117).

Others, not content with structured resistance, and choosing instead the slogan of “Hell no, we won’t go” enacted more dramatic ways which were intended to shock the public. The Berrigan brothers became household names, and they and their “Catonsville Nine” went to prison for their pacifist beliefs. (Forest 116-118). Day initially argued that

those who gave up their freedom were not disobedient, “they were followers of the Way of the Cross, which included suffering and sacrifice” (Forest 116-118).

That said Day did not approve of the outpouring of conscience-driven acts which the Berrigans and others came to be known for because often they involved the destruction of property and were tinged with violence. She makes the distinction as a veteran of the times when protests and protestors were not so “accepted” as agents of change. “Those priests and nuns,” she is heard to say, “I admire their courage and their dedication, but not their arrogance” (Coy 300).

Day, while urging penance and prayer “for all of us” (Forest 117), was, of course, not silent. She pointed to the United States government as the perpetrators of what surely, as the nightly news now reported, was a war like none other—at least in terms of deliberate ‘non-combatant’ casualties. Day was characteristically blunt: “I accuse the government itself and all of us of these mass murders in Vietnam this destruction of villages, this wiping out of peoples, this kidnapping, torture and rape and the killings which have been disclosed to us” (Forest 117-110). Many of the Viet Cong looked indistinguishable from those who the American soldiers were ‘protecting’ in efforts to thwart a “domino effect” of Communist control in Southeast Asia. The “battleground” was even more complex, composed of jungles and rice patties. As early as 1954 Day’s *Catholic Worker* newspaper had warned of the dangers of American imperialism in Vietnam. From 1964 through 1973 Day and her Catholic Worker movement spearheaded protest against American military involvement, which included Agent Orange and the threat of nuclear weapons (Roberts 160-165).

This involvement was to have a profound effect on both Day and her followers when the United States, ignoring the 1965 plea by Pope Paul VI, plunged even further into the tragic human nightmare that was Vietnam (Roberts 161).

### **Humanity Communicated**

Dorothy Day was particularly distressed when her grandson, Eric Hennessey became one of the soldiers of the United States in Vietnam (*Duty* 414). She wrote in her newspaper that Cardinal Spellman had chosen to ignore the pleas for a negotiated settlement and instead had called for “total victory” (Forest 119). Day’s other particular sadness within that place and time involved the self-immolation suicide of someone she had never met, a new Catholic Worker, Roger LaPorte. In November of 1965, Roger LaPorte burned himself to death at the United Nations Plaza to protest his country’s participation in the Vietnam War (*Duty* 374). Day was totally devastated that this young man had chosen this way to call attention to what he fervently believed was a war of inhumane methods and unprovoked cruelty.

This act served to focus unwanted attention on the “Worker” and the press downplayed the decades of non-violent protests and service to the underserved which the Catholic Worker had previously been known for (Coy 101). Instead, the publicity portrayed the Day and the CW family as implicit accomplices in what, in today’s unfortunate vernacular, might be termed “a solitary suicide bomber.”

This very public suicide caused the well known monk and Day confidant Thomas Merton to observe that, after “the LaPorte incident,” the entire world, including the Catholic Worker, “has gone nuts” (Merriman 117). He implied in his correspondence with Day that she should distance herself from the incident (*Duty* 463). Day, of course,

cannot agree with Merton. She writes in her column titled “Suicide or Sacrifice,” that while the official doctrines of the church forbid suicide, the circumstances of his sacrifice identify LaPorte as a “victim soul,” and God would know :”Roger’s intent was to love God and love his brother” (Day *Selected* 168).

Day was somehow convinced her readers could distinguish between an act which, according to the teachings of the church was “unforgivable” and the sad event of one whose mind had been overcome by forces that Day could neither understand nor condemn.. Such believe in the “unity of contraries,” or perhaps in simple naiveté, it seems, was misplaced as other Catholic publications, such as the *Our Sunday Visitor* implicated Day’s “ pious oversimplification” as “influencing the minds of the young and the unstable; the uninformed and the unformed--such as the late Roger LaPorte [and it ] has done much harm” (Roberts 161).

Day, of course, chose not to retreat and in a prescient 1967 *Catholic Worker* article, she foretold many of the trouble spots and breeding grounds for terrorism of the next few decades. She wrote: “It is not just Vietnam, it is South Africa, Nigeria and the Congo; it is Indonesia and all of Latin America [where] we are supplying arms and money to the rest of the world [and] where we are not even ourselves yet fighting” (Roberts 164).

The period of the late fifties and the early sixties had produced another nightmare for the United States: Fidel Castro. “Tragic” is how Day interprets the failure of the Cuban institutional church to “live the perfectionist, and prophetic teachings of Christ” (Stone 89). She thereby suggests that the Cuban revolution was inevitable because “the Marxists had taken seriously the lives of the poor, whereas the church had not” (Coy 39). Regarding Castro himself, Day writes: “No one expects him to lay down his arms and

become another Martin of Tour [but] we pray the grace of God will grow within him and that with a better social function. . . the church will be allowed to function” (Roberts 156).

The American public does not respond kindly to these unfulfilled hopes. Day was widely criticized as disloyal and hypocritical (Forest 106-107). Yet, the Journalist Day was more than likely the envy of the restricted American press when she went to Communist Cuba and witnessed a speech by the illusive Fidel Castro. Never flinching from controversy, and predating Barbara Walters by a decade, she and Eileen Egan had obtained a ‘backdoor’ visa from the Czech embassy. The visit elicited a flood of criticism for seeming to deny Day’s vaunted pacifism and for ignoring the human rights violations rampant in Castro’s regime (Stone 89). Later Day will note of Castro’s revolutionary companion: “According to Irish priest Father Patrick Dundon, who has a mission in Brazil, most of Latin America now regard Che Guevara as a saint” (*Duty* 430). Elaine Murray Stone relates that Day was not effected by those who “misinterpreted” her visit, which had has its intention to portray the “human interests” of the Cuban people and the hope for a “Radical Christianity to emerge as part of a post- revolutionary Cuba to come” (Stone 89).

An authentic wish from an authentic communicator, yet at the same time, one wonders if such actions indicated a defiant stance which, at the time, understandably overshadowed Day’s devotional rhetoric. More palatable perhaps is the personal observations of those who witnessed Day as a nonconformist extolling the virtues of personal accountability. Jack English was equally intrigued by her earlier fundraising pleas for help and her *panache* when he saw her lecturing in the late thirties. He

described a Day lecture where: “She appeared with a beret on, and was quite beautiful. She gave the entire talk with a cigarette hanging out the side of her mouth” (Forest 148).

Similarly, Jim Forest compares Dorothy Day to “Chaucer’s Wife of Bath,” in that she was not only “shocking in her plain-speaking ways” but also “he was able to tell a bawdy joke” (Forest 151). Day, it appears as a pure purveyor of unadulterated and singular ‘holy messages,’ was depicted rarely. Instead, the Dorothy Day who emerges is the modern woman who had a journalist eye for what was important and what was trivial.

Catholic Worker Joe Zarella recalls Day had little patience with flattery or attempts to make her appear ascetic. She also knew how to swear. In reply to a woman who loftily asked Day: “Miss Day, do you have visions?” Day replied ‘Oh S---!’” (as qtd. In Zarella 12). In her autobiography Day remembers it differently, (no scatological reply). She recalls saying: “Yes, I have visions, they are of unpaid bills!” (LL 188).

Justine L’Esperance was a product of Catholic schooling and was an early Catholic Worker volunteer. She remembers that she was struck by how much Day delighted in poking holes in the fawning admiration of those who came to flatter, but not work. When told “you must be a saint” by two nice ladies from the parish, Day’s reply was to say, without batting an eye: “Oh Bulls---t” (as qtd. in L’Esperance 1).

Eschewing political correctness, Day found the seventies decade, with its cultural and societal changes, superficially inclined and hypocritically charged—and she let her readers know her views. In a 1975 interview, she termed the women’s liberation movement: “Geared to those articulate middle-class women with time on their hands, the ones who have the least to complain about” (Scott, *Praying* 34).

Regarding the expected “he and she” of the now inclusive style of writing, Day could not see the sense of awkwardly writing or enclosing in parentheses messages which let the reader know she was not sexist. As the reader of this particular offering might, by now note, here I have followed her lead, and for the most part, I have done the same.

Day, in her writings is without apology, she responds: “When I say *men* I mean people, men and women . . . I will not be bullied into re-wording such beautiful sayings such as all men and women are brothers and sisters” (Scott. *Praying* 28).

“Bullying Dorothy Day” was clearly an ambitious project, although her writing sometimes refers to her “being only a woman” (LL 236). Particularly, it seems to appear, when she is getting her own way. Clearly, however, men had influenced Day throughout her life, starting with the seeming indifference of her father, the love affairs with Moise. Tobey and Batterham, and the relationships with Day and her ‘teachers,’ found within her association with Peter Maurin, Father John Hugo and Ammon Hennacy.

A close look, however, reveals that Day was a woman who listened, absorbed and then more often than not, did exactly as she deemed to be right, regardless of what men or women, or children, or sisters, or clergy, or colleagues had to say. Inspiration, not surprisingly, played its art in her narrative. Day’s female inspirations were found in the lives of the saints especially Theresa of Avila, who she admired for her rebel spirit and Therese of Lisieux who she loved for her “Little Flower ways” (Merriman 173). As a contemporary influential counterpoint, it is Sister Peter Claver, known for her work with African American causes, who gave Day the first dollar to be used toward the Catholic Worker publication and, according to Ellsberg, was “a tremendous influence in Day’s life” (*Duty* 80). Mother Teresa was a dear friend.

There are those who may disagree with these assessments, particularly that Day was equally influenced by both genders. June O'Connor, who portrayed Day as "understandably influenced by patriarchy" was subsequently challenged by David Scott, who took issue with whoever would term Day "anti-feminist." In his review of the 1992 O'Connor' book, Scott wrote: "Day was not a woman parroting patriarchal expectations, but a believer talking of the possibility of God in a world filled with unjust cruelty and suffering" (Scott. *More Than*). Scott suggests O'Connor do more research into the life of Day, which he insists includes deep admiration for the positive role models of history and church culture, such as Juliana of Norwich and Catherine of Sienna (Scott. *More Than*).

At her last public appearance on August 6, 1976, Day appeared with a person to whom she is occasionally compared with: Mother Teresa, when they both addressed the International Eucharistic Congress in Philadelphia at a mass to honor the military (*Duty* 561). Day noted the irony of asking her, a known pacifist, to speak on the 31<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the day on which Hiroshima was bombed. Her rhetoric is reported as courageously and characteristically direct: "I plead that we regard the military mass as an act of penance for God to forgive us for what we have done" (*Duty* 561).

The historical moment then was one of drama, and at the same time a heightened exuberance, and even though Day started to slow down from the illnesses of old age, she was still an active in-house leader. She personally followed how the rhetorical power of protests and protestors were viewed by the general public even though by now her role was primarily a pastoral one (Coles, *Radical* 159).

## Parody as Communication

Dorothy Day knew the “decoding” power of ironic language and the ability of parody to make a point. In a nod to Bakhtin’s theory of the carnivalesque power of parody, she appeared delighted to hear no less than arch-conservative Bill Buckley has targeted her as an intended victim of sarcastic appraisal. Catholic Worker Chuck Matthei remembers a story which involved Frank Sheed, partner of Sheed and Ward Publishers, and a conversation he had with one of conservative America’s most prolific figures, William F. Buckley. Matthei relates: “Dorothy would often laughingly repeat a story publisher Frank Sheed told her. It seems arch-conservative Bill Buckley was talking to Sheed once, and labeling all prominent New York public figures mentioned as ‘asses’. When he got to Dorothy Day’s name, Buckley barked out: *Half-Ass!*” (as qtd. in Matthei 147) Day found this an amusing incident worth repeating. (as qtd. in Matthei 147).

In this rhetorical situation, one is reminded of Bakhtin’s view on parody and how “the victim” by refusing to be insulted, becomes “the winner” (as qtd. in Morson 64-65). Day allows herself to be the “target” knowing, that, “a parodist utterance cannot help but pay compliment to its target subject: [because] it points out that the original is important enough to be discredited [so] the second utterance represents the first in order to discredit it [and] the audience knows with whom they are to agree” (as qtd. in Morson 64-65)

Thus, the erudite and pompous Bill Buckley was a perfect foil for the Bakhtinian parody that Day successfully enacted in the re-telling of the story.

On a more serious plane, the intellectual Day, while a person of conviction, never dismissed as inauthentic the valid beliefs of others. She repeatedly communicated the danger of ungoverned evangelization, and how human pride is often the motivating

factor. “Because the worst sin is pride and you can easily have a sin like that which is Hate in the name of religion” (Coles, *Radical* 28).

As a friend of Calcutta’s Mother Teresa she visited India, admiring the writings of Vinoba Bhave and Jayprakash Narayan, followers of Gandhi, ‘since they reflected the synthesis Peter Maurin was seeking.’ She concluded: “These Indian philosophers were even more realistic, perhaps, than Peter Maurin” (Day *Loaves* 48). Day had, in 1970, literally traveled the world, visiting various Catholic Worker houses or places of refuge aligned with the Gospel of giving (*Duty* 482). She wrote of being impressed by the caste-conscious Hindus “who feed the dying at the hospices as an act of piety, regardless of religion” (*Duty* 484). Miranda Spencer relates that during one visit Dorothy Day and Mother Teresa were observed holding hands. With a modesty that the Americans are not known for: “Dorothy Day had to stop Mother Teresa from calling her ‘a saint’” (Spencer 94).

As the unquestionably authentic Dorothy Day approached her final years, she would quote Cardinal Suhard’s belief that: “To be a witness does not consist in engaging in propaganda or even in stirring people up, but in being a living mystery; it means living in such a way that one’s life would not make sense if God did not exist” (Coles, *Radical* 169). She, especially with her more mature mind, observed: “The longer I live, the more I see God at work in people who do not have the slightest interest in religion, or reading the Bible” (Coles *Radical* 29). By this observation, Day was expressing a hope for inclusivity which embraces the ideal that in loving God, one must also be tolerant of those who do not worship under the same label.

Furthermore, Day had little patience with any religious labels, saying: “I don’t think God is so jealous about our worship of him that he will want to separate those who serve His purposes and His goodness, even if they have never stepped into a church. To clutch at the Bible or to dismiss others who don’t read it or haven’t read it as bad people or unworthy. . .not up to the membership in your club, or good enough to be your allies or friends . . .it’s *sacrilegious* to be like that” (Coles *Radical* 25. 28.)

As a student of church teaching Day, time and time again, Day was constantly reminding her readers of the original message of Christ and the teachings of both the Old and New Testaments. She recognized that in the name of religion, much of the human tendency toward exclusivity has enacted a parody of what He would have wanted presented as Christian Gospel. Day’s God, therefore, was not a jealous deity (Coles *Radical* 25. 28). The end of the nineteen seventies’ decade finds the “un-jealous God” of Dorothy Day now starting to beckon home his faithful servant.

### **Personal Communication**

Robert Ellsberg, in his previously mentioned 2008 book, *The Duty of Delight The Diaries of Dorothy Day*, found a diary excerpt from 1977. In it, the ailing heart patient Day worried how she will pay her four thousand dollar hospital bill. Her Personalism beliefs do not allow her to accept “free care for the poor” at the hospital. Later, she appears relieved since: “A check for five thousand arrived in the mail today!” (*Duty* 590). Day later laments that, even though her books, particularly *The Long Loneliness* have rarely been out of print, the paperback editions earn her only one and a half cents per copy (*Duty* 558). So profit was undeniably never the driving force behind Day’s journalism. Later, Day expressed the dilemma of what we today term ‘the niche author’

when she told William Miller: “I have no faith in our kind of books selling but if they get on the library shelves, they might influence people—and that is enough” (Roberts 68).

Day is not without hope, or indeed vanity. She wants to influence and she wants to be read. In her serio-funny manner, she ponders the “accomplices” she has in those who sell her books which they themselves do not read. She writes: “But oh the joy of seeing one’s books on newsstands, in chain drugstores, bus stations and even airports [even though] they contain [metaphorically] dynamite enough to blow our current unjust war-ridden , profit- hungry civilization to smithereens” (Roberts 68)

In the late seventies, Day became less mobile and less able to write. She was unable to go to her Staten Island home and she remained at Maryhouse in the lower East Side of Manhattan, a section she had many years before, preferred to the “intellectual” Greenwich Village. In April of 1979, Caesar Chavez came to visit, in July it was India’s Mother Teresa. Day was becoming weaker but was not afraid of her impending death. She told Robert Ellsberg, in a reference to Saint Teresa of Avila, that “her mules were packed” and the work she had started would go on. “The paper is in the hands of young people, and the houses are strong. My prayer now is ‘Now let thy servant depart in peace’” (Forest 412).

Robert Coles writes of visiting Day not long before congestive heart failure ended her life. She was reading Tolstoy again and some Dickens. This is what she told him:

It will soon be over. I try to think back; try to remember this life that the Lord gave me; the other day I wrote down these few words “A Life Remembered.” But then, I couldn’t get into a summary what mattered most. I could not do it. I just sat there and I thought of the Lord, and his visit to us all those centuries ago, and I

said to my self “What great luck it was for me to have Him in my life for so long.” (Coles *Radical* 16)

Tamar Teresa Batterham Hennessey, Dorothy Day’s daughter, was by her side when death came for Dorothy on November 29, 1980 (Riegle 181). Tamar immediately took exception to plans to involving Father John Hugo, a Pittsburgh priest, in Day’s final rites. Tamar thought Father Hugo, who Day had identified as a spiritual advisor, had influenced her mother into being unduly severe in her religious expectations, particularly while Tamar was growing up (Riegle 111). At the suggestion of Sister Peter Claver and Father Roy Pacifique, Day and Tamar had attended several religious retreats in the forties, held usually in a bucolic setting and allowing for “refreshment of the soul” away from the Catholic Worker setting (Merriman 134).

The most influential of these retreats were the “LaCouture retreats” These were religious “retreats” held in Oakmont Pennsylvania, away from the world, lasting usually a week. The intent was to allow the religious consciousness to be refreshed in an atmosphere of prayer and “holy silence;” broken only to hear extremely stern sermons which, in the case of Father Hugo, usually started out: “If you really loved Christ” (Merriman 134).

Father Hugo conducted the retreats for the Catholic Worker community also, but was eventually restricted by his bishop in this ministry. He was also banned from publishing his work in various venues, including the *Catholic Worker* newspaper. The retreats were revoked for their call to unrealistic austerity, and for lacking adherence to church teaching about grace and penance (Forest 84). Day recalls that restriction was prompted by the original Father Lacouture, a Canadian priest, and his “being accused of

inexactitude of expression [causing] division among the clergy, and also causing some people to go to extremes in the business of mortification” (LL 258). Jane Sammon relates that the one undeniably good thing which came from Day’s association with these retreats was that Day gave up her cigarette habit. (Sammon Interview)

Day’s daughter Tamar later identified the retreat as “that dreadful retreat” and when she overheard plans to have Father Hugo as co-celebrant in her mother’s final religious ritual, she vehemently stated: “If Hugo comes, I will not” (Riegle 184). Tamar had the last word on the subject and it was Cardinal Cooke who met Day’s body two days later at the church of the Nativity where her grandchildren carried it, in European fashion, from Maryhouse a block away (Forest 145)

Before Dorothy Day died, several people had kept a vigil with her, including Jane Sammon, the aforementioned present ‘manager’ of the Catholic Worker and an invaluable source for current researchers. Tamar Hennessey, her family, and the Catholic Worker staff, volunteers and various “guests” grieved for the woman who would, shortly be described by the *New York Times* as: “A nonviolent social radical of luminous personality [and] a pious Roman Catholic” (Roberts 169).

Prominent obituaries of Day’s death (and life) appeared in papers and publications across the country, notably the *Washington Post* and *Newsweek* and *Time* (Roberts 169). Even the ultra-conservative church sponsored paper *The Wanderer* paid her tribute for her conscience, if not for her methods (Roberts 169). Nancy Roberts thus duly observes that which has often been said about Day: that she actually and authentically lived the true ideals of Catholicism. “By fulfilling church law, Day became probably the greatest lay influence on the Catholic Church in the twentieth century” (Roberts 170).

As in life, Dorothy's death was unconventional and in equal parts, both devout and defiant. Catholic Worker Michael Harnak was a registered nurse and was at Maryhouse when Day died. In what appears to be an example of the type of carnivalesque that Bakhtin (and most assuredly Day herself) appreciated, Mike Harnak describes the scene:

It was the damnedest funeral I have ever seen. The casket was pine, violating absolutely all the New York rules, but no one was going to tell the Worker not to do it.' Cardinal Cooke said the mass at the humble Nativity church around the corner. One of the woman guests from Maryhouse came in, listened for a while to the liturgy, then cuddled down in a front pew and took a nap. (as qtd. in Harnak 184-87).

Dorothy Day was laid to rest on December 2, 1980, in a donated grave on Staten Island, not far from the cottage she had shared with Forster Batterham, who according to most Day researchers, Dorothy identified always as 'her husband.' Other mourners at the mass included Day's family, Caesar Chavez and his wife, the Jesuit activist, Dan Berrigan, the Episcopal Bishop, Paul Moore, Monsignor Egan from Chicago, and the radical Abbie Hoffman (as qtd. in Harnak 185 ).

In a final nod to the "unity of contraries" that marked her communicative lived life, Day's funeral procession was led from the lower East side, over the Verrazano Bridge, to her to her final resting place on Staten Island. by the New York City police department, an organization she had so often thoroughly worried. At Resurrection Catholic Cemetery, the unionized cemetery workers, whose efforts, thirty years prior, Day had vehemently supported, insisted on paying their tribute by reverently lowering her plain and unadorned casket into the earth (Riegle/Harnak 186). A plain granite stone marks the spot and the

part of the inscription reads simply: *Deo Gratias* (Stone 102). An apt description of how Day had lived her own life on earth: “Thanks be to God.”

### **Interpretive Analysis: Communication**

Dorothy Day as Buber’s ‘Unity of Contraries’

This chapter had considered Dorothy Day within her various communication roles as interpreted through Buber’s ‘unity of contraries’ Her embedded narrative served to give witness to her authenticity and her devotion and defiance which marked her complex efforts as rhetorician, activist, pacifist, author, protestor, parodist, sister, parent and Matriarch of the Catholic Worker. Day granddaughter and writer Kate Hennessey, speaks to the “unity of contraries’ which make up the complexities associated with Day and her narrative when she terms Day “inexplicable”. Hennessey is undoubtedly thankful for the legacy of Dorothy Day as a writer and communicator, yet she, seemingly in keeping with Day as a “unity of contraries,” also points out that: “It is difficult to summarize or characterize Dorothy Day [particularly] as either Tamar’s ‘neglectful parent’ or even as ‘a heroine,’ who is, in many ways, simply inexplicable” (Riegle x, xi).

As this chapter ends, it appears “Inexplicable” is an apt adjectival description of Dorothy Day, just as “Contrary” is certainly what Day often was. Thus Buber and Day demonstrate the premise that life and its living is more complicated than hard and fast truisms. This is aptly additionally illustrated by the turbulence associated with Day’s embedded narrative: her early troubled youth, her leaving a “natural love” for a Divine one, her dramatic conversion, and her often controversial views. Some of the views she held have come to be prophetic; others are still being pitted against much of what is considered ‘prevailing wisdom.’ To paraphrase Patrick Allitt, it just might be that

oftentimes she was right but sometimes, because as she was a very real human being, she, like all of us, ended up being just “plain wrong” (Allitt 18).

To those who have the audacity to categorize Dorothy Day as “either this or either that” one might be well served to remember that Dorothy Day was, without doubt, an extraordinary person *and* she was also exquisitely human. In this latter role she provides an authenticity for our flawed, but not failed, humanity; the type which invests itself in the “transversal communication” which Calvin Schrag says “seeks to understand within the context of differences” (Schrag 148).

In other words, Day as protestor, parodist, rhetorician and communicator did exactly what she believed to be the best choice for the particular situation within that particular moment in time. Said another way, Day was perpetually enacting the message which she deemed to be right, regardless of what anyone had to say: be they relatives, the clergy, the president, or even the supporters of the organization she led. As a public figure and communicator of ideals, Day’s legacy is easy to find. Nancy Roberts points out that inspirational offshoots of the *Catholic Worker* newspaper and the Day-like ideal of social justice are still found within the publications of *Liturgy and Sociology*, *Today* and *Integrity*, just to name a few (Roberts 174)

In venues which often obscure her initial involvement, Day, as a contemporary influence, lives on. Bibliographers Anne and Alice Klejment suggest that Dorothy Day has made a difference in not only the radical community but in the way “the poor” and ideas of justice have been brought to the attention of the public. They reference a 1940’s visit to the New York headquarters of the *Catholic Worker* by a young idealistic John F. Kennedy, before he officially started his national political career. The Klejments argue

that: “While this visit had not an immediate effect, the subsequent work of author and former Catholic Worker Michael Harrington did. His book, *The Other America* was published in 1962 and shattered the illusion that the nation was a land of plenty. [This] moved President Kennedy to begin his “war on poverty” (Klejment xii).

So influence, like hermeneutic understanding, always lags behind the “truths” of a particular historical moment. This has been made apparent by observing how Day’s ideals, once considered ‘radical,’ are now respected. As an instance of such a happening, I point to how, in 1983, the American Catholic Bishops finally endorsed a non-nuclear weaponry policy which was an almost complete reversal of the policies advocated by the Bishops in previous decades (Robert 174). Day unfortunately did not live to see her demands of only a few years before ‘legitimized’ by the passage of only a few years and the cognizance brought about by her writing, her actions, and her legacy of protest. Events like this have caused Mel Piehl to remark: ‘Dorothy Day was an influencing figure in legitimizing the idea of modern war resistance, especially in inspiring the new Catholic Left of the sixties’ (Piehl 227).

Although others may point to the contrary manner which “peace activists” have seemingly ignored Day’s strict adherence to the “non-violent” aspect of protest, it appears Day played a seminal role in the initial raising of the importance of public social conscience. As an instance of this type of thinking one has only to look to the Brothers Berrigan and others who have made their mark by dramatic acts of protest which destroy property and which, only in a broad sense, can be termed strictly “pacifistic” (Coy /Klejment 303). So indeed it seems here, as within many aspects of the Day embedded narrative: there are shades of the “unity of contraries.” Also, worthy of note, is that

“Day’s core principle of nonviolence makes her closer to the concepts of Christ and Gandhi than to the Berrigans” (as qtd. in Klejment302).

While that may be the case, the Berrigans themselves also claim Day as an influence, even though they acknowledge that their methods differ. They and their band of Plowshares followers had departed from Day’s strict interpretation of pacifism when they broke into a General Electric nuclear facility in Pennsylvania, poured blood around the site, and proceeded to destroy documents and property (Coy 302). According to Jesuit priest, Dan Berrigan, who was later interviewed by Rosalie Riegle, “Dorothy Day was a strong inspiring influence” (as qtd. in Berrigan 135) even though Father Dan Berrigan admits to the departure from Catholic Worker teachings. In a tribute to her humanity the brothers Berrigan had received a Day note some years later in which Day had asked that ‘they not judge her.’ While not condoning the activities which led to the incarceration of the Berrigans and their followers, Day wanted them to know that she personally regretted her “former lack of compassion” regarding their activities (as qtd. in Berrigan 26).

For the most part, though, how she might be judged by others was not Day’s overriding concern. She was more focused on the daily activities of her organization. Just keeping it afloat, year after year, was more than a fulltime job which, of course, does not preclude others from inquiring about the long term potential influence of the Catholic Worker after her passing. Anne Klejment quotes her reply to just such a question:

Who knows . . . how much influence a thing has? I think we have to follow our own consciences and we also do the work we have set ourselves out to do, and accept sometimes [that it is] small. Yet, sometimes, I have a great confidence that

it has affected people's thinking and their interests tremendously. (as qtd. in Klejment 303).

This chapter analysis ends after considering Day's place of influence and significance in the various aspects of Communication as she lived out the public roles of journalist, lecturer, columnist, and editor, listening to and responding to the voices and events of the American century. In her personal life as parent and family member she displayed the complexities inherent within authentic human relations and encounter.

Now, with the knowledge gained by considering Day as illustrated by "a unity of contraries," we now enlist the hermeneutic possibilities of a final Buber metaphor to further attempt to: "define Dorothy Day." In this next summarizing chapter, Day is considered "treading the narrow ridge," the place of choice and change, which further illustrates the authenticity of the embedded narrative of Dorothy Day.

## **Chapter Five: Summary**

### **Defining Day as “Treading the Narrow Ridge”**

“I have often described my standpoint to my friends as the ‘narrow ridge’” (Buber, *Way of Response* 110). Thus begins Buber’s musing about the complexity of life, the choices we make, and the precariousness of the human experience. In this summary chapter Dorothy Day is hermeneutically interpreted in terms of how she reflects the Buber thinking that we exist on a “rocky ridge,” a complicated terrain, where Buber says: “there is not sureness of expressible knowledge” but (rather) “the certainty of meeting the One who remains undisclosed” (Buber, *Way of Response* 110).

This “narrow ridge” which Buber is describing is one in which we “balance out” and then decide. It speaks to the concerns of the self and the concerns of community; the draw of the secular and the pull of the spiritual; the surety of certainty and the inevitability of doubt. In a sense, what Buber is pointing out is that we make choices and decisions framed by other interpretations, and of course, as Gadamer has ascertained, interpretation itself is fed by hermeneutic understanding—which in turn is influenced by tradition and prejudice (Gadamer, *Truth* 484).

With this in mind, we now turn to a summarization of this work so far and then we add several “definitions” of Day, as she is seen by others and interpreted by their “truths.” We keep in mind the hermeneutic aspects of “defining” and the fact that Dorothy Day’s life has been, undeniably, a “narrow ridge” journey, in search of the Buber metaphorical concept of the “One who remains undisclosed” (Buber, *Way of Response* 110).

Throughout this narrational journey of exposition, Day has emerged as one invested in the experience of being human; treading the “narrow ridge” with both consistent bravery and frequent incaution. Hers is a story of a real and authentic person, who like all members of the human family, exhibited human failings. So, while undoubtedly, Day’s is primarily a narrative of faith and religious conversion, she additionally finds a philosophical home within postmodern “transcendence,” described by Calvin Schrag as a: “Self who is present *In, For and With the Other*” (Schrag 78).

Up to this point, Day’s embedded narrative has been considered throughout the preceding chapters as reflecting the metaphoric concepts of: “Bakhtin’s no-alibi conscience;” and the Buber ideal of “community.” Then, following these two metaphors, a third, the “unity of contraries,” was introduced to illustrate and in a sense “backlight” the complexities associated with the conscience-driven and communal aspects of Day’s role as a very human twentieth century communicator. These metaphors have helped to place Dorothy Day within an informal chronological order, starting with her family background, her early childhood influences, her experiences as a college student, a protesting suffragette, and then as a free-wheeling and troubled bohemian. These times were then followed by Day’s identity as short-lived wife, divorcee and then ‘common law wife’ (her term) whose motherhood and subsequent conversion to Catholicism prompted the co-founding of the Catholic Worker community.

The embedded nature of Dorothy Day’s “petite narrative” has been presented against the larger contextual narrative of the “grand narrative” associated with the turbulent events and changing cultural, economic and political climes of the last century. An understanding of Day’s life events have been additionally aided by a hermeneutic

consideration of her journalistic endeavors evidenced by her controversial and journalistic responses to the dramatic changes of her eighty-year lifespan which included two World Wars, Korea, and Vietnam, the rise of American Labor, Civil Rights, the Women's Movement and the place of America in the postmodern world.

Now in the decades following her death, "defining Dorothy Day" continues .with no end in sight, as many academics, historians, clergy, and associates have, in effect, like the author of this work, become "Day scholars." These semi-audacious Day scholars, and erstwhile 'interpreters,' are bold enough to present their individual varying 'truths' of "the real Dorothy Day." The variances associated with interpretation and definitions are likewise played out in the hermeneutic dance of discovery. Not surprisingly, no two "Day definitions" are exactly alike. For instance, Elaine Murray Stone, in her book, *Dorothy Day, Champion of the Poor* characterizes Day as retrospectively: "the most influential lay Catholic in the history of American Catholicism" ( Stone 92) while Robert Ellsberg calls Day "an authentic saint who speaks to the demands of our present times" (Stone 114). Even though, during her life Day, was never at a loss for critics; now almost thirty years after her death, Day has found many admirers, even if those admirers 'see' her (as demonstrated within this chapter) as 'treading the narrow ridge' through admittedly different interpretive lenses, one of which is 'Saint Dorothy.'

### **Definitions and Interpretations**

Academics and Day biographers, Robert Ellsberg and Robert Coles, have become the most prolific of the Dorothy Day scholars, and they are joined in their scholarly endeavors by several contemporary clergy-view voices, such as EWTN's Father Benedict Groeschel and Sister Brigid Merriman, whose views then differ, naturally enough, from

historians Garry Wills and Patrick O'Brien and the Feminist June O'Connor. The efforts of each of these (and others) will now be presented within their abridged attempts to provide the definitive closure on essentializing Dorothy Day.

Perhaps we should start, however, with a brief quote on how Day once identified herself. She wrote that she was “a socialist in college, a communist in my early twenties, and a Catholic since 1927” (*Loaves* 8). In this simple statement, Day, with characteristic modesty and deflection, has attempted to sum up, explain, and define the sense of her lived life. The term “a Catholic since 1927,” however does not begin to address her contribution to the American century and the authenticity of her lived life of “defiance and devotion” which, for me, provides the essence of her lived life and the pivotal focal point of her embedded narrative, regardless of whether or not she is ever made an official saint.

In 1997, to mark the anniversary of what would have been her one hundredth year, the archbishop of New York, Cardinal John J. O'Connor proposed Day for sainthood in the Catholic Church. Cardinal O'Connor left no doubt about his approval of Day as a relatable person of praxis: “It has long been my contention that Dorothy Day is a saint, not a gingerbread saint or a holy card saint, but a modern-day devoted daughter of the church” (Scott, *Praying* 25). Regarding whether Day would want to be, as she had said years before ‘dismissed that lightly’ (Jordan, *An Appetite*), no one is quite sure. Patrick Jordan thinks she meant that remark in the sense that (official sainthood) might take away from all she wanted to achieve (Jordan *An Appetite*). Janet Parachin views it (official canonization) as a non-issue of sorts, calling Day a “spiritual exemplar” who can be called upon, regardless of her “official” sainthood (Parachin, *Educating*)

Carole Jablonski thinks that Day would not want to be canonized because of her life and because of her declination of ‘honors’ which had marked her witness when she was alive. She sides with delaying the finality of classifying Day as a canonized saint, believing that by “resisting the crystallizing (and finalizing) optic of hagiography. [it then] invites reflection on the particulars of Day’s religious witness.” In her article ‘Declining Honors: Dorothy Day, Rhetorical Resistor to the Culture of Heroic Ascent’ (Jablonski 1998). Jablonski addresses the “problems” associated with the possibility that Dorothy Day may be officially canonized, noting the “cruel irony” of such an event, since Day and her movement “made a point of targeting believer’s complacency by emphasizing each person is called to be a saint” (Jablonski 1998).

Like much in Day’s embedded narrative of devotion and defiance, this is a problematical issue. In a latter article, “Dorothy Day’s Contested Legacy: Humble Irony as a Constraint on Memory” (Jablonski “Contested Legacy”), Jablonski states further that “the irony of being regarded as a likely saint was not lost on her” (Jablonski “Contested Legacy”). Jablonski states the case in this manner: “Rather than being remembered for what she believed and did, public and institutional recognition of her sanctity seemed to contradict almost everything she stood for” (Jablonski, “Contested Legacy”). Those who are urging Day’s canonization and those who oppose it (on the grounds that she did not want it) are two sides of a coin which Jablonski views as “a Bakhtinian sense of caricature” (Jablonski, “Contested Legacy”)

Day’s “use” after sainthood is another issue which is also worrisome according to Jablonski, because the issue of sainthood for Day has consequently promoted two different camps: those who want her officially made a saint and those who want her

“piety” to stay as it is. Jablonski insists: “Neither [side] is capable of capturing the ironic sensibility of Dorothy Day.” Since “the question is not only why she is to be remembered, but how and for whose interests” (Jablonski “Contested Legacy”).

For Patrick Allitt, understanding the Catholic Worker community coincides with attempts to understand Dorothy Day. Such a mission, it seems, is doomed to failure and he contends that since Day was a complex person, both embracing a much-needed community and at the same time, living the sparse life of individual sacrifice, she resists simple “definitions.” In his article “Too interesting to be a Saint,” he encapsulates the earthy mission of Dorothy Day, and even though this quote appears earlier in this offering, it might be not inappropriate to remind ourselves of the message of his brief synopsis which touches on the high points of her varied and now ended life.

Like Saint Paul, Dorothy Day went through a dramatic conversion, she was fearless, lived a life of heroic poverty and loved the poor and went to prison for her pacifism. She obeyed church teaching, almost to the letter, even at her most defiant, she radiated spiritual integrity. She was injudicious, and even if it is tempting to call her a ‘fool for Christ’ . . . sometimes she was just plain wrong. (Allitt 18).

Allitt then goes even further by saying: “I hope Day does not become a saint. By staying as she is, she will stay in focus as a brilliant controversialist to be argued over, rather than as a saint, who was moved out of reach” (Allitt 6). With this observation, Allitt seems to be alluding to the ancient dialectic construct of not only Socrates (Melchert 67), but also in more recent times, the thinking of M. M. Bakhtin who presents the theory that, particularly within Dostoevsky’s novels, and by extension within life

itself: “there is no first word, nor is there a last” (*Problems* 47). So it is with Day’s canonization process and so it is with Day scholarship: there appears to be no end in sight. Her “rhetoric of devotion and defiance” continues to intrigue us into the next century following her death.

In this present decade it is the internet which has become a vehicle for the contrary opinions expressed regarding whether Day should be officially canonized. Riegle relays a 2002 comment from the Catholic Worker website in which Donna Conroy, a Catholic Worker pointedly writes: “Of course Dorothy Day is [already] a saint. But I find this process of canonization distasteful, with all the miracles and money needed to verify them. It seems so far removed from the witness of her life” (as qtd. in Conroy 198).

Conroy appears to be saying what many have observed. She suggests that instead of “official miracles” now looked for, we might be better served by: “the forgiveness of all nations’ debts, the death penalty abolished, and more efforts to attack racial hatred—or at the very least, the lifting of the Cuban embargo” (as qtd. in Conroy 198).

In keeping with the piety and praxis which I claim is part of the Day persona, Conroy then is asking for “a different set of miracles” which might stand in fitting tribute to Day’s narrative of both defiance and devotion. She ends her digital musings by concluding: “I think Dorothy Day would not mind at all being associated with these kinds of miracles!” (as qtd. in Conroy 198).

“Interesting” is how Patrick Allitt describes Dorothy Day. In fact, he calls her: ‘Too Interesting to be a Saint,’ and Garry Wills, in a similar vein accepts the “interest quotient” as a given and then goes on to declare Day: “a Working Saint.” In his article ‘The Saint of Mott Street,’ Wills situates Day among saints who are, as he puts it

“outstandingly crazy and they “worship his or her God by deeds, [like] the *oeuvre* of Joan of Arc, incorporating Praxis of leadership, example and sacrifice” (Wills, *Working*).

‘Outstandingly crazy’ is how some others may have seen her, perhaps in no small part due to her unbending position on Pacifism. This, perhaps more than any other, was Day’s “hardest sell” (to use a marketing term), and it adds to the difficulty in “defining Day” in a culture which is wedded to the idea of “fighting back.” Day publicly reminded her audience, including the clergy, that as “violent responders” they were often at odds with the Biblical message of Jesus Christ’s Sermon on the Mount and, unfortunately, more accepting of the futility of the Biblical “eye for eye” concept. Privately, however, Dorothy Day’s personal journal reveals at least some thoughts of violence. In 1963, after a particularly hard day of listening to a fellow Catholic Worker expound on his grandiose plans for the ‘Worker,’ the pacifist Day wrote: “I would like to choke Ed Haas. . .” (*Duty* 341).

Mel Piehl finds pacifism a large part of the Day identity. He says that during the early Twentieth century, while the Quakers, Mennonites and the Brethren, notably all Protestant groups, had stood up for peace, the Catholics, until Dorothy Day, had remained largely unsubstantiated in the area of American pacifism (Piehl 189). It is this legacy which he deems is of primary importance.

Similarly, Eileen Egan, who was a longtime Catholic Worker and traveling companion of Day’s, tends to agree with the basic premise of Piehl but then adds a going forward aspect which opens a door of potentiality. A significant point, since Egan describes her friend Dorothy as a “Pilgrim of Peace” (Coy/Egan 110) and thinks that Day can be exemplary for us yet today. Egan was already a noted peace activist when she

joined up with Day in 1935. Both brought to the attention of the public the unpopular view that there would be no “winners” in the civil war which was starting in Spain (Coy/Egan 110). Egan would accompany Day on many of her worldwide travels for peace. What is most important for Eileen Egan is that “Dorothy challenged the fifteen hundred year old tradition of justified warfare and became the luminous center for Catholics peacemakers in the United States and beyond its borders’ (Coy/Egan 110),

Janet Parachin, taking a slightly different vantage point, has relayed her understanding of Day’s value as not so much as situated within pacifism, but more in a broader vision of what Parachin terms a “spiritual exemplar.” Parachin points to Day’s potentiality in that “Day was a person whose ‘engaged spirituality’ can be used to initiate programs within [many] communities of faith.” Parachin aligns Day with the Eastern pacifist teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh. She then suggests both, each in their own way, as “Spiritual Exemplars.” (Parachin 250).

Pacifism notwithstanding, Day was not a “pushover,” as her narrative readily attests. In addition to her private thoughts of ‘liking to choke Ed Haas’ (*Duty* 341), those who have encountered Day in her public wrath have seen the side of Day which reveals her human frustrations, her identification with church teaching and, again, her potential for what she can mean to us in the future. Father Benedict Groeschel, the widely recognized (and bearded) Franciscan priest of Mother Angelica’s Eternal Word television ministry, was once confronted by the “rosary clutching Day” for performing marriages between divorced persons (a charge she apologized for when finding out it was another priest). (Scott *Praying* 9).

Father Groeschel thus personally affirms that as he puts it: “Day took no prisoners” in her calling to task not only those who would break from church rules, but also “the mighty and magnificent about the causal issues of inequality and injustice.” Father Groeschel views Day as “an enigma and a person of disconcerting surprises” (Scott *Praying* 9-10). “Valuable to us today,” is how Groeschel continues his interpretation. He then points out: “Particularly within this current times of clerical scandals, Day’s touching devotion to the priesthood, and especially to the loving and unworldly priests she befriended, is a powerful object lesson for both the laity and the clergy also” (Scott 11). Groeschel then warns us not to underestimate Dorothy Day, who may be a useful spiritual example but is in no way overly humble. He thinks, particularly in her younger years, “she was no mild and meek convert, accepting all as true.” Father Groeschel then gives a final caution: “Dorothy Day was also quite complex” (Scott *Praying* 11).

Father Groeschel is not alone in noting Day’s blend of defiance and devotion. Paul Elie, who has held the Dorothy Day professorship at New York’s Queens University, journalistically refers to Day as: “The Patron Saint of Paradox,” noting the efforts to “pigeonhole Dorothy Day are difficult at best since she has more than one side to her character and to her story” (Elie). Thus she has been interpreted as devout and defiant, pious and paradoxical and now the next “interpreter” defines Day within a specific theological perspective.

*Searching for Christ* is how Sister Brigid Merriman partially titles her biography of Day. Merriman, who identifies herself as a “cradle Catholic” interprets the convert Day a person “whose extraordinary integrity” was based on “her understanding of the Christian gospel and on the interrelationship of all persons because of Christ” (Merriman 224).

Merriman, therefore, believes that Day is integrated into—and is defined by: “Christian Spirituality.” This is an important point to Merriman because she believes Day can initiate serious consideration of the role of the layperson within the present and future church, an area which in the not so distant past was exclusively reserved for the clergy (Merriman vii). Her hope is that Day, and others like her, can promote a form of “Christian Spirituality,” which will aid us within our troubled time period. Merriman believes: “Christian spirituality” offers the field of theology an integrative perspective on the lived Christian experience” (Merriman vii).

So, it follows that for Merriman, it is also obvious that Dorothy Day’s personal spirituality outweighs just about everything else about her. She understands Day less as a quixotic fighter against the system, and more as a person who was seeking an understanding of the mysteries of faith. The major part of the Day narrative, for Sister Merriman, is found in these two quotes. “In the Catholic Worker’s labor, she [Day] met Christ in human guise. In the Eucharist, which she believed was the heart of her life; she met Christ and was sacramentally and intimately transformed by him” (Merriman 98). And: “Dorothy Day searched for Christ and found him, whom her heart loved” (Merriman 224). Both Groeschel and Merriman define Day in terms of spirituality, yet this may be a dangerous zone for the inspirational (and deceased) model, as evidenced by the next two testimonies.

### **Dangers of Interpretation**

Two incidents, both associated with Notre Dame, help to illustrate the significance of Dorothy Day to the rhetorical community and the caution necessary in remembering her. In 1972, the seventy-five year old Day, after much coaxing from her friend Father

Hesburgh, received the Laetare Medal at the University of Notre Dame. The citation of the prize recognized the duality of “Dorothy Day’s long commitment to comforting the afflicted, and afflicting the comfortable” (*Duty* 504).

Appearing at Notre Dame and this acceptance was, for Day, an exception since she usually turned down honorary degrees where there was any hint of an association with what she called “our military-industrial-agricultural-educational-complex-conglomerate” (*Day Writings from* 168). Day had made this particular exception because: “Father Hesburgh threatened to come to First Street [in New York’s Lower East Side] if I did not come to the Midwest” (*Day Writings from* 106)

In 2001, President George W. Bush needed no such urging when the invitation from Notre Dame arrived. In his speech he quoted, (or actually misquoted) Dorothy Day, in his address to Notre Dame’s graduating class, saying: “Any effective war on poverty must deploy what Dorothy Day called ‘the weapons of spirit.’” This caused outrage among Day’s family and followers who were appalled at the president using Dorothy Day, “of all people,” in a “veiled rhetorical defense of his welfare cuts” (McCarthy).

Perhaps a more seemly tribute was paid Day in the “Contested Legacy” issue of *Newsweek* where Day was described as a “Fighter of abuse and a strong reconciler, [along with] Desmond Tutu, Martin Luther King and Pope John XIII.” When she died in 1980, Dorothy Day was then eulogized by historian David O’Brien as “the most significant, interesting and influential person in the history of American Catholicism” (Scott 115).

Interestingly, some Day recollections seem to echo some of the divisions of our present society. Her personal friend, Father Richard McSorley, believes Dorothy Day has

some unifying aspects for us that might be helpful within our present historical moment.

He writes:

Since Dorothy's time there have been increasing divisions the church between what you might call the right and the left in gospel terms. The right are those who see religion as personal, without any social aspect to it. The left are those who work for justice and peace and very often do not do much personal prayer. That division is widening by misinformation from one group against the other. Dorothy Day and her Catholic Worker bring it together. (as qtd. in McSorley 96)

So it appears that the closure obtained by "final and definitive understandings" elude the Day scholar. As Jablonski has predicted "Day's contested legacy" continues to churn up scholarship about her, and her place in the American identity. Rosalie Riegle's aforementioned 2003 book: *Dorothy Day; Portraits by Those Who Knew Her* presents a cornucopia of testimonies by Day friends, family and many of the Catholic Worker family. Day's granddaughter, the previously mentioned Kate Hennessey begins the book by observing: "Memory is a fragile thing, unpredictable and severely limited." She goes on to say: "It seems dangerous for memories to be the primary way a person lives on, for they lack wholeness and stability" (as qtd. in Hennessey xi).

The Riegle book's message is imbued within the conclusion drawn by its author that Day is, indeed, defined as a person of varying interpretations by "those who knew her." What she "discovered" was much of the same conclusions reached by this particular researcher: Day's embedded narrative is "humanity-themed," and in keeping with the spirit of Martin Buber's 'narrow ridge,' it also addresses the complexities found in certitudes and judgments made on just part of the Dorothy Day embedded narrative.

Day was complex, to speak of only one part of her personality is to give a distorted view of the entire picture of one [who was] witty, yet wistful; forceful yet insecure; loved conversation but sought privacy for her prayer, music, art, reading and writing. She believed in freedom and autonomy, yet nevertheless knew she had to lead a movement; in short a complex person—vital, engaged, and engaging (Riegle 163)

As a complex parent who trod the “narrow ridge,” Day was met with obstacles and decisions which few of her generation shared. It is this relationship, Day and daughter Tamar, which we next consider, to provide yet another view of the embedded narrative of Dorothy Day.

### **Telescopic Philanthropy**

Tamar Hennessey, Day’s only daughter and mother of Kate Hennessey, granted a rare 2005 National Public Radio interview which was titled “An Extraordinarily Difficult Childhood.” In it, she referenced the “hardscrabble life” she experienced as a child raised in the background of her mother’s Catholic Worker movement. Tamar is, like her mother, and intriguing character, and perhaps at some later time a deeper investigation of her life and times might be attempted. Some facts immediately rise to the surface though: she was undoubtedly influenced by the decisions her mother made and the training (some might say indoctrination) of the Catholic Worker experience. Day does not appear to directly display specific regret for the manner in which she raised her child; however in her later life she expressed a general regret for what she terms her own “Telescopic Philanthropy” (Coles *Radical* 156).

Often in the care of others, the child Tamar lived for a time with a Catholic Worker couple who ran the garden community at Day's location on Staten Island (Stone 62). She went 'home' to Manhattan during school holidays to be with Dorothy but that meant she also was exposed to the "crazy people, derelicts, and alcoholics" which also inhabited the CW house (Stone 62). Tamar's sparse schooling was primarily experienced in a series of boarding schools, starting when she was eight years old (Riegle 110).

Tamar and Day undoubtedly loved each other, even though the life of the youngster was made even more difficult when Day would drag Tamar along to a series of "retreats" which, in fact, were more appropriate for the clergy than for the laity (Stone 72-73). So, when a Catholic Worker asked Tamar to marry him, without even finishing high school, the eighteen year old was more than ready to make a new life. Like many sub-stories in the Dorothy narrative, Tamar's marriage did not work out: her mentally fragile husband left her after helping produce eight children in just as many years (Stone 78). Day's diaries portray efforts to aid Tamar and her children, both before and after this troubled "Catholic sacramental marriage" dissolved. Day, at one point, writes hopefully of Tamar and Dave Hennessey: "T and D are solidly Catholic so they will work it out" (*Duty* 281). Day's effort over the years to assist Tamar and her brood exhibit a worrisome side not demonstrated in other aspects of Dorothy's forceful personality, and certainly not glimpsed within her public persona.

In one of the many "Grandma visits" when Dorothy is called into help, her human side is demonstrated by her love for her grandchildren who yet exhaust her when she writes: "they have no musical abilities but insist on singing" (*Duty* 163). She scrubs, cooks, and waits for yet another baby to be born. She also prays for them constantly, and

in describing Tamar and her increasing family (and her unable to keep a job son-in-law), Day appears somewhat conflicted.

As a layperson Day has no vows which the church would hold her to concerning poverty, yet she, and now another generation, live a life, which for the Hennesseys, can only be described as incredibly deprived and poor. For some of the eight year marriage, they live in West Virginia, trying to eke out a living from the land in the tradition of the Catholic Worker experiment. Day shares with the ever-increasing family half of the royalties from her books, the other half go to the Catholic Worker (*Duty* 172).

So, even though Day's devotion to her only child is without question, it must be noted that this was a child taken from the consistency and support of a father's influence by her mother's all-encompassing conversion. Elaine Murray Stone writes that before Day evicted Batterham when Tamar was a baby, her priest had suggested she wait "for the sake of the child" (Stone 44). This was in the hope that her previous brief 1920 marriage to Berkeley Tobey (Forest 38) might be eventually annulled. This might have then allowed Day, in the future, to consider convincing Batterham to marry her. Day, instead, had decided her partner would not change, and besides "the new overwhelming love she had discovered was for Christ" (Stone 44).

Day was, without question, a largely absent parent and Tamar rarely saw her father while she was growing up, although she makes a point of saying to Rosalie Riegle that: "Temperamentally I am the opposite of Dorothy Day." Tamar appears somewhat sullen as she goes on to insist: "My father is responsible for who I am" (as qtd. in Hennessey 111). About the parental contributions of her mother, Tamar Batterham Hennessey is less sure. Significantly, Tamar never addressed Dorothy Day as "mother." Child

Psychiatrist Robert Coles, who is also a prolific Day scholar, has addressed the possibility that Tamar was affected by being brought up “basically in a hospitality house.” He does not say that Tamar was adversely affected. But he, oddly, offers only the “community aspect” of Dorothy and Tamar’s shared life among the poor and the troubled as evidence as a “balancing out factor” within the obvious “difficulties of living as Dorothy Day’s child” (Coles *Radical* 135)

Tamar is described by most Day biographers as “a quiet and good child who took whatever life dished out” (Stone 62). Day, herself, writes that “rarely does my daughter Tamar appear unhappy or torn” (Forest 78). However, after a life of hardship initiated by her birthright, and a difficult marriage which kept to the Catholic Worker tenets, the more mature Tamar recently ( 2005) confided to NPR interviewer Margot Patterson that: “She [Day] expected a lot” (Patterson). In response to interviewer Rosalie Riegle (in 2003) Tamar had shared the thought that “Both my mother and I were strong people” and “there was a period in my teens where Dorothy became very severe and religious—all because of that dreadful [Father Hugo] retreat” (Riegle 111). Riegle interprets the mother–daughter relationship “complex and compelling” and writes: “It is comforting to know that in Dorothy’s final years they were very close” (Riegle 111). Hennessey died in 2008 at her home in Vermont, which Day had helped her purchase. Even though she had confessed to “losing her faith,” (Patterson) her obituary indicated she was buried from the neighborhood Catholic Church.

One cannot but wonder if Dorothy Day’s past “narrow ridge” choices were on her mind when she confessed to Robert Coles that she felt sometimes she might have been guilty of what Dickens described as “telescopic philanthropy,” a phrase used by the

Victorian author to describe the phenomenon of not seeing the effects of one's action upon those around them, preferring instead to see only what is "looked for far away in the celestial heavens" (Coles *Radical* 156).

Clearly, the elder Day is not without retrospective regret. Her dialogue with Coles regarding her "telescopic philanthropy" appears to indicate she may have looked back with some remorse about what might be termed the "collateral damage" caused by her unstinting adherence to enacting what she felt was her "vocation." Such regret, at least as interpreted by the writer of this particular interpretive work, appears to add to the significance of the "narrow ridge choices" which were made by Day. And it also serves to make Day more of an introspective human being, and less of an inaccessible and Icon. Robert Ellsberg terms regret: "the essential solitude at the heart of Day's vocation" (Ellsberg, *Saint's* 99). Ellsberg reminds us also that Day's life even though it was freely chosen, it was also exceedingly difficult, and he reminds us again that: "There was absolutely no distinction between what Dorothy Day believed, what she wrote, and the manner in which she lived" (Merriman 23).

### **Self-Definition**

The question then arises: How does "the real Dorothy Day" view herself when labeled? Does she see herself as a "liberal Catholic?" Some have labeled her that, and it may be due to the inability of people who read her defiant prose, to separate the definitions of "liberal" from "radical." In 1973, Day pondered if she should accept the Frederic G. Melcher Award of the Unitarian Universalism Association, an award which she associated with that particular organization interpretation of her as a "liberal Catholic" (*Duty* 530).

Day thinks they have misunderstood or misinterpreted her activities as she had reported them in her book, *On Pilgrimage: The Sixties*. (She eventually accepted the award *in absentia*).

Am I a religious liberal? No I am not. If the award was for good works and concordances, Yes. If for liberalism in religion, [then] no. I am dogmatic. I believe in the Divinity of Christ. Christ as God and Redeemer, Savior. True God and True man. I believe in a Heaven and a Hell. The Resurrection of the body, Life everlasting. I believe with St. Augustine that we are all members or potential members of the Mystical Body of Christ. In other words, we are all members of one another. And that if the health of one member suffers; the health of the whole body is lowered. I believe with the IWW (the Industrial Workers of the World) that an “injury to one of us is an injury to all.” (*Duty* 530-531)

Thus does Day herself join in the chorus of finding the words to “define Dorothy Day.” As if that were at all possible, at least in terms of creating a summarizing containment which situates her into a final iconography and answers, once and for all, the motivational question which lurks in the narrative shadows. *Why would she do It?*

### **Narrative Embeddedness**

Why would she choose a life of celibacy, deprivation, controversy and hardship for not only her, but also her young child? And continue such a life for the next half century? We have already heard her explanation about allowing for someone else to “get a leg up” and thus, in effect, “level the playing field,” to use another archaic metaphor.

In her voluminous writings, she really never delves into extensive and personal revelatory explanation, other than to profess an unavoidable realization of her love for

God which converted her, and a “harsh and dreadful love” similar to the observations of Father Zossima’s, which sustained her (*On Pilgrimage* 383). This focus on the larger tradition within which her life’s story became embedded was nourished by the narrative of her acquired Catholic faith. It was the soil that was not present at the beginning of her life.

She was not from a religious family, nor was she altruistic in the “spiritual rescue” sense: Day was “mad as hell” about injustices and poverty before she initiated her particular brand of “devotion and defiance.” Dramatic happenings such as being “knocked from a horse” like St. Paul, or “hearing voices” like Joan of Arc, did not happen to Day. Instead, she simply tells us, she experienced a gradual realization that “only faith in Christ would give me the answer” (LL141).

When pressed for further explanation, Day compared the mystery of finding faith with her early memory of listening to a Beethoven symphony on the radio: “I cannot understand the mechanism of that little box with its crystal, set like a jewel, to be touched by a piece of wire. If I cannot understand scientific truths, then why should I worry about understanding the truths of religion? . . . I take on faith the truths of Christianity, the Church, and the sacraments and my heart swells with gratitude” (*Duty* 574).

Day’s journey along “the narrow ridge” is often bewildering for us who may be confined within our own “embedded narratives” of postmodern sensibilities which, in turn, cannot completely fathom Day’s brand of activism, sacrifice, and spirituality. Simply stated, there appears no one in recent memory who gives us a comparative life which is expressed in what I have termed “Day’s no-alibi rhetoric of defiance and devotion.”

Within our current decade, in this, the twenty-first century, Day is subsequently remembered for her dichotomies. Stephen Krupa writes “It is difficult to think of Dorothy Day in ways that are not reflected by [both] the religious and the radical.’ (Krupa 5). Krupa then points to “Day’s witness as a constant inspiration to Christians and non-Christians alike” (Krupa 1). Paul Elie, likewise, hopes that: “Day’s sacramental imagination can be a sure light in our post–September eleventh world” (Elie 13). Elie is a contemporary observer of what Day pointed out as the “disproportionate cost of our freedom.” In keeping with the Day mentality, he is concerned that, all too often, we “accept the premise that there is a necessary cost paid in human life for freedom” (Elie 13). Like Day did years before, Elie now worries about unthinking reactive response. He advocates that we interpret “Day’s sacramental realism [which could] then lead us to ask if a freedom so purchased is not really a servitude?” (Elie 13).

In effect, what these two Day scholars, Elie and Krupa, are implying is that with Day, we may have a potential “hero” we can look to honor non-violence, diplomacy and our mutual humanity over the inevitability of imprudent and violent reactions: the type, honored previously as admirable, for its unquestioning support of military action as “patriotism.”

Thus, it appears that Dorothy Day, interpreted by the “narrow ridges” she explored, and the choices she made, can be potentially valuable to us within our present historical moment. After the closing interpretive analysis of this chapter, the next and final chapter hermeneutically considers some additional implications of Dorothy Day’s ‘Potentiality’ for us within this, our 2009 historical moment.

### **Interpretive Analysis: Defining Day Treading ‘The Narrow Ridge’**

Day choices along “the narrow ridge” have hermeneutically uncovered a myriad of definitions of what she was, and what she can presently mean to us as inspiration. She made decisions during her lived life which have generated various interpretations and definitions. We have witnessed her as a “spiritual exemplar,” who is yet “an absent parent;” a “fighter who chooses pacifism and humble obedience;” and a “faithful daughter of the church” who yet “challenged the praxis of His church” and who is now posthumously in residence within the area of “potential” saints. Day’s identity, forged by our own interpretations of what is valuable, has then inspired descriptions and definitions of her as “a paradox,” a “pilgrim for peace,” and “a dispenser of the weapons of the spirit.” All of these defining interpretations, including the reference to Day as a parent, speak to the life of one woman and also to the decisions, both understandable and baffling, which Day made as she walked “the narrow ridge” of Buber’s choice and change.

Day has been examined by those who are sincere in their convictions that they can offer a true picture. However, we must remember these are hermeneutic reflections, the kind which, as Gadamer suggests, speaks to reflections which take into account “much of ourselves” (Gadamer *Reader* 23). This “prejudice” which each interpreter carries into his or her “interpretive mission” accounts, in no small part, for the wide range which each Day observer proffers as “the truth.” In other words, to Day’s story each interpreter (including myself) brings their own prejudices and therefore “slants” their interpretations, thus further illustrating Georg Gadamer’s observation: “There is no final interpretation” (Truth and Method 573). There are, however, “horizons” of our own

experiences and prejudices; leading inevitably to the problem of what Gadamer terms the “arbitrariness of definitions or constructions” (Gadamer *Reader* 21).

One might rightly inquire then, what else do we have—other than our own eyes, ears, and experiences to “filter” Day’s identity? The answer is not much, at least not much that will bring us to the end of the definitive Dorothy Day. Yet, is that not the joy of hermeneutic discovery? The looking back and examining the past metaphoric slips and steps Day has made along the “narrow ridge” which then, in turn, may inform our academic contemplations of the implications of own humanity and our theories of what it means to be fully human and fully spiritual. Day may say it best when she writes:

“Each day we try to do our best, do the best we can—for all our faults and imperfections” (as qtd. in Coles *The Call* xxv).

Thus the story—the embedded narrative—of Dorothy Day importantly calls to mind the “praxis” thinking of not only of Gadamer but also of Paulo Freire who, like Day, valued the primacy of human dignity. Day was “a most determined teacher” (Coles *Radical* xviii) and Freire was an educator who “was wary of words that are not fully supported by actions” (Anderson et al., *Reach* 292). Day is like Freire, who according to R.C. Arnett, hopes for “storytellers who will live the heart of a message [because] a story becomes worthy of participation when people live what is spoken.” Arnett adds that stories such as these, filled with authentic praxis are: “simultaneously inviting others to continue to shape the story and the practical life of the community” (Anderson et al., *Reach* 292).

Since Praxis was primary for Day, to those who actually presumed to tell Day how “good she was” Day was merciless. She would, especially within one of her cantankerous

moods, reply: “Put your money where your mouth is. . . Come and join the work, you are not doing me or yourself any good by saying ‘Good Master’ [a reference to Jesus] so just come on board and change your life” (Riegle 193). Statements such as these are typical of the no-nonsense Dorothy Day and the praxis and prayer that are woven throughout the Day’s embedded narrative of co-existing devotion and defiance.”

On a personal level of interpretation and observation, much of my research has been inspired by several visits to Day’s New York City Catholic Worker locations, including St. Joseph’s and Maryhouse. During these last few years and through numerous conversations with several Workers, including Frank Donovan, Bill Griffin, Joanne Kennedy, ‘Phil’ and most lately Jane Sammon, I find myself in complete agreement with Judith Gregory, who was a Catholic Worker in New York for two years during the chaotic sixties. Gregory writes: “What was the most astonishing thing about Dorothy was that she stayed” (as qtd. in Gregory 88). This is not a sterile hospice-like environment in which Day and her Catholic Workers lived their lives. Instead, it is closer to the real manifestation of the dialogic encounter, what Arnett has metaphorically referenced as “walking with others through the mud of everyday life” (Arnett, *Dialogic* 32).

Yet stay she did, and we, as Rhetoric and Communication scholars, and as persons who look for lessons in the embedded narratives of others, remain all the richer for it. By never taking a ‘sabbatical’ (she tried once for six months in the forties), Day provides an example of longevity, tenacity and, even the type of stamina which in fact, seems to deny our current opting-out ideas of what is now known as “compassion fatigue.”

In sum, Dorothy Day continues to intrigue us: from her early days as a “girl reporter,” through her turbulent early life and then onto her embrace of a “lay

vocation”—a term not familiar with the average Catholic until after Vatican II. With her Bakhtinian “no-alibi conscience” as her guide Day went on to co-establish a community which lived out the praxis of the Christ’s Sermon on the Mount. She is situated within an extended narrative of response to the historical moments of the last century, and her personal embedded narrative is one which challenged her church, her government, and much of the prevailing culture for most of her eighty-three years. Her mode of protest enlisted the carnivalesque aspect of Bakhtin in using absurd protest to point out the peace and justice problems of the American century from 1919 until 1980. In doing so she was often imprisoned, and more than often ridiculed and criticized. Cautionary, Day was, insisting: “The biggest mistake is to play things safe in this life, and end up as moral failures” (Coles, *Radical* 41)

Such words, such thinking, even these thirty years after Day’s departure from this earth, ring as profound in interpreting the “why” and the meaning of Day’s earthly mission. It is a mission “understood” best perhaps by remembering Buber’s observations about the “narrow ridge” we travel and the ‘unity of contraries’ which informs our human choices. Father Groeschel suggests Day is best understood within the historical context of the great women reformers of the Church, including Saints Catherine of Sienna and St. Teresa of Avila and also within the hospitality tradition(s) of Saint Bernard and St. Francis (Scott 10). Yes, she can be understood within this reference but yet there is another “catch,” which Groeschel then points out. Groeschel argues that Dorothy Day’s legacy leaves us with a “nagging problem” He makes a case that what we learn from Day’s inspiration is simply this: “You cannot adore Christ in the Blessed Sacrament and

[then later] walk past Him begging on the street” (Scott 10). Or, one might add, within today’s environment, in a women’s shelter, or a prison, or at a foodbank.

In following her conscience, Day’s personal life story also hints at complexities which the researcher can, at best, merely speculate upon. The nuances of family life lead the list, made perhaps more sensitive by the fact that Day’s descendants are a notoriously reticent lot, preferring to point out the motives of those who may ask, instead of, in keeping with our “tell-all” society, sharing their intimate memories. Granddaughter Kate Hennessey only reluctantly shared her thoughts with Rosalie Riegle (Riegle/Hennessey x) when she noted those who wish to “define” her grandmother as being “somehow neglectful” ( because she may have not fit the traditional roles of mother and grandma) were “perhaps well-meaning but definitely misguided.” Hennessey “sees them as cloaked in the respectability of the well-meaning” and yet they appear “fearful of a sight of so much faith and [that is] an abyss they would rather not peer into” (as qtd. in Hennessey x).

This Day relative may say it best in her “defining Dorothy Day” moment, when she offers this succinct interpretation: “To have known Dorothy Day means spending the rest of your life wondering what hit you” (as qtd. in Hennessey x). So, as we close this summary chapter, these aspects of dueling Dorothy Day definitions, however, share, in a certain sense, much of the dialectic nature of the Communication discipline. They prompt questions of ““what comes from, and what may potentially come next?” It is this aspect of the Day embedded narrative which is next offered in the final chapter of this offering.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusion**

### **Potentiality: Day in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

In an inquiry about what role Day might play after her death, Thomas Merton warned that: "We would do well to take her [Day] very seriously" (Merton ix). And seriously this particular offering has endeavored to consider her, particularly in the light of our current communicative climate of cynicism which holds as true that there are no real "heroes" within recent memory. This is a paucity that needs correction and this work has argued that Dorothy *Day*, within her identity as authentic and accessible, may be the font of untapped potentiality to help fill that particular communicative gap.

Cognizant now as we are of the embedded narrative of Dorothy Day, we can now leave the metaphoric interpretations which helped in the illumination of embedded narrative and now in this final concluding chapter we will focus on our "Human Condition," where, according to Hannah Arendt: "In order to go on living, one must escape the death involved in perfectionism" (Arendt *Almanac* 2). The next logical question then is: "Just how might Dorothy Day be significant to us within our present historical moment and what are the implications for 'Day scholarship' in the future?"

Within this concluding chapter, some of the keys to the 'potentiality' associated with Day are now considered. I warrant that she is not only significant to the discipline of Religious Communication, but I additionally argue that Day's embedded narrative stands as a genuine model of admirable, yet complex humanity, and she is someone with "no secrets" who will not disappoint us. This is a perhaps ambitious hope for us, ensnared as

we are within our postmodern sensibilities, where within the vernacular: “Everyone has got an angle.’

If Day has to have an academic “angle” it might be that she is truly compelling in addition to being a valid communication figure. As elucidated by Claretian priest, Father Henry Fehren: “Day is a saint for our time. In the past we thought of saints as more than human. [now, however] we need her for a realistic ideal” (Stone 113). So our aspiration might be, that prompted by Day’s embedded narrative, as textured by the metaphors and connectives with Martin Buber and M. M. Bakhtin, we might we now be brave enough to engage in what Ronald C. Arnett has suggested as “yet another unforeseen way” (Arnett, *Communication* 160-160) to ethically and imaginatively engage our present communicative climate? Specifically, how do we now respond to the age-old questions of: “What kind of society do we wish to create?” And, “How best might I, as an individual and as a member of a community respond?”

June O’Connor pursues this line of thinking, and she offers for our consideration, the concept of Dorothy Day as “moral ethicist.” (O’Connor, 88). In her book *The Moral Vision of Dorothy Day* O’Connor writes that Dorothy Day can, and will if we give her a chance, lead to a consideration of “ethical possibilities” from her [Day’s] role as “moral agent” (O’Connor, 89). This thought ties in with one of the core claims of this work, as O’Connor also views Day as valuable for her potentiality outside of strictly ecclesiastical overtones. Set upon a template of basic secular ethics. O’Connor is presenting not the “Religious Day,” but rather the “Ethicist Day,” who then “invites, yet does not command.” O’ Connor suggests that the moral agency which Day undoubtedly possesses

will then prompt a moral response not anchored by anything other than a “open-ended view of ethics”. And that for O’ Connor should be adequate.

By focusing on ethical possibilities, rather than ethical obligations, these Three questions of ‘what can I do, how best might I respond, and what kind of society do I wish to create’ alerts us to a more open-ended view of ethics. They express an indicative ethic of invitation rather than command, thus encouraging imaginative, rather than conforming, thought and behavior.[Therefore] from this particular perspective, ethical response is limited only by a person’s own ethical imagination, willingness, generosity, and courage. Day was clear that most of the choices we make in life are not between good and evil, but instead between good and better (O’Connor. 89).

Ethics, obligations, religion, faith, and morals and complexities have, up to this his point in the Day narrative, occupied Day’s identity and her possibilities and potentialities. Now, some additional strata, in keeping with the general observations of O’Connor and the unexplored terrain of goodness in general and human diversity in particular, we now take into account “what it means’ to be good”

Implied within the full humanity of Day’s narrative and her disdain of material things which might be better used by the needy, there is a valuable avenue to explore in terms of what it is that makes for accepted ideas of goodness. This approach draws on Day’s complicated legacy on two levels. First it speaks to a hermeneutic reconsideration of the concept of “goodness as perfection” and secondly, it asks for a re-valuing of “the good” as “the successful” and thus undeniably worthy of emulation.

Day, of course, was never, in the usual sense, “successful,” yet how can we argue that she does not offer an ideal of goodness, of inspiration, and, taking it a step further, does she not provide an embedded narrative of authenticity for a cynical society which presently has no overwhelming or realistic “grand narrative” of goodness to currently guide it? Understood another way, we are continually searching for contemporary models of inspiration within what author Alasdair MacIntyre has termed our *After Virtue* (226) existence. Dorothy Day can help us there. In Day we do not find a communication model where the individual is waiting for a newly resurrected universal ethic to resurrect itself, nor is this “model” tied into defining “success” in the accepted societal manner. Day, going against postmodern prevailing culture, believed simply: “There is a call to us, a call of service—that we try to make things better in this world” (Coles. *Call of Service* xxxiii).

By serving Christ in His poor, by battling injustice, and by using all the means available to her, Dorothy Day found meaning in her life. I doubt the idea of “being good” ever really occurred to her. She did not consider herself “saintly.” Indeed, she once joked that, considering “the lack of zest” found within the Lives of the Saints, “No wonder no one wants to be a saint” (Ellsberg. *Saints* 6). As a rhetorician of praxis and authenticity, Day was convinced that all should “join in the work” (Riegle 193) and she was equally convinced that “words have power” perhaps not immediately seen, but available always in memory to “transcend the moment” (Ellsberg *Saints* 181). As a pacifist who fought for peace and justice, Day subscribed to the underutilized rhetorical notion that “Language can be used to combat violence” (*Duty* 463).

Now, within our present postmodern sensibilities where cynicism is a “survival tool” (Arnett, *Dialogic* 22) we are faced with the challenge of finding an authenticity that is genuine, human and one which offers value to an increasingly diverse world.

This is a tall order. Our world, our culture, our present society, is one of perpetual disappointment, populated by politicians, celebrities, sports figures, educators, financiers and even the previously sacrosanct clergy. As pointed out by MacIntyre (226), Sissela Bok (1) and others, we currently have no central or grand narrative to guide us. And while not suggesting everyone is capable of becoming the next Dorothy Day, I suggest that her embedded narrative is one that can initiate a dialogue of what is important, what is genuine, and how we might live our lives differently.

Robert Coles points out, referring to Day’s troubled early life that Day also empowers thinking that suggests: “One can be judged not only by our mistakes, but also by our different intentions” (Coles 65). Day’s contemporary life of voluntary poverty is undoubtedly “different.” It stands in current irony to the involuntary poverty experienced by the increasing numbers of the new and not-so-new unemployed within our society. Until only recently, while occasionally acknowledging the “domestic “gap” between the ‘haves and have-nots’ did, in fact exist, we had successfully ignored the now well known fact that “the gap” has become, in some instances, a Chasm. Internationally, there is no longer much doubt that unrelieved global poverty continues to incubate almost certain violence and chaos, a fact brought home to us nightly by the instant images of our digital world.

Perhaps in Day we find *someone*, and in her humble narrative *something* we can look to for an authentic Gadamerian voice of “word and deed” (Arnett, *Dialogic* 17).

What is needed is a new brewer's yeast which can ferment new ideas of scholarship which include "the strange to us," the "different," and those that do not fall in line with our familiar lineage of worship traditions. These are the new "others" who force us to admit to our ethnocentrism that has for long been legitimized because of the prevailing cultural constructs of our "Western World."

Intercultural scholar Kathleen Glenister Roberts, in her book *Alterity and Narrative*, points out: "The Western focus of its Self as the sole perpetrators of ethnocentrism dehumanizes and objectifies 'the Other'" (K. G. Roberts 162). As products of a Western mindset, we have been resistant to admitting that we may have much to learn from the narrative of "one who is somehow alienated by being different." Roberts, however, believes it is: "'Narratives of alterity [that] are significant for the academy, for the public sphere, and for everyday interactions'" (K.G.Roberts 163).

I suggest Day, within an American perspective, is certainly that: She is different, and she is significant. Hers is an embedded narrative of being not displaced into an alien land perhaps, but certainly a tale of being different from most of the natives within her time and place who certainly viewed her as "alienated" from the America of the last hundred years. This included her own father, who "to his death thought of Dorothy as 'the nut of the family'" (Stone 70). Day was, and is, an example of tolerance and acceptance for alterity, the identity of being "different." Her contextual life was set against a landscape of what must be admitted was, before the advent of political correctness, a country of frequently unabashed prejudice (Stone 81).

As such an example of how one might be "different" and yet live authentically Day can perhaps inspire us to an extended tolerance which goes beyond that which is

necessitated by economic realities and the artificial manners of political correctness within our changing world of diversity. Her example of tolerance and hospitality can help welcome the new un-escapable actualities of our emerging economic, political, cultural and communicative changing world.

Day is an inclusive icon, and one that will not be the subject of an exposé. Chris Montesano writes that, over the years, many of the staunch supporters of the Catholic Worker have been gay men and lesbian women. (as qtd. in Montesano 29-30). Day was approached in complaint about supporting the “Good Soup Co-op” in San Francisco who had declared themselves similar to the Catholic Workers although their “guests” were almost exclusively homosexual. Day’s reply was to “shush” the complainer. She then gestured to the obviously gay people to whom she was, at that very moment ministering to, within her New York location. In her usual pragmatic fashion she explained later: “Someone has to minister to the needs of the gay people” (as qtd. in Montesano 29-30).

What is more, Day was never happier than when she had a diverse group of “guests”( Stone 61) She delighted in startling her visitors over the years by pointing out: “Ours is an international house” (Day *Loaves* 78). She enacted the church’s hitherto passive vision of equality between the races, and according to Patrick Coy “turned it into a dynamic practice, welcoming blacks as equal brothers and sisters in her houses of hospitality” (Coy 199). The first *Catholic Worker* edition revealed the unlivable wages paid to African Americans in New Orleans; the third addressed child labor and the conditions of women as workers; the sixth publication pointed out the growing anti-Semitism against the Jews, not only in Europe but also within the United States (LL 206). Day enthusiastically led a 1935 group to the docks to “demonstrate against the German

Ocean liner the *Bremen* which had a swastika on its bow” (Stone 61). In her lifetime Day saw many changes, but she never was satisfied with inequality. And as such a model, she may serve us now in a time which has left the American century behind worries how to handle the next century of diversity.

Yet, Dorothy Day does not “preach,” in the usual sense of the word. Her rhetoric and journalism are at once often funny and thought-provoking, allowing her audience to obtain their own interpretations of what ‘message’ she is sharing. In her *Selected Writings* book of columns, Day wrote of things both profound and simple: the joys of lovely sunrise (359) a good dinner (76), the dangers of nuclear power (349), and the mystery of suffering (345). Reading Day, one appreciates the everyday, framed by the underlying reminder that this life is both serious and ridiculous, and much of it is surely out of our immediate control.

Author Rosalie Riegle finds a similar value when she writes: “Dorothy was so realistic and practical and had a full range of emotions, but with a sense of humor at the same time” (Riegle 171). The journalists who Day admired were people like Studs Terkel, Dwight McDonald and Robert Coles who “brought a sincerity and a sense of sacramentality to their writing” (Riegle 171). Lenny Bruce is somewhat less amusing when she reads his book, Day remarks he is “shockingly vulgar, yet very funny” (*Duty* 550).

This Dorothy Day is one who is academically invested and politically savvy; tolerant and even curious. Her last journal entries, written just days before her death, indicates that she was reading a volume of the Russian author, Turgenev (*Duty* 654) and that she is annoyed because President Carter is “gloomy about the economy” (*Duty* 644).

These musings show Day as part of this world, and speak more to her humanity than her vocation. As such, we ask: might she not be looked to as an acceptable model for those who presently view religious figures as polemic and/or embedded in the dogma of unattainable perfection. The next question naturally arises: What empowerment might that sort of thinking then release; what seeds might be sown if we were all to adopt the personal piety and public call for accountability that Day epitomized?

These key parts of the Day embedded narrative rest in the fact that Dorothy Day viewed everyone as fellow human beings, not exclusively as Christian human beings. In one of her early letters from Thomas Merton, he says: “You are right about going along the lines of the Satyagraha (Gandhi’s term for non-violent action) and he points out: “Nowadays, it is no longer a question of who is right but [instead] who is it that is the less criminal” (Forest 147). As an admirer of Buddhism, she welcomed the Hare Krishna youngsters that others would shun. Who else but Dorothy Day would have participated happily in worship rituals as varied as the Jewish poet Allen Ginsburg reciting his poems, followed by communal chanting which was led by visiting Hare Krishnas? (*Duty* 465).

Is this not an outlook which might benefit us within our current culture which is witnessing the rise of religions which few of us can claim to understand and yet, without doubt, will be a part of the cultural and economic realities which will be a vital part of the twenty-first century? Often, we do not respond to the value-stories of others as anything other than quaint at best, and inscrutable at norm. Change is for them, not for us. Sadly, within a digital communicative, and now increasingly economic, shared world of increasingly unavoidable diversity, even our startlingly comparable stories are often

ignored. To our peril, we divide ourselves into ‘them’ and ‘us: our ideas, our histories, must be right, and they must be final.

In the field of education, particularly within the discipline of Communication, the problem of how we understand, and ethically relate within a context of diversity, has recently been explored by Ronald C. Arnett and colleagues Janie Harden Fritz and Leeanne M. Bell. They point to the problems associated with ‘dialogue and difference’ and they have arrived at the conclusion: “We can’t assume that each good we seek to protect and promote and that shapes the heart of a given communication ethic finds support from others” (Arnett, *Communication Ethics*). In the public sphere, presently we are in a time of increasing anxiety about jobs and reluctant to see the world as *New York Times*’ Thomas Friedman and others suggest as our “now flat world” of globalization and economic interdependence.

As Kwame Anthony Appiah and Kathleen Glenister Roberts point out: it is within unavoidable diversity that our not-so-distant future world will be experienced. Yet, in these distressed economic times we find an increasing distrust of those “different from us.” The illegal immigrants “problem” personifies this observation, along with a willingness to ascribe our failures to those who challenge the one-size-fits-all of meaning, patriotism and culture. Appiah calls for an “escape from Positivism” of this sort and points out that *Cosmopolitanism* which he promotes, demands just two things. First, we acknowledge since we are all humans, that we have obligations toward one another, and two that we take seriously the value of not just human life, but *particular human lives*, which means taking interest into practices and beliefs which lend them significance’

(Appiah xv). Said simply and significantly: “Cosmopolitans value the narratives of others” (Appiah 29).

Day’s is an embedded narrative that will never deny our common humanity or dismiss as invalid the voices of others. To do so is to privilege the denial of ourselves as part of a human and humane family. Devoid of meaning and cognizant only of our own voices, authentic dialogue is therefore suppressed, bringing to fruition Buber’s warning: “That people cannot longer carry on authentic dialogue [ is] the most acute symptom of the pathology of our time” (Buber, *Genuine* 311).

The implications of Day’s potentiality, again, rest within the prospect that she can open up a new dialogue; a dialogue which prompts thinking regarding the ‘big questions’ of life: what life shall we live—and how shall we live it. Unfortunately, our current climate is complicated by our cultural and communicative atmosphere of either polemic positivists or unabashed “non-responders.” We often hear the phrase “I am not a joiner,” and yet, in both our public and private spheres of encounter, what potential communication and subsequent responsive praxis remain unexplored in the continuance of such certainties?

### **Praxis and Potentiality**

If we are to understand, and indeed appreciate Dorothy Day, then might we also be drawn to the implications of praxis, the Gadamerian sphere of word *and* deed? As a specific, for instance, might we at least, in a digital world of unprecedented opportunities for organizing public opinion, make some gesture to validate our desire for peace and freedom from war? Perhaps in Day we also find *someone*, and in her humble narrative *something* we can look to for a potential Day narrational dialogue of “building from—not

tearing down,” uniquely suited to our currently morally and economically distressed historical moment. As an initial entry to this extension of hermeneutic thinking, and with Day’s embedded narrative as our model, might we warrant somehow even a modest model of praxis in response which engages conscience and complexity? Too difficult, too strenuous, perhaps?

In the narrative of Dorothy Day, we witness her as a sixty-six year old going with other global activist women, (most non-Catholic) to Rome and completing a ten-day hunger fast for peace. The *Mothers for Peace* witnessed Pope John XXIII in his last public appearance, as he spoke from his balcony to the ideal of everyone being a “Pilgrim for Peace” (Day, *On Pilgrimage* 259). This visit of Dorothy Day to Rome would be the first of three which the elder Dorothy Day would make to visit the Vatican in the cause of peace. (*Duty* 340)

Perhaps as we draw near to the close of this work, this time, a slight redirection from Rome to a local venue might not be totally inappropriate, if for no other reason than to allow Day to appear as a real person, a person who has literally and figuratively walked the paths we now walk—within our own university and within our own city and county. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania played a not insignificant part in the narrative of Dorothy Day. She visited often, both in her support of the steel strikes, the creation of the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) and to visit with both Bishop Boyle and Bishop, (later to be Cardinal) Wright (LL 211). She came here often with another purpose, and that was to attend the Oakmont retreats of Father John Hugo (LL 255). Day’s 1962 diary entry recalls her visit to Duquesne University where she spoke at a meeting sponsored by the Pius X society. She, in her senior-citizen voice mode, recalls

“The train down was filthy, stinking from the men’s room [and] and no water to wash with in the ladies room” (*Duty* 321).

Attending mass at Duquesne Chapel served to improve her mood, in no small amount “because the service was beautifully participated in by the students.” Later at a meeting on campus, Day notes the questions from the Duquesne students and those in attendance at the meeting “were all about war and the state” (*Duty* 321).

Day had been instrumental in setting up Pittsburgh’s St. Joseph’s House of Hospitality—“on the top of a hill in the Negro section” (LL 210) where the “labor priest,” Father Charles Owen Rice could oversee the operation. In a 1938 Depression era visit, Day appeared encouraged by the housing of thirty men and the feeding of five hundred more at lunch (*Duty* 28). Day was also happy that “they have Mrs. Lentz who runs the kitchen and is also a welcome nurse for the men.” The one sour note, per Day, is that “the hallways smelled like cats” (*Duty* 28).

Decades later, in 1970, Day’s journal notes that she wants to re-visit Pittsburgh since “Msgr. Rice now runs a school for blacks and I really want to see how it is run” (*Duty* 475). So it appears that Day, even in old age, wants to make sure the underserved are being treated fairly. She does not shy away from possible rejection of her inquires, choosing to place a search for assurance of the “Black’s” treatment over fears of being viewed as a busybody.

This local connection and other vignettes of Day’s “inquiring interference” causes one to wonder what are our obligations in assuring equal treatment for those who have been disserved in the past? Might we, in our present world where diversity demands at

least tolerance, at least, again, ask ourselves this question: “Cannot Day’s embedded narrative provide some examples of tolerance available to of us?”

Cannot we look to her for early instances of being our brother’s keeper, knowing that the very early issues of her 1933 *Catholic Worker* newspaper’s masthead portrayed a “Negro man and a white man” an idea which shocked its readers ( Day, *Loaves* 18). The masthead in 2009 remains the same, and the demand for payment has risen to a nickel, instead of a penny, for the price of the paper.

As pointed out earlier in this work, Day’s paper also, very early on, spoke out against child labor and the abuse of women in the workforce (LL 206). Even within the book *The Moral Vision of Dorothy Day* by June O’Connor (which was criticized for portraying Day as somehow “anti-feminist.” Day is at least partially praised by O’Connor who admits she has found a “hidden feminist dimension [in] Day’s thoughts” (O’Connor 39). She then points out that Day is saved from being anti-female [because] “Day’s writing is also punctuated with observations and recommendations which clearly reflect a critical eye with respect for injustices in sex roles and a desire to improve opportunities for both men and women” (O’Connor 39). The same work appears to privilege Day as a “moral ethicist” over “crusading Feminist” (O’Connor. 89)

To my mind, there are two issues regarding feminism and Dorothy Day which appear important. First, that she must be looked at within the historical moment(s) in which she lived, the second is that any scholar who researches Day will realize that, as David Scott has ascertained: “Dorothy Day is more than a Feminist” (Scott, *More*). Or as I have previously warranted, plainly speaking, Dorothy Day was “nobody’s girl.” Day thought of women within the roles society had given them, but however, she also

confessed to her female Catholic Workers that they were correct in thinking she “expects more of them than she does of the men.” Day readily agrees with them, saying in effect these women are *more* than the equal of men (*Duty* 159). A 1938 entry in her diary notes that, for Day in her position as House of Hospitality on-site minder, the phenomenon of violence was not the exclusive province of the male occupants. Day writes, without comment that she had to physically separate two female guests: “A Japanese woman and an Irish woman who were fist-fighting” (*Duty* 36). Her next day’s entry says that “a Chinese epileptic had convulsions as he waited in the soup line and the ambulance refused to take him” (*Duty* 36-37). So like Saint Paul, who is thought of as the apostle of all nations, Day might, in a postmodern sense, be an apostle of *all of us* —period.

These stories, which Day and others relate, provide a fertile field of research for the potential Day scholar. These are the instances of personal revelations and confrontations which parallel her public life. Such stories evidence the hermeneutic opportunities of delving into the dynamics which informed the Catholic Worker’s public persona. The knowledge gained from such scholarship then may uncover opportunities for further dialogue, particularly as I suggest, within academic inquires of how one might find meaning, holiness and humanity within ourselves and within others.

Of invaluable assistance to such a scholar is the ready help of her Catholic Worker Family located at Maryhouse in New York City, and the archival information stored at Marquette University, and watched over by Phil Runkel. Valuable also is the work of those who have studied her, particularly that of Jim Forest, Brigid Merriman and Robert Coles. Robert Ellsberg seems to be the continuing Day biographer and researcher and it is Ellsberg who has recently edited her journals and diaries. (*Duty* xxii). His aforementioned

2008 book *The Duty of Delight: The Diaries of Dorothy Day* starts off with a 1961 note which Day made to herself, warning of the sadness that comes with aging. She promises herself that this is something that must be overcome. “It is made easier as we grow in love and in the joy that comes with loving” (*Ellsberg v*).

When reading these texts the researcher may legitimately come to the conclusion that Day’s was a philosophy of equality in heading up the Catholic Worker. She had a standard operating practice that “all must pull their load” (*Duty 388*). Certainly, Day could certainly not be accused of allowing ageism to flower within her organization. Whatever she demanded of others, and as Tamar points out, “it was a lot,” Day also demanded of herself. In 1973, the frail seventy-six year old Day served a difficult two weeks sentence in a California jail for protesting with Caesar Chavez’s mostly Mexican migrant workers (*Duty xxxiii*).

Tolerance was a Day directive. “Judge not. This is our direction!” is how Day responded to her editor asking how they would editorially treat “the gays” in a 1973 editorial (*Duty 611*). Michael Harnak is a Catholic Worker and a registered nurse who helped to take care of the elderly Dorothy Day. He is the founder of Bethany House in Oakland, California, a shelter for homeless people with AIDS where all are welcomed. Harnak organized the first gay-lesbian-bisexual-transgendered meeting of the Catholic Workers in 1996 (as qtd. in Harnak 202). Harnak notes that: “No problem was too overwhelming for Day and her followers to address in the last century” (202). So one might then ask: Why should it be different now?

## Potentiality and Problem-Solving

So, if we believe, and we would like to, that we are ‘problem solvers,’ what problems will we deem “too altruistic” or “too overwhelming” to address in this century? Day might help us there. Her response was to never back away from encounter in this world while awaiting the next, echoing what Martin Buber also believes in his metaphor of “the narrow ridge.” Here, Buber explains the human condition and the human dilemma of choice and change:

I have occasionally described my standpoint to my friends as the narrow ridge. I wanted to express that I did not rest on the broad upland of a system that includes a series of sure statements about the absolute, but rather on a ‘narrow rocky ridge’ between the gulfs where there is no sureness of expressible knowledge but the certainty of meeting the One who remains undisclosed. (Buber *The Way* 110).

Day, like Buber, “did not rest’ since like him, she has traveled the “narrow rocky road” of with nothing but the “sureness of the One who remains undisclosed.” Day and Buber find their God not exclusively within a church or a synagogue, but rather within the “Revelation [which is] a meeting with God that does not come to man in order that he may concern himself with God, but in order that he may confirm that there is meaning in the world” (Friedman *Encounter on the Narrow Ridge* 137).

This, in fact, ties in the ideals of potentiality and recognizes the inspirational aspects of Dorothy Day, as both a humanist (in the best sense of the word) and a spiritual communication figure. What is more, the implications of Day’s rhetoric of defiance and devotion, and the fact that she is a recent and real person, may then aid us, as fellow and

human beings, who can relate to occasionally losing our footing on the “narrow ridge,” and yet, still aspire to do better.

### **Potentiality and its Implications**

As our other metaphoric illuminist, M. M Bakhtin, reminds us, we must be vigilant in recognizing and creating possibilities. “Real potential results from an act of commitment, albeit, a tentative and open-ended commitment, and [it] produces the genuinely new. If we are condemned to only knowledge [then] we live lives of ‘empty potential’” (Morson 19). Dorothy Day helps make a connection with, simply stated: “what may yet be.” Her narrative is situated within a fertile field for hermeneutic scholarship, as more of her journals and writing become available. While she is primarily known as a religious figure, one of the aspirations of this work is that we consider her also within in a broader sense. Furthermore, her rhetoric and her communication efforts put forth ideas for consideration in much the same manner as any twentieth century thinker who has challenged “accepted’ philosophies.” Ecumenical efforts are invited: as Day similarly reminded her potential volunteers: “We are not filing out membership cards here, and we are not interested in religious affiliations [be they] Catholics, Christians, Jews, or whatever else you might be” (Coles *Radical* 30).

It is, therefore, my contention that at the heart of Day’s vocation is a very real and accessible person who now might, within the aid of academic disciplines such as Rhetoric and Communication, prompt a dialogue about blessed imperfection and unlikely possibilities: the fact that we grow from recognizing mistakes—not denying them, and above all, learning from them. When asked to deemphasize her “few missteps,” she would decline to do so, but then she would quote St Augustine’s belief

that: “the bottle always smells of the liquor it once contained” (LL189). Additionally when told, as she often was, that someday, whether she would want it or not, she might be canonized, she would reply with her standard comeback: “Don’t call me a saint; I do not want to be dismissed that easily” (Stone 97). For Day, as for Thomas Merton, being authentically human mean—being saintly.

Thus, the basic Day potential lies in facing up to our humanity and indeed, embracing it, and never allowing past errors to excuse present choices, or prevent second chances. After her death Father Henry Fehren wrote an article for *Salt* magazine. In it he called for a broader understanding of sainthood itself. He admitted that Day probably would scoff at the idea that saints were somehow “superhuman” (Stone 97) Fehren thinks it is important that Day be a “saint for our age,” since “she had the same fears, weaknesses and doubts that we all have. We need her for a *realistic* ideal” (Stone 97). Cardinal John O’Connor, who initialized the official petition to Rome, was similarly impressed. He was totally aware of the errors of her Dorothy Day’s early life, and instead of declining to nominate such a person, whose entire life would be scrutinized, he was enthusiastic about it. Not only because of her Catholic Worker life, but also because of her humanity and because she represents the grace of God in a modern life. O’Connor views Day as a likely “official” future saint, saying “her conversion directly demonstrates the Mercy of God” (Stone 112). Currently, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints at the Vatican is still studying Dorothy Day. Her official status and title in the long official process remains: “Servant of God,” one step behind her friend Mother Teresa who has been recently advanced to “Blessed” (Sammon).

Elaine Murray Stone calls our attention to the fact that Day often said: “We are all called to be saints,” insisting “nothing less will work, nothing less is powerful enough to combat war” (Stone 117). To no one’s surprise, Dorothy Day has also been viewed as a modern Augustinian figure. Her early sensuous life and dramatic conversion are but two similarities. Stone compares Day and Augustine in terms of the notion that both Day and Augustine are associated with “wishing for chastity, but not just yet” (Stone 112) And Sister Brigid Merriman likewise observes: “She [Day] struggled with the same concerns which had troubled Augustine fifteen hundred years before her [which were] God’s love for each of us and our rightly ordered human love, and the problem of good and evil” (Merriman 35).

Our “rightly ordered human love” is an area which Day’s potentiality might significantly impact us in our time of “expected sexuality” in even the very young, with little thought to the powerful consequences. What I mean by that is that perhaps Day, because of her youth and the decisions she felt forced to make, might be looked to for a real model for combating the current culture which pretends there are no “downsides” to unbridled sexuality and no relationship between natural love and divine love. Dorothy Day spoke freely of “natural love,” and of sex, sometimes to the embarrassment of her friends, reminding them: “He [God] put us here to enjoy our sexual lives [but not to] let sexual energy lead us to moral blindness” (Coles 24).

Humanity, mixed with some regret and then some hermeneutic reflection, is revealed within Day’s 1970 interview with Robert Coles. Coles was a favorite of Dorothy’s and as a medical man and a Harvard trained psychiatrist, he attempted to delve into her motivations. Coles tells us he was attempting to find out just what spiritual forces

turned Day away from herself confessed early life of defiance to conversion and a life of sacrifice, celibacy and devotion. Day, like many older people, however, wants to talk about the past. The septuagenarian reminisces about her early days as a thoroughly modern young woman whose actions matched the turbulence of a young century:

I was foolish then, caught up in stormy love affairs or infatuations and there is no other way to put it. I had no moral bearings—not enough of them anyway’ [However] ‘The world was in terrible shape then and I am glad we stood up and said what we believed in, but a lot of the time we would say these beautiful thing to one another about justice and fairness and equality. [Yet] there were times when we were not always so nice always to each other. (Coles *Radical* 35)

So, by never denying her failings, and defending what she believed in, she therefore avoids the stigma of inaccessibility. We can believe Day—and we can believe *in* Day as an important figure for us, as communicating human beings who are currently bereft of valid heroic role models. She represents our humanity as a flawed— but not failed condition. She is an authentic fellow human being, one whose humanity and spirituality may serve to remind us what there are authentic examples of inspiration within our current epoch of, at best skepticism, and at worst, widespread distrust of “heroic figures.”

### **Authenticity and Potentiality**

Authenticity, as Martin Heidegger suggests, is to be clear –sighted and to face up to one’s responsibility for one’s life is as a whole [and] because our lives are connected with community, to be active in community and to share in heritage, and to cultivate a shared destiny (Cambridge Heidegger 372). However, our existence within a cultural context that tends to clings to groups has a problem with the individuality called for by

authenticity. According to Heidegger: “This explains our inveterate tendency toward inauthenticity.” Additionally, the closer we come to dying, “the more important authenticity becomes” (Cambridge *Heidegger* 372).

Day’s authenticity, unlike the German philosopher, does not come with the idea of impending death: for her, it is her ontological and phenomenological “being” which is derived from her embedded narrative of encounter and response. Day’s particular manifestation of the Heidegger ideal of “intentionality and engagement” (Law 164) does not “throw” Dorothy Day. What she understands as “understanding” has to do with what it means to be human, and at the same time what it means to be spiritual within an accessible and real “taking action” ideal. Succinctly stated: “Dorothy Day makes sanctity accessible to people” (as qtd. in Forest 196). Jim Forest tells us Day was fairly uncomplicated; she had more than a glancing knowledge of philosophy and was fond of quoting her favorite philosopher George Bernanos, who said simply: “Hell is not to love anymore” (Forest 150).

Riegle and Forest are not alone in their estimation of Day’s authenticity and the complicated, yet very real Catholic Worker community which she “mothered” for close to 50 years. Historian David O’Brien leaves no doubt about his estimation of the influence of both. “Dorothy Day was the most significant, interesting and influential person in the history of American Catholicism.” (Stone 115). O’Brien then added a comment that I suspect might have pleased Day, as an ironic, or at least a two-sided compliment: “The chief gift of Day and the Catholic Worker, to both church and society, was the creation of a community from which it is practically impossible to be expelled!” (Stone 115).

A policy of ‘non-expulsion’ and insistence on helping others might be just the concept to intrigue the current children of the ‘me generation,’ who have in their anthropological turn, seemingly embraced as their entitled motto: “Who me?” Such bewilderment at who and what to believe, and by extension what to do, is perhaps at least somewhat expected in a diverse communicative world such as ours. To say the youth of our time receive mixed messages is to put a mild interpretation to a serious problem. Credibility and the tension between religion, culture and science appear to spread like wildfire across the digital world, where the concept of “faith” and “a moral center” is challenged by questions of: Just whose ‘faith’ and whose ‘center’ is it which is privileged?

Gadamer recognized this growing “doubting problem” when he wrote: “The concept of faith can scarcely claim to apply to the whole planet in the same way as the concept of science” (Gadamer. *Hermeneutics and Religion* 121). What has been suggested within this work, however, is that the concept of “humanity” may come closer to being universally accepted than either the concept of faith or science.

Day brings forward a potential hero who can give humanity and “doubting” a newfound respectability, one which can combat “the debilitating cynicism’ of our current communicative climate” (Arnett, *Dialogic Civility* 23). For our youth in particular, her defiance and devotion can be presented as equally meaningful. Day’s actions over the years, stated plainly, indicated she was not a fan of blind acceptance to unquestioned rules, which has caused Mel Piehl to comment: “Within [Day’s] Catholicism was the freedom to critique church policy without undermining its spiritual essence” (Piehl 50-52).

As an almost final point, it should also be noted that Day's unfailing persistence and her genuine stamina for "doing good" also has a classic philosophical base. In a sense, she embodies Aristotle's thinking about persistently cultivating "virtuous action," which he then terms "Excellence" (Aristotle 84). In his *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle asserts: "For excellence consists in doing good rather than having good done to one, and in performing noble actions rather than in not performing base ones" (Aristotle 84). While no one is suggesting Day as a modern Day Aristotle, her life does have a certain arête quality about it, in that "she fulfilled her proper task well." As Robert Coles reminds us "Dorothy Day thought long and hard about how one ought to live this life" (Coles *Radical* xxi).

To use a sports analogy, departing somewhat from an Aristotelian tone, Day is to dependability and staying power as Cal Ripken is to baseball or Jerry Kramer is to football. She inspires by her strength, resilience, staying power and dependability. While at the same time, somewhat conversely, the undeniably hard-hitting Day can be thought of as inspiring thinking which aligns itself with what has recently been termed "an ethic of care" (O'Connor 61. 65). Some may equate "caring" with being maudlin or sentimental. Certainly, Day could afford to be neither. Yet strangely, the concept of "care" in understating ethics and finding communicative meaning has only recently been academically explored.

Carol Gilligan and Nell Noddings are two contemporary and prominent thinkers who point out the valid place of "the ethic of care" and "the place of feelings" as philosophical approaches to postmodern life (O'Connor 61. 65). According to June O'Connor, these women are potential kin to Dorothy Day in that they, all three: Day,

Gilligan and Noddings promote “the unyielding belief in the relationships all persons have with one another” (O’Connor 65). By adhering to this position from not only a feminist perspective, but also a humanist one, O’Connor then goes on to state that Day incorporates “the centrality of feeling in the construction of moral vision” (O’Connor 65).

This brings us to my almost final claim for Dorothy Day. And that is that she has an easily transferable potentiality within most fields of academic study. She crosses, and in some cases, actually permeates most of the boundaries of the Humanities—be they philosophical, cultural, or even those put up artificially in the name of “organized religion.” The Theologians already study Day for her spiritual value; the Philosophers might study Day further for her ideas on what makes for real wisdom; Historians might for her contribution to the American century; the Sociologists for her work among the disadvantaged; Intercultural scholars for her embrace of diversity. All within the Academy can find the potential which is appropriately suggested to them within Day’s embedded narrative.

Day will not disappoint us, regardless of what lens is used in academically situating her. The one solitary caution is that, as someone who demanded that all ‘join the work’ (Riegle 193) Dorothy Day motivates even the most relaxed among us to go beyond theory into actual praxis as well. Praxis, for Day, meant acting out one’s best conscience—but not from the theoretical sidelines. We are reminded of the Dorothy Day caution that one should judge by praxis, not promise. Day was not a theorist, as such, but she was undoubtedly a partaker of an approach to “doing” which was prompted by thoughtful conscience and human complexity. In her *Long Loneliness* autobiography she

writes: “I have long since come to believe that people never mean half of what they say and it is better to disregard their talk and judge only their actions” (LL 107).

The intellectual home she finds within the philosophical and illustrative thinking of both Bakhtin and Buber reflects a contemporary life of accessible integrity. In Bakhtin, we locate Day within his “no-alibi” which stands up to the demands of conscience (Art and Answerability). And since her acts of conscience and often carnivalesque conflict continue to generate additional Day scholarship, she, in turn, relates to yet another previously unmentioned M. M. Bakhtin metaphor: that our words and work “live on” within the rhetorical and dialogic concept of “unfinalizability” (Problems of Dostoevsky’s 47).

Assisted also by the thinking of Buber, we have seen how Day’s very human, yet simultaneously spiritual naritival presentation connects with the complexities of the contrariness of the lived life; what Buber terms “negotiating the narrow ridge” (The Way of Response 47). Her communicative witness rings true within the observation of Thomas Merton mentioned previously within this offering: “Sanctity is a matter of being more fully human” (*Duty* xx).

So, by being “more fully human” Day then represents praxis worthy of the thinking associated with Gadamer, Freire and Arnett, by which we connect word *and* deed. In like manner, Day informs a “model of genuineness” (Arnett, *Dialogic* 17-19) which is currently in scarce supply within our present culture of cynicism (Arnett, *Dialogic* 17-19). It is her praxis of deed and her rhetoric of genuine yet paradoxical “devotion and defiance” which make her potentiality all the more real for extensive and perhaps

intensive further scholarship within our discipline of Communication, which might then claim Day—as the Theologians already have, as “one of our own.”

Day’s use of persuasive rhetoric articulates her conviction that one must question the status quo and move on from it. Janet Parachin believes this conviction gave a central urgency to her work (Parachin 90). As an instance of this, Parachin points to the ecumenical quality of Day’s life and work, writing: “Dorothy Day embraced this vision of a better world with Christians, non-Christians and even atheists” (Parachin 90). Day herself summed up a construct of hope by writing: “We are only beginning each of us to practice the folly of the Cross, to live as tho we were all brothers [and sisters] (*Duty* 498). So, by being inclusive of all, it follows then that Day provides proclivity for the type of scholarship which consequently values the hermeneutic nature of understanding and the evolving “truths” which honors differences and second chances..

Indeed, for those who value Intercultural Studies, as suggested earlier, perhaps we need to study someone who, without equivocation, called those who feared another race or religion “Mentally diseased morons” (N. Roberts 123). Now, one must ask: is this not descriptive speech not heard much in these present days of politically correct rhetoric?

In other words, and stated more academically, Day’s potential dwells in all of us, as humans who communicate, who care, and who strive to love. Consequently, perhaps within her vetted communication niche as an apostle of potential, Dorothy Day can initiate a dialogue of what *we might yet be*.

### **Interpretation: Potentiality: Dorothy Day in the Twenty-first Century**

My Irish mother, born the same month as Dorothy Day, used to say to people coming in from the cold: “Take your coat or you won’t know the good of it.” Thus

indicating that everything has an inherent “good” or “worth” associated with it, whatever it might be. We look for “the good of it” in the embedded narrative of Dorothy Day and ask how might she be additionally helpful to us within our own troubled historical moment? We therefore ask, might we, prompted by Day’s lived life, and as textured by the thinking of Martin Buber and M. M. Bakhtin, endeavor to engage in what Ronald C. Arnett suggests as ‘yet another unforeseen way’ (Arnett, *Communication* 160-161) to potentially respond to the moral milieu—some might say morass—of our current communicative climate?

This offering concludes with that hope: that the vetted and valid Dorothy Day may answer that very call. Her embedded narrative serves to remind us of the rhetorical power of just one person, evidenced by the scholarship and discussion she continues to generate. She can be thought of as a modern prophet. As such, she may be capable of leading us not with an evangelical fever, to the “promised land” but rather as an authentic, real and genuine example of how the narrative and life events of just one solitary woman continues to engage debate and consideration about the nature of what it means to be spiritual and what it means to be human: the obligation we owe to ourselves, and what we owe to others.

In community, she has traveled Buber’s “narrow ridge” lived out his “unity of contraries” and conducted her long life with a Bakhtinian “no-alibi conscience” lived often with a “carnavalesque” flair. She is, I argue, situated within a unique rhetoric of “defiance and devotion,” lived in response to historical moments which, for the most part, are still within our relatable collective memory. She imparts a communication model textured by humanity; her story is more than a shape shifting from bohemian rebel into

iconoclast and then, without her intending to—becoming an Icon herself. Her story offers an entry point to the dialogic possibilities and potentialities which exist, if we are ready to and brave enough to recognize them within our own postmodern lives. Buber has called for dialogic trust and Arnett, taking that one step further, has warranted: ‘If the foundation of dialogue is trust, perhaps the foundation for trust is courage’ (Anderson et al. t *Reach* 244).

Therefore, perhaps if we are “courageous” enough, Dorothy Day can help us in our approach to our increasingly pluralistic society, not as an apostle of intercultural diversity—such a term was not yet in widespread use during her lifetime, but as an example of one who valued the dignity of her fellow human beings and demanded justice for them. Not an easy thing to practice as Day often reminded herself and others. She echoed often the words of Dostoevsky’s Father Zossima, that: “Love in practice is more difficult than love in dreams” (LL 285).

With the respect for diversity of a Dorothy Day model, might we now not check for an unexamined common denominator which might help us navigate by asking what is it that we all are? The unsurprising reply is, as implied throughout this dissertation is, of course, “We all are human.” In the embedded narrative of Dorothy Day we find a human witness to the power of pragmatic idealism. Humanness and second chances highlight her communicative model. Perhaps we might, like Day, attempt to value the common humanity we all possess while respecting and acting from established and time honored ideals of ethics, thoughtful dialogue, encounter and praxis. Admittedly Day’s humanity was more than tinged by a motif of Christian philosophy. Her vantage point was that of a Christian within a predominantly Christian historical moment. Yet, I suggest that even in

a coming non-Christian world, we can look to Dorothy Day, *sans* religion, to furnish the *best of that particular visage*; one informed by admitting legitimacy to a narrative of human errors: one which simply warrants that we do our best, fall down, get up and try to do our best yet again.

Fundamentally, it is the implications of seeing the deeper meaning of what it means to be human that might enhance communication with “no preliminaries” or, as Burke has termed such communicative barriers: “terministic screens” (Burke 2). If we admit our biases as suggested by Arnett, Fritz and Bell, (Arnett Communication Ethics) but then insist on our humanness, we are then emulating Day’s belief that “it is because of the humanity of Jesus Christ that we can then love our brothers and sisters” (Coy 247). Said differently, Day’s embedded narrative is also an embedded narrative which can connect our humanity to relatable inspiration and praxis. Embedded narratives such as Day’s, speak to the concept that we are all invested in “human interest” narratives and benefit from their ability to teach.

Before closing, one other final clarification should be made. This work does not claim, of course, that Dorothy Day is the solitary inspirational figure in living a postmodern life of service, only that she might be the most fascinating one, perhaps. Assuredly, there are those who spend their lives serving others, for instance, just to name two, the members of the Salvation Army who serve the needy, Mother Teresa’s nuns in India, and also the dedicated members of various religious and humanitarian organizations. However, I would make a case, and I hope I have, that none of these other “charitable organizations” are comparable with the Day’s Catholic Worker; perhaps in part because none share a matriarchal founder such as Dorothy Day. As admirable as

these others may be, I suspect they might hesitate to emulate the strange combination of a unpaid working administration who, in our present historical moment, still refuses any organizational funding and a “staff” of volunteers who act out the foundational thinking of Day and Maurin in responding to global issues such as healthcare, war, ecology, torture and racism (Catholic Worker 76th)

Sometimes Day spoke of “burn-out” and the lure of the affluent New York society which lived just a few blocks from her. Her entreaty, similar to that of Martin Buber, was that we learn to trust each other (Anderson 310). Writing about the metropolis of Manhattan, she wrote: “My prayer is that on this one small island, we get to know each other and trust each other” (Coles, *The Call* 282). This “knowing one another” does not mean embracing every “difference” as true. It means instead that we acknowledge our concern that for other human beings, there are other “truths.” As Day’s friend Thomas Merton more fully reminds us: “To be more fully human is to have a capacity for concern, for suffering, for understanding, for sympathy and for humor, for joy, and for the good and beautiful things of this life” (*Duty* xx). Jim Wilson, one of Day’s Catholic Workers likewise writes: “Dorothy Day’s hospitality was given freely, even to those who others would look at with ‘undisguised cynicism’” (as qtd. in Wilson 89). Day’s lack of cynicism is key here, as it offers an extraordinary example of hope in action and the potential for addressing the unrelenting cynicism which continues to mar our communicative climate.

Cynicism was not in Day’s make-up. Her “long loneliness” did not surrender to distrust. Faith was her inspiration and Hope was her ultimate motivation. Thirty years ago she expressed that in addition to Love, we must also have Hope, praying: ‘The grace of

hope, this consciousness that there is in every person that which there is in God, comes and goes like a rhythm of the sea [and says] Lord I believe because I want to believe” (Scott *Praying* 59). In her letters to Thomas Merton, Day indicates that hope is needed on a daily basis. She urges him, that regardless of the troubled times (Vietnam) to “keep on going” (Merriman 123). Times change, the locales of conflict and cultural ‘norms’ change also. In their wake we are now left with a communicative environment that appears to distrust “trust” itself. It is an environment which has been pointed out as one which is ingrained by a “routine cynicism [which is] morally impoverished because it cannot generate a basis for communicative life in which self and others engage”(Arnett, *Dialogic* xiii)

I believe we can now use Day’s advice to “keep on going,” (Merriman 123), regardless of the distrust and cynical tenor of the times. If anything, such communicative suspicion and distrust, noted by Arnett and Arneson in the nineties, has indeed worsened within our own distressed decade where previously unconsidered layers of trust and security within the public sphere have been literally and figuratively been shattered. The old metaphors for human tragedy of the last century such as “Auschwitz” and “Hiroshima” have been significantly supplanted within our new century by new metaphoric references which need no explanation: for instance “Nine Eleven” and “Abu Grahib.” Ours is an epoch of instant digital images which relay disappointments, disasters and scandals which serve to add to an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion.

Understandably perhaps, it appears that, at least within the short term, the “wedding of cynicism and hope” articulated by Arnett and Arneson (*Dialogic* 23) is yet to be consummated. So maybe it is not so surprising that within such a climate, within even our

private spheres, we are reluctant to say much, or do much—for fear that our dialogic attempts might be misunderstood as politically incorrect, or even if accepted as well-intentioned, somehow unable to affect the “big picture.”

Unfortunately, this is not a new phenomenon. In Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem* she coins the phrase “the banality of evil” to address how the German citizenry people refused to acknowledge, or purposefully ignored, unspeakable violations of humanity (Arendt *Eichmann* 289). Arendt warrants inactivity, in both the private and public spheres, as factors which allowed this to happen. She believes “A life without action is . . . literally dead to the world: it has ceased to become a human life, because it is no longer lived among [women and] men” (Arendt, *Human* 176).

In Day, I argue, we find a purposeful *Vita Activa*. It is my sincere hope that Day might be considered a ready reference to those who wish to engage in a dialogue which starts from the premise that we need to affirm the realities of the present world without giving in to the type of totality of either unbridled optimism which falsifies reality or continuous pessimism which then nourishes the response of unthinking cynicism (Arnett *Dialogic* 20). Day may offer us the “yet another unforeseen way of response” (Arnett, *Communication* 160-161) to what we could be.

So, the final gift which Day has for us within her potentiality is that she can help us significantly in this current communicative environment with her unadulterated authenticity and her inspirational model of what it means to be both realistic and “hope-ful,” both devout and defiant. In her letters to Merton (and by extension to us) Dorothy Day insists that “we must keep on going” (Merriman 123). She writes further

that “Even though [we know] these times are difficult, they call for courage and faith [and] Christian Hope. For as Paul says ‘Hope does not deceive’” (Merriman 123).

Unfathomably and unfashionably sacrificial, imperfect, yet undeniably authentic, real and courageous, the twentieth century Dorothy Day continues to preoccupy us in the first decade of the twenty-first century. One of her last published writings was written in February 1979 when her column was prophetically titled: ‘And Again I Say Rejoice’ as it expressed her startled amazement at a ‘mini-earthquake’ in the neighboring boroughs of Staten Island and Brooklyn. She writes:

*‘Why was not Manhattan affected? What a thought! Unimaginable to think of those two, fantastic World Trade Center towers swaying with a sudden jarring of what we have come to think of as solid earth beneath our feet.’*

A prophet indeed.

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