The Catholic Worker after Dorothy

Practicing the Works of Mercy in a New Generation

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Still Going On

> We cannot love God unless we love each other, and to love we must know each other. We know Him in the breaking of bread, and we know each other in the breaking of bread, and we are not alone any more. Heaven is a banquet and life is a banquet, too, even with a crust, where there is companionship.
>
> We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community. It all happened while we sat there talking, and it is still going on.
>
> —Dorothy Day[1]

Indeed, it is still going on. Three generations after its founding, and a full generation after the death of its founder, the Catholic Worker movement is as vital as ever. At hospitality houses in nearly one hundred fifty cities, and farms in more than a dozen other places, the battered survivors of addiction and urban decay talk and break bread with idealistic college students, charitable churchgoers, and full-time Workers who have given their lives to the vision articulated by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin when they began publishing the *Catholic Worker* on May Day 1933. It

is a vision as old as the Gospel. In Matthew's vision of the Last Judgment, Jesus tells the righteous sheep that they will inherit the kingdom because "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me" (Matt 25:35-36). Following this teaching, Catholic Workers have built a movement around the practice of what they call the "works of mercy"—attending directly to the physical and spiritual needs of the strangers and guests in whom they glimpse the face of Christ.

It is a rare thing for a movement of this sort to last three-quarters of a century. One influential study of communal groups in the nineteenth century classified communities as "successful" if they endured for a single twenty-five-year generation and nevertheless identified twice as many "failures" as "successes."[2] Even among the successful communities, many collapsed—sometimes in spectacular dissension—within a few years of the founder's death. Yet in the years since Dorothy Day's death in 1980, the number of hospitality houses associated with her movement has more than doubled, and the number of local communities that are themselves more than twenty-five years old has increased tenfold. Though longevity is certainly not the only measure of success, the Catholic Worker's endurance is a token of the relevance Dorothy Day's vision has had for generations other than her own.

It is a rare thing, also, for a new religious movement to preserve its original structure and vision for the better part of a century. Throughout its history, the Roman Catholic tradition has spawned intense spiritual movements that have dramatically transformed themselves by the second or third generation. The Franciscan movement, for example, began as an alternative to traditional monasticism in which lay men and women would take the whole world as their cloister, yet within a decade or two of Francis's death his followers wore habits, lived in convents, accepted priestly ordination, and followed a rhythm of daily prayer that was scarcely different from their Benedictine and Cistercian

neighbors. The Waldensians, emerging around the same time, preserved their vision of lay discipleship only by severing ties to the Catholic Church, transforming themselves into a renegade heresy isolated from the mainstream of society. Yet the Catholic Worker has maintained a fierce commitment to the "lay apostolate" while preserving a life-giving, if sometimes tense and ambiguous, connection to the larger Catholic community.

It is a rare thing, finally, for a community's third and fourth generations to attract as much attention from scholars and admirers as the glorious age of the founders. On this score, perhaps, the Catholic Worker does not represent such an exceptional case. Despite the phenomenal growth of the movement since Day's death, books and articles about Day herself continue to pour from the presses at a faster rate than studies devoted to her movement. Many otherwise informed observers of religion in America continue to perceive the Catholic Worker as an expression of Depression-era radicalism; more than a few continue to wonder, "Whatever happened to the Catholic Worker?" The two most widely cited studies of the Catholic Worker—one of them published two years after her death—bring the story to a conclusion well before the end of her life, while two more recently published essay collections devote more than two-thirds of their space to Dorothy Day, Peter Maurin, and the houses of hospitality founded in the 1930s.[3]

This book represents one small attempt to respond to this puzzling situation. My purpose is twofold. I hope, first, to offer a general account of the Catholic Worker movement that takes the past few decades as seriously as the founding generation and that takes the houses and farms spread across the nation as seriously as the New York houses of hospitality. Many scholars have, understandably, concluded that such a general account of the Worker movement is impossible given the diversity of its expressions. They may well be right. Yet many people who have spent time at one Worker house have an immediate sense of familiarity when they enter another. The key to this familiarity, I contend, is that throughout the movement the works of mercy—concrete

acts of care for the "least of these"—function both as a defining practice and a hermeneutical principle. One cannot claim to be a Catholic Worker unless one is practicing the works of mercy, and for most Workers the works of mercy are not merely a practice but also a way of seeing the world. The Catholic Worker's commitment to the works of mercy, moreover, is what allows it to be diverse and inclusive: simply by feeding the hungry and clothing the naked the Worker has been able to welcome not only the whole of the Catholic Church, both "conservatives" and "liberals," but also the whole of the American Left, both "secular" and "religious," "radical" and "reformist." Indeed, much of its abiding significance lies in its capacity to sustain a decades-long dialogue between the Church and the Left.

My second goal is to identify some of the key factors that have allowed the movement to survive, relatively unscathed, for such an extraordinary span of time. This story has much to do with Dorothy Day: though the movement is deeply indebted to Peter Maurin's ideas and she always insisted on his status as cofounder, it was her leadership and not his that sustained the movement for its first half century. Unlike many charismatic leaders, moreover, Day led in a manner that prevented a significant crisis after her death. Paradoxically, I contend, this was because she consistently took more interest in the people who were drawn to her movement than in the preservation of the movement itself. On those occasions when she tried to "lead" directly, by appointing subordinates or setting boundaries, her efforts almost always backfired. But as a mentor, friend, and teller of stories about her own mentors and friends, she inspired thousands of people to devote their lives to the works of mercy.

The story of the Catholic Worker's survival is thus also the story of those thousands of people. In the early years, especially, many Catholic Workers were drawn to the movement by a direct encounter with Dorothy Day's intense interest and friendship. Increasingly, though, the national web of Workers began to form friendships among themselves. By the early 1970s, in particular, a generation of Workers had emerged who were able to learn

from one another what it might mean to make a lifelong commitment to the works of mercy. Dozens of these individuals are still feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, and comforting the afflicted as this book goes to print. The story of this generation of friends has scarcely been told, and in this short volume I will not be able to do it justice. Ultimately, though, they deserve as much credit for the endurance of the Worker as Dorothy Day herself. They are, moreover, the ones who have handed Day's legacy on to the new generation that is now adapting the Worker vision to the twenty-first century.

In the chapters to follow, I will flesh out the story of Dorothy Day and the movement she befriended in two ways. Part 1 is organized chronologically, with chapters devoted to the four major "generations" of the Catholic Worker movement. In each chapter, I begin with the character of Dorothy Day's leadership during a specific historical period, then sample the diverse ways individuals and communities responded to that leadership. The history I present is far from exhaustive; there are a great many stories that I do not know or did not have space to tell. But the examples I have chosen should illustrate the diversity and creativity that has always characterized the movement.

In part 2, I turn to a thematic analysis of three especially interesting aspects of the relationship between Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement. Chapter 5 examines the Catholic Worker's unique alternative to the "rules" that govern many religious communities: Dorothy Day simultaneously encouraged her followers to create their own evolving rules and provided them with more enduring guidance through a distinctive style of hagiography. Chapter 6 challenges the widespread perception that Dorothy Day did not intend for families to be part of the Catholic Worker movement. On the contrary, I suggest, she always believed it was possible to combine family life with the works of mercy, and this conviction provided a firm foundation for the many families who participate in the movement today. Chapter 7 considers the complex relationship between the Catholic Worker and the Church, with particular emphasis on

such hot-button issues as women's ordination, homosexuality, and abortion. I challenge the view that these issues were not widely debated in the movement prior to Dorothy Day's death, but more important, I suggest that the hermeneutic of the works of mercy has always allowed Catholic Workers to see these issues in a distinctive way. Finally, in my conclusion I consider the future of the Catholic Worker, arguing that the works of mercy still have the potential to transform American society.

The Works of Mercy as Practice and Hermeneutic

I have suggested that the works of mercy are the heart of the Catholic Worker movement. In this sense, Peter Maurin was surely right to say that the philosophy of the Catholic Worker was "so old that it looks like new," for the idea of the works of mercy comes straight out of the Gospel of Matthew. In the midst of a long discourse of parables, Jesus' teaching takes an apocalyptic tone. "When the Son of Man comes in his glory," he begins,

> and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me." Then the righteous will answer him and say, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?" And the king will say to them in reply, "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me." (Matt 25:31-40)

A few aspects of this passage are worth noting. First, it offers a pointedly communal vision of salvation. No one is saved or damned alone; rather, the sheep (and, later, the goats) are brought forward and addressed as a group. They are commended, moreover, for their service to another group, the "least brothers" of Christ. These two groups, however, are not fully conscious of themselves as groups. The sheep are surprised to learn that they have been feeding, housing, and caring for Christ; they, apparently, did not realize who the "least brothers" were. There is no suggestion that the sheep shared a common theology or ideology. Their identity as a community stems entirely from their common care for an anonymous Christ.

The idea that care for the anonymous Christ could provide a basis for community was an important influence on the early monastic movement. Saint Benedict, for example, made hospitality central to his *Rule,* adding that "great care and concern" should be shown for the poorest guests, "because in them more particularly Christ is received."[4] By the Middle Ages, the specific examples given by Jesus became the basis for a standard list of seven "corporal works of mercy": feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick, ransoming the captive, and burying the dead. To this was added a parallel list of "spiritual works of mercy": instructing the ignorant, counseling the doubtful, admonishing sinners, bearing wrongs patiently, forgiving offenses, comforting the afflicted, and praying for the living and the dead. These lists were presented in countless sermons and devotional books and became an integral part of medieval Christian spirituality.

Centuries later, Catholic Workers can readily connect their daily practices to these two lists. The "Hippie Kitchen" at the Los Angeles Catholic Worker, for example, feeds the hungry at a daily meal for more than a thousand people. Haley House in Boston has sheltered the homeless in a variety of transitional housing programs over the years and has recently partnered with a family shelter to create a housing development in which families and seniors, poor and middle-income people will build

community together. In Alderson, West Virginia, the Catholic Worker community visits women prisoners at the nearby Federal Prison Camp and provides hospitality to their friends and families. Following in the footsteps of Dorothy Day's original *Catholic Worker* newspaper, most local communities publish newspapers or newsletters to "instruct the ignorant." For thirty years, Catholic Workers from Des Moines have traveled to the Strategic Command center in Nebraska to "admonish the sinners" responsible for the threat of nuclear weapons; when they are arrested for these protests they are able to "bear wrongs patiently." In the Polk Street neighborhood of San Francisco, Temenos Catholic Worker comforts the afflicted by providing sacramental and pastoral ministries to "those who find themselves abandoned and isolated in their suffering, in particular male and female sex workers and homeless gay/lesbian/transgender youth."[5]

Such practices are far from incidental to the identity of Catholic Worker communities. Practicing "the works of mercy . . . is our program, our rule of life," declared Dorothy Day on one occasion.[6] In one of her first attempts to encapsulate the vision of the movement, she identified "the two age-old techniques—*voluntary poverty* and *the Works of Mercy*" as key to the Catholic Worker's "philosophy of labor."[7] A later statement of "Catholic Worker Positions" identified "the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:38-48) and the call to solidarity with the poor (Matthew 25:31-46) as the heart of the Gospel message."[8] Perhaps most provocatively, the website of Casa Juan Diego, the Catholic Worker community in Houston, invites viewers to click on a link to its "Mission Statement" that takes them to the New American Bible's text of Matthew 25:31-46.[9]

Because of the Catholic Worker movement's deep commitment to the works of mercy, it is often perceived as a "charitable" organization, concerned more with social service than with social change. Yet Catholic Workers have always resisted such an understanding. As a young socialist, prior to her conversion to Catholicism, Dorothy Day had been deeply critical of charity as a means of concealing and thus perpetuating social injustices.

Even after her conversion, she "felt that charity was a word to choke over. Who wanted charity? And it was not just human pride but a strong sense of man's dignity and worth, and what was due to him in justice, that made me resent, rather than feel proud of so mighty a sum total of Catholic [charitable] institutions."[10] Gradually, though, she gained a new insight into the transformative potential of directly caring for others. "We consider," she wrote in 1940, "the spiritual and corporal Works of Mercy and the following of Christ to be the best revolutionary technique and a means for changing the social order rather than perpetuating it. Did not the thousands of monasteries, with their hospitality change the entire social pattern of their day? They did not wait for a paternal state to step in nor did they stand by to see destitution precipitate bloody revolt."[11]

This position reflected the Catholic philosophical tradition of personalism, one of the greatest influences on both Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day. According to Emmanuel Mounier, the French thinker who coined the term, personalism began with the affirmation that the human person, created in the image of God, is "an absolute in comparison with any other material or social reality . . . and can never be considered merely as a part of a whole, whether of family, class, state, nation or even humanity."[12] Mounier's emphasis on the person made him deeply skeptical of the modern tendency to invest more and more power in the centralized state, and both Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day pressed this skepticism to the point of rejecting all state-sponsored programs of social service. It was the impersonal charity of "Holy Mother the State," they believed, that perpetuated an unjust status quo, while the practice of caring for the poor "at a personal sacrifice" had the potential to create an entirely new community. Maurin drew the contrast pointedly in one of his most frequently quoted "easy essays":

> In the first centuries of Christianity
> the poor were fed, clothed, and sheltered
> at a personal sacrifice

and the Pagans
said about the Christians:
"See how they love each other."
Today the poor are fed, clothed, and sheltered
by the politicians
at the expense
of the taxpayers.
And because the poor
are no longer
fed, clothed, and sheltered
at a personal sacrifice
but at the expense
of taxpayers
Pagans say about the Christians:
"See how they pass the buck."[13]

Not everyone who serves soup or sweeps floors at a Catholic Worker house of hospitality would agree that there is no place for taxpayer-funded charity. But virtually all would agree that they have been changed by their practice of the works of mercy. Much more than writing a check to the United Way or the Internal Revenue Service, taking personal responsibility for the needs of the stranger changes the way one sees the world.

When Catholic Workers must spend hours standing in line to help their guests receive a few dollars worth of food stamps, they gain new insight into the destructive consequences of weapons systems that cost billions of dollars. Many have traveled from the soup kitchen to the picket line as the result of such experiences. At the same time, the practice of "bearing wrongs" and seeing Christ in guests who are often unpleasant or abusive helps Catholic Workers to recognize the human dignity of the soldiers, police officers, generals, and politicians who are often the target of their protests. At many antiwar protests, Catholic Workers take the lead in engaging their opponents at a personal level, striking up conversations rather than taunting them with harsh invective. As a result of such experiences, the works of mercy have come to function not only as the unifying practice of the Catholic

Worker movement but also its hermeneutical principle—its way of interpreting both the past and the present.

As a hermeneutical principle, the works of mercy help account for the extraordinary depth of the Catholic Worker movement. Catholic Workers readily make connections among seemingly diverse issues, linking the crisis of homelessness to Cold War military budgets and to the experiences of gay and lesbian Catholics who feel bereft of their church home. They are also quick to place their practices within the centuries-old tradition of the Church, appealing to the Benedictine integration of work and prayer, to Saint Francis's vision of life-giving poverty, or to John Chrysostom's suggestion that every family provide a "Christ room" for one stranger in need of shelter.

At the same time, the works of mercy have made possible the movement's equally extraordinary breadth. For if everyone sees the world anew after practicing the works of mercy, not everyone's vision is changed in the same way. In the practice of breaking bread with the poor, many Catholic Workers have discovered the true meaning of the Eucharist and have been drawn to make daily communion part of their spiritual discipline. Others have decided, on the basis of the same experience, that the Eucharist is superfluous—that the true communion is every shared meal. For some Catholic Workers, likewise, the experience of life in a house of hospitality proves the personalist dictum that state welfare programs are a threat to human dignity, while others have been led to work for the dramatic expansion of such programs. Even the War on Poverty can be traced to the years its principal architect, Michael Harrington, spent at the New York Catholic Worker.

It might seem that such diverse conclusions should have ripped the movement apart years ago. But the peculiarly unifying genius of the Catholic Worker lies in the fact that everyone can practice the works of mercy. One does not need to be a Catholic or a Christian to welcome the stranger, even though the Catholic Worker movement as a whole might see this action as a welcoming of Christ. One does not need to be a pacifist to calm the

tensions that sometimes break out in the soup line, even though other Catholic Workers may see such actions as preparation for civil disobedience at military bases. One does not even need to live in a Catholic Worker community, as Dorothy repeatedly pointed out, to practice the works of mercy within one's individual life.

Day's insistence that anyone can practice the works of mercy suggests part of the reason that I do not regard "voluntary poverty" to be as definitive of the Catholic Worker as the works of mercy. This is a risky claim, because Day herself almost invariably linked the two concepts. The works of mercy, she believed, were transformative only if they were practiced "at a personal sacrifice," and this entailed a life of simplicity, in which one did without superfluities and luxuries in order to ensure there was enough to share. Both Day and Maurin emphasized the distinction between poverty of this sort and the "destitution" experienced by persons without enough to eat or places to sleep. By embracing the poverty of simplicity, Day and Maurin believed, people could create a world in which no one would be destitute.

Yet a great many Catholic Workers have not practiced voluntary poverty in this sense. On the one hand, many part-time volunteers—the people who come once a week to serve a meal or join the full-time Workers on the picket line—do not aspire to practice poverty at all but may be wealthy, middle-, or working-class people aspiring to prosperity. On the other hand, many full-time Workers have chosen lifestyles that would better be described as "destitute" than "poor." "Instead of poverty," recalled Stanley Vishnewski, who spent more years at the New York Catholic Worker than any other person, "I was given a taste of destitution. For weeks I have gone without a penny in my pocket. I have known what it is to eat horrible, ill-tasting meals. I have worn cast off clothing and ill-fitting shoes."[14] Despite her clear understanding of the difference between poverty and destitution, Day regularly told stories that glorified such experiences, reinforcing a traditional Catholic piety that treated ascetic poverty as an end in itself rather than a means to justice. Draw-

ing on such stories, one historian has even argued that Day "proposed self-dissolution as the goal and essence of Catholicism."[15] Though this judgment is surely one-sided, it is not entirely wrong.

Fortunately, Day's pursuit of simple holiness is more widely imitated in the movement today than her quest for self-dissolution. Most Catholic Workers work hard to balance their own needs with the needs of the people they serve, though some feel that in so doing they are not living up to Day's heroic standard. The point I would stress, though, is that in most cases the practice of the works of mercy must come *before* an authentic commitment to poverty. Prosperous volunteers, for example, must experience the satisfaction of serving others before they can begin thinking about simplifying their own lifestyles. Those who are initially attracted to ascetic self-denial, moreover, gradually realize the value of showing mercy to themselves and—as it often works out—to their children. The trick, as Catholic Worker Larry Purcell has wisely suggested, "is to love your kids so much that you want what you have for them with the homeless. Not like you want to treat your kids like you treat the homeless, but that you want the homeless to have what your kids have."[16]

Catholic, Leftist, and American

The capacity of the works of mercy to transform different sorts of lives helps explain the historical significance of the Catholic Worker: it is the place where the American Catholic Church, taken as a whole, has encountered the American Left, also taken as a whole. In forging a vision for their movement, Day, Maurin, and their early companions drew on an extraordinary range of other Catholic movements, many of them anticipating the renewal of the Second Vatican Council. They were among the most devoted readers of papal encyclicals on social issues, as well as of the distributist writers who taught that the Catholic vision could best be fulfilled in a decentralized rural economy. From the nascent liturgical movement, they imbibed

a vivid sense of the liturgy's capacity to transform the social order and a keen awareness of the Church (and all of humanity) as the Mystical Body of Christ. Jacques Maritain reminded them of Thomas Aquinas's doctrine of the common good. The retreat movement of Father Onesimus Lacouture inspired them to aspire to the personal holiness of the saints. Drawing on these rich traditions, Dorothy Day was a Benedictine oblate, a practitioner of Franciscan poverty, and a lover of the Eastern rite liturgy. She corresponded with Thomas Merton, professed her loyalty to the Cold War cardinal Francis Spellman, attended the Second Vatican Council with an ecumenical group of pacifist women, and bemoaned what she saw as a lack of reverence in the post-Vatican II church. Day first joined the Catholic Church because of its inclusiveness—"it held the allegiance of the masses of people in all the cities where I had lived"—and both she and her movement embraced all of it.[17]

Yet the Catholic Worker has never been exclusively Catholic in its inspiration or its membership. Dorothy Day spent her young adulthood as a socialist journalist, and to the end of her life she professed admiration for the ideals and the discipline of the Communists and anarchists she met during those years. At least a few of Day's radical friends continued to associate with the Worker into the 1960s. The anarchist martyrs Sacco and Vanzetti were regularly commemorated in the pages of the *Catholic Worker,* and the movement's approach to labor organizing was as indebted to the "one big union" of the International Workers of the World as it was to the social encyclicals. (One of the Worker's most memorable slogans, "to build a new society within the shell of the old," was borrowed from the Wobblies.)

In its pacifism, moreover, the Catholic Worker stood within one of the most venerable traditions of the American Left. Its American roots go back to William Lloyd Garrison and Adin Ballou, radical abolitionists who took the Sermon on the Mount as a binding rule while discarding most of the doctrinal heritage of Christianity. The Catholic Worker embraced Gandhian methods

of civil disobedience years before they were embraced by the civil rights movement, and at least some Catholic Workers were quite conscious of the chain of influences connecting Gandhi to Leo Tolstoy to Garrison and Ballou. In the last years of her life, Dorothy Day was a fierce advocate of E. F. Schumacher's "small is beautiful" philosophy. And despite her personal commitment to Christian anarchism, her socialist sympathies were catholic enough that she paid a friendly visit to Fidel Castro's Cuba.

The recent history of the Worker reveals an equally broad engagement with both the Church and the Left. In the years after Vatican II, Catholic Worker communities were among the first to sponsor informal house liturgies, and in more than a few cases allowed lay women and men to preside at house Eucharists. Catholic Workers have been deeply involved in such "liberal" movements as Call to Action and Voice of the Faithful and have been among the most vocal proponents of gay and lesbian liberation in the Church. But in the 1970s the Catholic charismatic revival and the *cursillo* movement also led many idealistic young Catholics to the Worker, and in more recent years the Worker communities in Houston and South Bend have been among the most enthusiastic admirers of Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Though many Catholic Workers refuse to vote, the Worker influenced both the anti-Vietnam War presidential candidate Eugene McCarthy and more recent candidates for the Green Party and Canada's New Democratic Party. The Worker has also helped to connect non-Christian traditions to the American Left. Boston's Haley House Catholic Worker is an important center for Buddhist peace activism. One of the first Jewish thinkers to declare himself a theologian of liberation, Marc Ellis, was decisively shaped by the year he spent at the New York Catholic Worker as a young adult, just as one of the first thinkers to publish a gay theology of liberation, Richard Cleaver, is a longtime Catholic Worker and (more recently) a priest in a gay-friendly branch of Orthodox Christianity.[18] In the spirit of *Nostra aetate* (the Vatican II declaration on non-Christian religions), the Catholic Worker has always identified the "Mystical Body of Christ"

not only with the Church but also with the worldwide community of people who have welcomed Christ by feeding the hungry and welcoming the stranger.

What the Catholic Worker Is Not

I have suggested that the works of mercy provide the vital heart of the Catholic Worker movement, and that the movement's historical significance is as a vital meeting ground for both the entirety of the American Catholic Church and the entirety of the American Left. In making these claims, I also intend to challenge a few misconceptions about the Worker movement that are common both among Workers themselves and among the larger public. The first is that the Catholic Worker is essentially a thing of the past: that the movement achieved its glory days during the Great Depression, nearly collapsed as a result of the Second World War, and has remained a shadow of its former self ever since. In fact, I will show that for the past forty years the movement has included more people, in far more places, than it ever did in its first decade. This is largely the work of an outstanding generation of friends who came to the Worker during the Vietnam War, encountered the warm and empowering support of Dorothy Day, and learned together how to make the Worker a lifelong commitment.

A second misconception is that the movement experienced a dramatic break at the time of Dorothy Day's death, to the extent that much of what goes on in the Worker today represents a stark alternative to the original vision of Day and Maurin. Closely related to this is the view that that original vision was essentially a blend of conservative Catholicism and radical politics. If this were true, then certainly the previous point would also be true, for few Catholic Workers today are conservative Catholics. But from the beginning, the Catholic Worker represented a synthesis of Catholicism *as a whole* with the American radical tradition, and particularly with its anarchist strand. It is true that Dorothy Day's Catholic sensibilities were conservative

in certain respects: she held great respect for the hierarchy and even greater respect for the saints, and she cherished aspects of the pre–Vatican II liturgy. But in these respects she was a typical mid-twentieth-century Catholic, and her movement at mid-century attracted a cross section of Catholics of that era. Since Vatican II, the movement has continued to attract a cross section of American Catholics, and that cross section now includes neo-traditionalists, Call to Action reformers, and "cultural Catholics" who no longer attend Mass. As was the case from the beginning, the Worker's blend of Catholicism and radicalism also leaves plenty of space for Catholics who aren't especially radical and radicals who aren't Catholic in the slightest.

A third misconception is that there are just two basic models of Catholic Worker community: the urban house of hospitality, in which single volunteers share life with large numbers of homeless persons, and the rural commune or "agronomic university," in which formerly homeless people create a self-sufficient life on the land. These two models do, in fact, correspond to the reality of the two New York City hospitality houses and to the ideal sought (but never achieved) by the farms directly associated with those houses. But Dorothy Day never claimed that one had to live in a community like these in order to be a Catholic Worker. On the contrary, she held that the Catholic Worker is open to anyone who practices the works of mercy in her or his particular circumstances, with due regard for her or his particular vocation. Indeed, as I will argue later in this book, Day was especially supportive of the many families that were drawn to the Catholic Worker ideal.

A final misconception is that the Catholic Worker can best be understood as the antithesis of some other thing. A variety of attempts have been made to define the movement by antithesis. The Catholic Worker, some would say, promoted "justice" rather than traditional Catholic "charity." Others suggest that its agrarian and medievalist interpretation of Catholic social teaching was starkly opposed to the work of John Ryan and others who sought to make industrial society more just. Some

say that the Catholic Worker's "old" style of Catholic pacifism was challenged in the 1960s by the "new" pacifism of Daniel and Philip Berrigan, or that its "radicalism" was superseded by the "revolutionary" vision of liberation theology. Such antitheses are not surprising, for both Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day occasionally presented their ideas in antithetical form. Ultimately, however, Day's habits of friendship trumped any inclination to set the Worker in fundamental opposition to other groups or ideologies. Labor leader John Cort, War on Poverty architect Michael Harrington, and "ultra resistance" priest Daniel Berrigan all represent ideologies that have sometimes been set in opposition to the Catholic Worker, but they were also dear friends of Dorothy Day whose views are shared by many Catholic Workers today. What's more, the works of mercy have always created a platform for people of diverse ideologies—or no ideologies—to participate in the daily work of the Worker.

There is one antithesis, however, that is not so easily dismissed. Many observers have drawn a sharp line between the "radicalism" of the Catholic Worker and the more tepid "liberalism" of mainstream American society. This antithesis traces back to Peter Maurin, whose "easy essays" were filled with jabs at liberals:

> Liberals
> are too liberal
> to be radicals.
> To be a radical
> is to go to the roots.
> Liberals
> don't go to the roots;
> they only
> scratch the surface.[19]

Maurin's hostility to liberalism is echoed in the analyses of both longtime Workers and more dispassionate historians.

Geoffrey Gneuhs of the New York Catholic Worker, for example, describes attempts to associate the Catholic Worker with liberal-

ism and the Left as a "gross misreading [that] not only reveals a lack of understanding of the Catholic Worker but also diminishes the radical critique of modernity and the liberal bourgeois world that is at the heart of the Catholic Worker and the orthodox Catholic faith of Dorothy Day."[20] Michael Baxter, a Holy Cross priest who has been associated with Catholic Workers in both Phoenix and South Bend, explained it more poetically in his interview with Rosalie Riegle: "You know, the Catholic Worker is not a liberal movement. It's a radical movement, and there's a sharp difference. Liberals say, 'Hey! The homeless aren't being fed. Let's march on City Hall.' Radicals say, 'The homeless aren't being fed. Let's feed them.'"[21] And historian James T. Fisher, author of one of the few studies of the Catholic Worker that does not explicitly champion the movement, challenged earlier studies that linked the Catholic Worker to the Americanization of immigrant Catholics. The "view of the Catholic Worker movement as a sign of the Church's security in America," wrote Fisher, "obscures Dorothy Day's original intent, which was radically separatist."[22]

Given the amount of emphasis both Maurin and Day put on the word "radical," this antithesis deserves some unpacking. Its validity depends, to a large extent, on the precise meaning one ascribes to the word "liberal." At the most basic level, liberalism is linked to individual liberty and, by extension, to individualism. The Catholic Worker emphasis on the Mystical Body of Christ is often presented as an antidote to the rampant individualism of American society. Some Catholic Workers would even extend their critique of individualistic liberalism to ideologies, particularly feminism and gay liberation, that they (rightly) see as indebted to the liberal tradition. The problem, of course, is that feminism and gay liberation are very much alive and well in the Catholic Worker movement. Many, probably most, Catholic Workers see no contradiction between efforts to liberate women, gays, and lesbians from unjust traditions and the simultaneous project of building a new, "beloved community" in which all are free. One of the deepest insights of Catholic Worker personalism is that authentic individual freedom and genuine community are not opposites,

but interdependent. And this idea is not a monopoly of Catholic personalism: many of the best exponents of the American Left, from the communitarian wing of the Transcendentalists through the Social Gospelers and on to the civil rights movement, have insisted that there is no ultimate opposition between individual freedom and communal solidarity.

Other Catholic Worker critics of liberalism identify it not with individualism but with "reformism"—that is, with efforts to make existing social institutions more just rather than to build a new society within the shell of the old. From this perspective, liberalism is not the polar opposite of radicalism, but simply a watered-down variant of it. This sort of antithesis informs, for example, the refusal of many Catholic Worker communities to apply for federal nonprofit status or to receive support from governmental programs, and the movement has developed a profound body of writing criticizing reformist approaches to social evils. It would certainly be a mistake to regard the Worker as primarily a movement of social reform! And yet the Catholic Worker practice of the works of mercy has inspired such well-known social reformers as Eugene McCarthy and Michael Harrington, and even many Catholic Worker communities have sought government funds to feed the hungry and house the homeless.

Michael Baxter's comment about liberals marching on city hall might be interpreted as a critique of reformism, but it also contains a deeper level of analysis. The problem with liberalism, from Baxter's (and Gneuhs's) perspective, is not only that it is willing to work within the "system"—and particularly with the militarist state—but that in so doing it subtly reinforces the power of systems and states. When liberals march on city hall, or on the White House, they contribute to the mistaken belief that city hall and the White House are truly the centers of power. This argument is indebted to the critique of liberalism developed by Alasdair MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas, according to which the modern state, with its monopoly of violence and tremendous destructive potential, and the modern corporation, with its unconstrained

devotion to profit, emerged only because liberal movements for individual freedom had broken down the traditional, more human-scaled structures of family, village, craft guild, and church, as well as the transcendent reference point of orthodox Christianity. From this perspective, the unrestrained corporate capitalism espoused by the Republican Party and the welfare stateism championed by the Democrats (and, more fully, by most Western European societies) are the twin children of classical liberalism, and both are opposed to the common good.[23]

This book is certainly not the place for a full response to this argument. But even if one concedes the liberal roots of both capitalism and the omnipotent state, it is worth asking whether they are the only heirs of classical liberalism. Much of the American Left, and particularly the anarchist tradition that has been so important for the Catholic Worker, has at least as strong a claim to the liberal mantle. Pure anarchists (if there is such a thing) are adamantly opposed to hierarchy wherever it may be found—in state, corporation, church, or family. The position espoused by Baxter—and by Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day—might best be understood as a variant on pure anarchism, for it rejects not hierarchy per se, but the idolatrous and self-serving hierarchies of institutions that refuse any transcendent point of reference. At least since the late 1950s, this sort of anarchism has coexisted with the more classical variety in the Catholic Worker movement. If, as I suspect, there is some measure of truth to be found in both strands of anarchism, as well as in the reformism espoused by such renegade Workers as John Cort and Michael Harrington, then it is a great and good thing that the Worker practice of the works of mercy has created a community in which advocates of all three positions can meet and learn from one another.[24]

Leadership through Friendship

It is also something of a wonder that the Catholic Worker has endured so long, when its defining practice brings together such strange bedfellows. Yet the Worker has endured for

three-quarters of a century, all the while maintaining its identity as a decentralized lay movement in which families, individuals, and small communities practice the works of mercy in a wide variety of urban and rural settings. Some observers have marveled at the movement's avoidance of the process of bureaucratization that Max Weber saw as the inevitable fate of new religious movements after the death of a charismatic founder.[25] But the more remarkable fact is that it has not simply disintegrated into hundreds of local houses and farms, without any sense of connection to a larger movement. After all, as Dorothy Day often pointed out, one does not need to be part of a movement to practice the works of mercy. Any family, any parish, perhaps any individual can take personal responsibility for the "least" of Christ's brothers and sisters without signing up as a Catholic Worker.

Yet herein lies the key to the Catholic Worker's endurance: it has never really tried to endure. While many short-lived radical movements have sought to usher in the kingdom of God within a generation, the Catholic Worker declared from the beginning that "success" was not its highest priority. "What we do is so little we may seem to be constantly failing," Day explained in 1940. "But so did He fail. He met with apparent failure on the Cross. But unless the seed fall into the earth and die, there is no harvest."[26] A fervent admirer of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, Dorothy Day consistently advocated the "little way" and urged Worker houses to remain as small as possible. The consequence of this stress on smallness and lack of concern for success is that the Catholic Worker movement has rarely been so turned in on itself as to become cut off from the larger world. Following Dorothy Day's example, Catholic Workers have always been interested in the works of mercy wherever they have been practiced, and as a result countless practitioners of the works of mercy have become interested in the Catholic Worker.

Dorothy Day, I believe, deserves much of the credit for the endurance of the Catholic Worker movement not because she was a powerful, charismatic leader—though she was that—but

because she modeled a practice of friendship that reached beyond the boundaries of her movement. As a journalist with a roving spirit, she traveled widely, and everywhere she traveled she befriended people who were practicing the works of mercy. Though some of these friends eventually made their way to the New York Catholic Worker, she counseled most to craft their own communities in response to local needs, and she then passed on the New York houses' excess donations to these fledgling communities. When individuals left the movement, even if the reason was a sharp ideological disagreement, she stayed in touch and publicized their future accomplishments. "The gold moves on," she declared repeatedly, "and the dross remains." She took a lively interest in other efforts to practice the communitarian ideals of the Gospel, from Koinonia and Taena in the 1950s to Sojourners in the 1970s. Though she never tried to turn these communities into Catholic Workers, many became integral parts of the Catholic Worker network, initiating young people who would go on to join or found Catholic Worker communities. Some movements that have been perceived as rivals to the Catholic Worker—most notably the "ultra resistance" movement of the Berrigan brothers in the 1960s—have eventually become sources of renewal for the Worker, simply because Dorothy Day and other Workers have treated them as friends rather than as rivals.

This is not to say that Dorothy Day did nothing to promote the institutional survival of the Catholic Worker. In fact, it was Peter Maurin who most fully embodied the values of smallness and openness to failure that Day espoused. His practice, during all the years he was associated with the movement, was simply to outline his "program" and provide a personal example of a life of scholarship and manual labor, then leave it to others to follow suit or not. If an academic host mistook him for a plumber, he would quietly sit in the basement rather than give a planned talk about the Worker. When conflict broke out in the movement, Maurin repeatedly counseled Day simply to walk away, leaving projects and property to her antagonists. He himself walked out

on her when he first realized that the *Catholic Worker* newspaper would include a variety of perspectives on social justice, rather than devoting itself entirely to the publication of his "easy essays." Had Day always followed Maurin's example, the Catholic Worker movement may never have gotten off the ground.

Dorothy Day was, by contrast, both strong-willed and charismatic. She drew people to the Worker by the force of her personality and sometimes by her physical attractiveness. Once they were in, she did not hesitate to tell them what to do—with the soup or with their lives. Tom Cornell has often commented that Dorothy Day wanted to be an anarchist but only if she got to be the "anarch," while Michael Harrington recalled that the early Worker "was run on a führer concept, and Dorothy was the führer."[27] On occasion, she expelled volunteers unilaterally and without explanation or berated them and then made up awkwardly with flowers.[28] More than a few Workers, especially in the New York houses, were scarred by Day's authoritarian streak. But her authoritarianism had little influence on the movement beyond New York. The one time she seriously tried to assert her authority on a national level, the attempt backfired. This occurred a few months before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, when the United States was gearing up for what would be by far the most popular war in its history.

Dorothy Day had first articulated her pacifist commitments in the pages of the *Catholic Worker* during the Spanish Civil War; since that struggle pitted socialists against conservative Catholics, her stance partly reflected her refusal to choose between Catholicism and socialism. Many of her supporters in roughly thirty Worker communities founded during the Depression thus expected her stance to soften in the face of a war in which both Catholics and socialists were fighting against the threat of Nazism. Throughout the 1930s the Catholic Worker had spoken out more vigorously against anti-Semitism than virtually any other Catholic organization. Yet even as Nazi tanks rolled across Europe, the *Catholic Worker* published headline after headline

denouncing military conscription and declaring the Sermon on the Mount its manifesto of nonviolence. When some local houses began refusing to distribute the paper, Day dug in her heels, writing a strongly worded circular letter insisting that houses that would not circulate the New York paper should disassociate themselves from the movement. A great many did so willingly, while others shut down because their leading volunteers had enlisted in the military. Within a span of three years, the movement had shrunk from a peak of nearly forty communities to just ten. Many observers assumed that it was only a matter of time before it would collapse completely.

Dorothy Day never publicly admitted that she had been wrong to insist on the pacifist character of her movement. Indeed, it may be that this early instance of authoritarianism ultimately served the movement well. In the context of the Korean, Vietnam, and Iraq wars, the fact that the Catholic Worker had maintained its pacifist commitment even in the most challenging circumstances gave it immense prestige among peace activists. Yet she never again chose to impose a boundary on the movement as a whole. Instead, she slowly and steadily built it back up again through supportive visits and correspondence with the handful of houses and farms that were still in operation at the end of the war. When later houses expressed support for the revolutionary violence of the 1960s or challenged aspects of the Catholic tradition that she treasured deeply, she persistently reaffirmed her pacifist and Catholic commitments but also maintained a supportive dialogue with any community that committed itself to the works of mercy.

One consequence of this hands-off approach is that Catholic Worker communities have always been diverse in their organizational structures, and this diversity has been one key to the endurance of both individual communities and the movement as a whole. Day's personal preference was for the "Benedictine" model, in which a fatherly abbot (either male or female) exercises an authority that is deeply attentive to the individual needs of each member of the community. Especially in the Depression

years, Dorothy sometimes took it upon herself to appoint (or replace) "house managers" to play this role in local houses of hospitality. Both then and later, this structure has worked well in many places, in part because it allows a house to sustain itself for many years even if most of its volunteers are willing to commit to only a year or two of full-time service. Many, perhaps most, of the Catholic Worker communities that have lasted more than a decade have been anchored either by a charismatic founder or by a couple for whom the Catholic Worker house is also a family home. On the other hand, local communities of this sort have almost never outlived the "abbot" figure or figures.

In many places, moreover, Catholic Worker communities have not been able to identify even one individual who is willing to make the Catholic Worker a full-time, lifelong vocation. Another common model, therefore, is for a cluster of part-time volunteers—usually referred to as the "extended community"—to provide the continuity for a house whose full-time staff people typically serve for only a year or two. Several of the communities utilizing this model are formally registered as 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporations, and the extended community members are organized as formal boards of directors. This is a controversial approach within the movement, for Dorothy Day considered even this degree of cooperation with "Holy Mother the State" to be a violation of personalist principle. Yet the three most enduring houses of hospitality outside of New York City—Saint Joseph's House in Rochester, New York, Blanchet House in Portland, Oregon, and Benedict Labre House in Montreal—all established nonprofit boards early in their history. Dorothy Day did less to support these communities than those adhering to the first model, but she never attempted to force them out of the movement. (Blanchet House did choose to disassociate itself from the movement early in its history.) More recently, a number of small houses of hospitality have found that extended community can provide a sustaining structure even without formal nonprofit status.

Most Catholic Workers, I suspect, would find both these models—longevity based on a single leader or couple and longevity

based on extended community or a formal board—less than ideal. Explicitly or implicitly, most houses aspire to forge a self-sustaining community of full-time Workers who have made a long-term commitment. In this model, no one individual is indispensable: people may come and go quite frequently, but enough others remain to keep the newcomers connected to the house's identity and tradition. However sought after, this model of shared leadership has rarely been achieved in the movement. To my knowledge, none of the first generation of Catholic Worker communities was able to sustain itself on this basis. Even the New York houses relied on Day's charismatic leadership for most of their history and underwent extended periods when there were no live-in Workers with more than a year or two of experience. (The New York houses today come closer to the ideal.) It was only in the 1960s that a number of houses began to achieve a sustainability rooted in a common communal life. As a result of their achievement, a number of communities today come close to the ideal: the Des Moines Catholic Worker, the Loaves and Fishes community in Duluth, Haley House in Boston, to name a few with which I am familiar. Yet their achievement should not obscure the equally significant work being done by the many communities that still rely on the abbot or extended community model.

Just as a local house can achieve sustainability in a number of ways, so can a movement. During both the ferment of the movement's first decade and the fallow period from 1945 to 1965, Dorothy Day's charismatic leadership was the glue of the movement. Most communities, in other words, had more intense relationships with Day herself than they did with other communities in the movement. By the time of her death in 1980, however, the movement had successfully evolved into a genuine "community of communities," relying on one another for support and encouragement in difficult times. In this model, no one community—not even New York—is indispensable for the survival of the movement, for there are always many others to which a struggling community may turn in time of crisis.

To make the point somewhat differently, beginning in the late 1960s the Catholic Worker movement as a whole began playing the friendship role that Dorothy Day had honed in the previous decades. Individual Catholic Workers traveled frequently from house to house, sharing much more than recipes for soup. The "Catholic Worker tour" of existing houses became a common exercise for those who wished to start Catholic Worker communities of their own. A series of regional and national gatherings, many providing opportunities for intense bonding through shared civil disobedience, helped Catholic Workers form and sustain life-giving friendships. Remarkably, no individual and no community presumed to step into the leadership vacuum that had been left by Dorothy Day. Yet perhaps it would be better to say that almost everyone did so: because so many individuals and communities took personal responsibility for some of the tasks needed to sustain a vital movement, there was no need for a central leader or bureaucratic structure to take charge of all of those tasks. In the last years of its founder's life, the Catholic Worker movement became what Dorothy Day had always said it was: an organism rather than an organization. And as such it has endured.

[1] Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness* (New York: Harper, 1952), 285–86.

[2] Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972). This study has justly been criticized for equating longevity with success.

[3] William Miller, *A Harsh and Dreadful Love: Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement* (New York: Liveright, 1973); Mel Piehl, *Breaking Bread: The Catholic Worker and the Origin of Catholic Radicalism in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982); Patrick G. Coy, ed., *Revolution of the Heart: Essays on the Catholic Worker* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1988); and William Thorn, Philip Runkel, and Susan Mountin, eds.,

Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement: Centenary Essays (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001). A more comprehensive picture of the movement can be found in Rosalie Riegle Troester's oral history, *Voices from the Catholic Worker* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), which is the best starting point for any reader interested in the Catholic Worker movement as a whole. My previous study, *Touching the World: Christian Communities Transforming Society* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), focuses on both the contemporary Catholic Worker and the Camphill Movement.

[4] Timothy Fry, O.S.B., ed., *The Rule of Saint Benedict in English* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1982), 74.

[5] "Los Angeles Catholic Worker: Who We Are," http://lacatholicworker.org/who-we-are/; "Housing," at http://www.haleyhouse.org/housing.htm; "Alderson Hospitality House," http://www.catholicworker.org/communities/commdetail.cfm; "The History of Stratcom," at http://www.desmoinescatholicworker.org/stratcom.htm; and "The Mission of Temenos," http://www.temenos.org/mission/index.html.

[6] Day, "On Pilgrimage," *Catholic Worker* 13, no. 5 (June 1946): 1–2, 8. Searchable access to Day's columns and other writings in the *Worker* is available online at http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/.

[7] "Aims and Purposes," *Catholic Worker* 6, no. 7 (January 1939): 7.

[8] "'Making a path from things as they are to things as they should be'—Peter Maurin," *Catholic Worker* 45, no. 4 (May 1979): 4–5.

[9] "About Casa Juan Diego," at http://www.cjd.org/cjd.html.

[10] Day, *Long Loneliness,* 150.

[11] Day, "Catholic Worker Ideas on Hospitality," *Catholic Worker* 7, no. 8 (May 1940): 10.

[12] Emmanuel Mounier, *A Personalist Manifesto,* trans. Monks of Saint John's Abbey (New York: Longmans, 1938), 69.

[13] Peter Maurin, "Passing the Buck," available at http://www.catholicworker.org/roundtable/easyessays.cfm. The collection of "easy essays" was also published as *Easy Essays* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977).

[14] Stanley Vishnewski, *Wings of Dawn* (New York: Catholic Worker, 1984), 230.

[15] James T. Fisher, *The Catholic Counterculture in America, 1933–1962* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 47.

[16] Lawrence Purcell, interviewed by Chris Gamm, 14 July 2000.

[17] Day, *Long Loneliness,* 139. The best overview of the specifically Catholic sources for the Catholic Worker movement is Mark and Louise Zwick, *The Catholic Worker Movement: Intellectual and Spiritual Origins* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2005).

[18] Marc H. Ellis, *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987); and Richard Cleaver, *Know My Name: A Gay Liberation Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995).

[19] Peter Maurin, "Not Liberals but Radicals," *Easy Essays,* 156–57.

[20] Geoffrey Gneuhs, "Radical Orthodoxy: Dorothy Day's Challenge to Liberal America," in Thorn et al., *Dorothy Day,* 205.

[21] Michael Baxter in Troester, *Voices,* vi.

[22] Fisher, *Catholic Counterculture,* 72.

[23] For a fuller presentation of this argument, see Michael J. Baxter, C.S.C., "'Blowing the Dynamite of the Church': Catholic Radicalism from a Catholic Radicalist Perspective," in Thorn et al., *Dorothy Day,* 79–94.

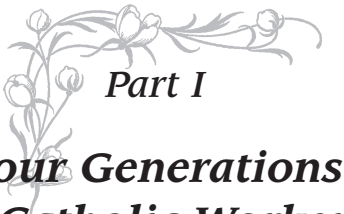
[24] One recent study that attempts to reconcile the radical and reformist strands in Catholic social ethics, with specific reference to Mike Baxter and the Catholic Worker, is Kristen E. Heyer, *Prophetic and Public: The Social Witness of U.S. Catholicism* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006).

[25] Michele Teresa Aronica, R.S.M., *Beyond Charismatic Leadership: The New York Catholic Worker Movement* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1987).

[26] "Aims and Purposes," *Catholic Worker* 7, no. 6 (February 1940): 7.

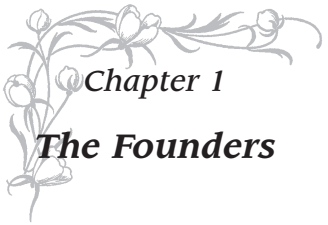
[27] Michael Harrington, cited in Troester, *Voices,* 131.

[28] Terry Rogers, cited in Troester, *Voices,* 88.



Part I

Four Generations of Catholic Workers



Chapter 1
The Founders

The story of the Catholic Worker begins with the interest Dorothy Day took in Peter Maurin—an eccentric, brilliant, self-absorbed, and boundlessly generous French peasant whom she found waiting in the kitchen of her New York City apartment on December 9, 1932. Catholic Workers still delight in telling the story: Day had just returned from Washington, D.C., where she had been covering a Communist hunger march for the Catholic journal *Commonweal*. Impressed by the earnestness of the marchers and saddened by the fact that her new Catholic faith prevented her from participating, she had also stopped at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception to offer "a special prayer . . . that some way would open for me to use what talents I possessed for my fellow workers, for the poor."[1] Perhaps in answer to that prayer, Peter Maurin had sought out Day on the recommendation of both the editor of *Commonweal* and one of her Communist friends, who had told Maurin that they thought alike. As he would do to countless Workers after, Maurin immediately began "indoctrinating" Day, telling her of the social encyclicals, of personalist philosophy, and of his own "three-point-program" for a "green revolution" that would bring about a society in which "it is easier for people to be good."

Despite his eccentric manner, Maurin immediately impressed Day. "Peter," she would explain in her autobiography, "made you feel a sense of his mission as soon as you met him. . . . He aroused in you a sense of your own capacities for work, for accomplishment. He made you feel that you and all men had great and generous hearts with which to love God."[2] These words say as much about Day as they do about Maurin. She had an intuitive sense of saintliness, even when it came in strange disguises, and an intense desire to see the heroic potential of every person whom she met. Maurin was woefully incapable of bringing his ideas to fruition, but Day immediately grasped the connection between his vision and her background as a socialist journalist. Their vocations, she realized, could flow together in the project of a newspaper that would bring his ideas to the unemployed workers who filled the streets of New York. Though Maurin quickly proved himself to be an erratic coworker, his vision was inspiring enough to guide her through a six-month process that culminated in the publication of the first issue of the *Catholic Worker* on May Day 1933.

In the throes of the Great Depression, American Catholics were eager for a new vision, and the fledgling paper achieved a circulation of 100,000 by its first anniversary. It then fell upon Day and Maurin—but especially upon Day—to begin implementing the three points of Maurin's program. He had called for "roundtable discussions for the clarification of thought," and so they rented a series of meeting rooms for presentations on such topics as "The History of Nationalism," "Cultural Interests vs. Business Interests," scholastic theology, Jewish spirituality, and racial justice. He had called for "houses of hospitality" to practice the corporal works of mercy, and so when unemployed Workers began arriving at their apartment, they made room, eventually sponsoring houses of hospitality for both women and men. Finally, Maurin had called for farming communes or "agronomic universities" where unemployed urban workers would find a more fulfilling life on the land, and the division between "workers" and "scholars" would be abolished. Accordingly, the

first Catholic Worker farm—really more of a garden—was established on Staten Island, and in 1936 the Workers purchased a more substantial property in Easton, Pennsylvania. Though the precise locations have changed repeatedly, for seventy years the New York Catholic Worker has always included at least one farm and one or two urban houses of hospitality.

As editor of the *Catholic Worker,* Dorothy Day publicized all of these ventures, as well as printing and reprinting the "easy essays" in which Peter Maurin laid out his own vision or synopsized the ideas of philosophers who had inspired him. Maurin, in fact, had originally imagined that the paper would consist of nothing but his own writings, but Day had wisely resisted him on this point. Instead, the paper became a vehicle for her wide-ranging interests and sympathies. Despite Peter's insistence that "strikes don't strike me," she covered dozens of strikes, establishing her paper as one of organized labor's best friends in the Catholic Church. Like her former Communist associates, she covered the trial of the "Scottsboro boys," a group of Southern blacks who were being tried on dubious charges of rape. She covered the Spanish Civil War, espousing a pacifist stance that irritated both socialist supporters of the Loyalists and Catholic supporters of Franco. And she wrote adamantly against anti-Semitism, both as it was expressed in the rising Nazi government of Germany and in the popular radio sermons of Father Charles Coughlin.

None of these topics was calculated to build up the Worker's local projects in New York City. But Day's capacity to see the heroism in other people's projects, even if those people did not share her religious convictions or economic theories, made it easier for those others to take an interest in her work. Soon she began combining her journalistic travels with talks at Catholic universities, and everywhere she spoke she encountered earnest young people who wanted to participate in the budding movement. She quickly honed the advice she would give to new Catholic Workers for the next forty years. Start where you are: identify the gifts and needs present in your neighborhood, and practice the works of mercy there. Stay small: remember that

massive houses of hospitality would not be necessary if everyone took personal responsibility for those around them. Honor your vocation: choose the work where you feel the most joy, and don't be afraid to move on in response to the spirit's call. Accept failure: remember that God's work is like a seed that must fall to the ground before it can bear fruit. These simple ideas, repeated time and again, empowered individuals and communities to craft countless variations on the Catholic Worker ideal, while remaining in fruitful dialogue with both Day herself and one another.

As a national movement, the Catholic Worker grew at a remarkable rate during its first decade. Between the launch of the newspaper in 1933 and the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, at least forty-three houses of hospitality or farms sprang up in locations as diverse as Boston, Los Angeles, Aitkin, Minnesota, and Houma, Louisiana.[3] Day's commitment to local self-determination is reflected in the fact that this first generation of Catholic Worker houses anticipated almost the full range of variants that are present in the movement today. There were houses of hospitality in major urban centers and in smaller cities, some managed primarily by live-in Workers and others by volunteers with more conventional lifestyles. There were actual communal farms and more traditional family farms inspired by the Catholic Worker ideal. In some Catholic Worker communities, a charismatic founder operated as an abbot, while in others authority was shared widely among a founding group. Some Catholic Workers were equally enthusiastic about care for the homeless, Catholic pacifism, and decentralist economics, while others quietly practiced the works of mercy but ignored Day and Maurin's larger social vision.

Despite these differences, most Worker communities of this era began in the same way: with a visit from Dorothy Day. Just two years after the founding of the paper, for example, Day spoke to a crowd of eight hundred people at Saint Louis University. One of those in attendance, Cyril Echele, then wrote to New York for a list of local subscribers to the *Catholic Worker,* and soon a

nascent group dubbed the Campion Propaganda Committee was formed. By the following spring, Echele was at the Worker farm in Easton, Pennsylvania, but he returned to Saint Louis to launch "Catholic Worker Farming Commune NO. 2" on two hundred fifty acres of donated land. Unfortunately, 1936 was a dry summer. In what he would later call "a glorious failure," Echele "almost starved to death and even my chickens died." Meanwhile, though, the Saint Louis Workers had launched a bookstore that competed in a friendly way with a nearby Communist shop. When a customer suggested that they should dispense more than ideas, they launched a soup line, distributing day-old bread and donated coffee to the city's unemployed workers. The Worker regularly hosted roundtable discussions, and these conversations led them to agitate for the admission of African Americans to Saint Louis University, to support a sit-down strike at Emerson Electric, and to champion the ideals of the liturgical movement. Finally, in April 1938, they opened a full-fledged house of hospitality; for the next four years, this house would provide shelter for about twenty men, and food for close to three hundred, on a daily basis.[4]

If one assumes that a Catholic Worker "community" is a cluster of committed Workers voluntarily living with the poor for an extended period of time, then Saint Louis never achieved "community" status. Typically, there was just one full-time Worker at a time: Cy Echele managed the short-lived farm; Don Gallagher lived in a back room of the bookstore; Herb Welsh and Bill Camp alternated as managers of the house of hospitality. This lack of communal commitment troubled the Saint Louisans: "Our chief problem," they wrote to Day in 1939, "is that there is none of us except Bill Camp who sleeps, eats, and breathes Catholic Worker day and night." The challenge of conforming to Worker ideals became even more difficult after Nazi Germany launched World War II by invading Poland. Though the Saint Louis Worker did not repudiate Day's pacifism as publicly as the communities in Chicago and Los Angeles, both Herb Welsh and Don Gallagher quietly dissented, while Cy Echele supported his

young family by taking a job in a tank factory. The booming war economy also meant that fewer people needed the services of the hospitality house. Key volunteers married or moved away from Saint Louis, and in 1942 the house closed its doors.[5]

Despite its brief and haphazard lifespan, the Saint Louis Catholic Worker had a transformative impact on many lives. "If I hadn't found the Catholic Worker, it's hard telling what I would have done," Cy Echele told a researcher in the early 1980s, while another founder said that "I don't think there's been a stronger influence in our lives." Just after the house closed, several participants formed the Saint Louis Logos Study Group, which continued to meet monthly for reflection on Catholic social teaching for more than four decades. Some of these people were still available to offer advice when a new Catholic Worker community, Karen House, was launched in 1977. This enduring impact had a lot to do with the personal interest Day took in the struggling community, for nearly everyone who met her was touched by her luminous example of Christian commitment. "She really put into practice the beatitudes more than anybody that I ever met," recalled one Worker, while another mused, "Once you waken to an appreciation of Dorothy, she gets under your skin . . . it's a rare and beautiful thing."[6]

If the Saint Louis Workers struggled to conform to the model of the New York Catholic Worker, Chicago was home to two communities that actively dissented from important aspects of Dorothy Day's vision. Yet, significantly, she retained an intense interest in both of these communities, publicizing their efforts tirelessly in the pages of the *Catholic Worker*. The first of these dissident Catholic Workers was the work of Dr. Arthur Falls, one of the few African American Catholics to take a strong leadership role in the movement. Falls began corresponding with Dorothy Day after the first issue of the *Worker* was published, and by 1935 he had his own column in the paper, the "Chicago Letter." He also persuaded Day to alter the paper's masthead, so that it would feature a white and a black workingman in a gesture of solidarity. He opened his house in 1936, shortly after

a visit from Peter Maurin. From the beginning, Falls rejected the notion that one could build a new society simply by performing the works of mercy. Instead of a soup line or a hospitality house, he sponsored a credit union and a lending library of books on cooperatives and self-help for the poor. Under his leadership, the Worker became a major voice for racial equality within the Chicago Church, even as his emphasis on leading African Americans into the bourgeoisie troubled Dorothy Day and her more idealistic followers. Still, Falls's house on Taylor Street endured until 1950, in part because a dapper and eccentric house manager, John Bowers, devoted the last decade and a half of his life to the work.[7]

One of the young idealists who was turned off by Arthur Falls's version of the Catholic Worker was John Cogley. He met Dorothy Day when she visited Chicago in 1937, and by the end of the visit she had entrusted a newly rented house of hospitality to his leadership. Though that project lasted only for a summer, a year later (after a brief trial stint with the Dominicans and some time at the New York Catholic Worker) Cogley and a cluster of friends launched a large house of hospitality in an abandoned factory. They also launched what quickly became the second most significant *Catholic Worker* paper in the country. "If you have one quarter," they urged readers, spend it on a subscription to the New York paper, but "if you have two quarters take a chance on Blue Island Avenue [the address of their house], we shall do our best." The paper featured sharp attacks on Father Coughlin's anti-Semitic brand of Catholic social teaching and fervent support for the new industrial unions of the Council of Industrial Organizations. Dorothy Day was so impressed that she wrote to say that the *Chicago Catholic Worker* "far outshines our own poor effort."[8]

Despite this strong show of support, the Chicago paper helped spark the most significant crisis in the long history of the Catholic Worker, for it consistently dissented from the pacifist views that appeared with increasing prominence in the New York paper. Dorothy Day's pacifist sentiments had crystallized during

the Spanish Civil War, which pitted her old socialist comrades against her Catholic coreligionists. When World War II broke out in Europe, she began publishing fierce criticisms of the new conscription law and explaining her pacifism in stridently biblical terms. "We consider that we have inherited the Beatitudes," declared one editorial, "and that our duty is clear. The Sermon on the Mount is our Christian manifesto."[9] The Chicagoans, whose personal views on the war varied, responded with an appeal to church authority and personal conscience. "Until the Pope speaks," they editorialized, "it is the right and obligation of every Catholic to form his own conscience on the issue of the war." A like-minded community in Seattle began distributing the Chicago paper in place of the *New York Catholic Worker,* and Workers in Los Angeles went so far as to burn copies of Day's paper.[10]

Such defiant actions prompted Day to issue what Chicagoan Tom Sullivan would dub "Dorothy's encyclical." In a circular letter distributed to most existing houses, she called for all heads of houses to be pacifists and urged those who "take it upon themselves to suppress the paper" to "disassociate themselves from the Catholic Worker movement." In a more conciliatory note, she added that "there is no reason why we should not be associated together as friends and fellow workers, but there is every reason for not continuing to use The Catholic Worker name."[11]

At least in Chicago, this profession of friendship was accepted as sincere and was earnestly reciprocated. A year later, John Cogley attended the movement's annual retreat, even though he knew it would be led by the adamantly pacifist Father John Hugo. Though Day's invitation to the retreat had urged participants to "drop everything, listening to the Lord who will only speak if we keep silent," Cogley engaged both Day and Hugo in vigorous debate at the retreat. Once it was over, he and his companions decided to shut down their paper out of respect for Day's leadership of the movement. A few months later, the Pearl Harbor attack propelled the United States into the war. Cogley enlisted, while

his companions Jim O'Gara and Tom Sullivan were drafted. Yet both Cogley and Sullivan took time to visit Dorothy in New York before shipping out, and they corresponded with her regularly throughout the war. When she took a year's sabbatical from the Worker in 1943, she wrote about Sullivan and O'Gara's service in the Pacific, promising to "gather and hold in my prayers all those members of our family so dear to us."[12]

With its base of volunteers gone, Cogley's house of hospitality folded, as did similar communities in Boston, Baltimore, Milwaukee, and a few dozen other places. Most left in their wake a cluster of committed activists who would promote aspects of the Worker vision in other venues. Chicago's Ed Marciniak, for example, had a long career as a labor and human rights activist, culminating in his service as executive director of the Chicago Commission on Human Relations. Tom Sullivan returned from the war with a new appreciation of pacifism; he spent many years managing the house of hospitality in New York City and serving as an editor of the *Catholic Worker* before joining the Trappists in 1955. John Cogley himself had a long career as a radical journalist. Similarly, Nina Polcyn Moore of the Milwaukee house remained Day's devoted friend for decades afterward and steadfastly promoted the Catholic Worker vision at her Catholic bookstore in Chicago.[13]

A handful of early Worker communities managed to survive the war, usually because they were anchored by a single leader (or a committed couple) who had made a lifelong commitment to the Worker vision. This was the case for John Bowers at the Taylor Street house in Chicago, for Llewellyn Scott in Washington, D.C., for Mary Frecon at Saint Martin's House in Pittsburgh, for the Gauchat family in Cleveland, and for the Murphy family in Detroit. In most cases, these individuals were local versions of Dorothy Day, inspiring short-term or part-time volunteers with the depth of their Christian commitment. Unlike Day, however, none of these leaders was able to forge a self-sustaining community that could survive the founder's death. Apart from the New York houses of hospitality, the only first-generation

Catholic Worker community to survive the death of its founder was Saint Joseph's house of hospitality in Rochester, New York. Like virtually every enduring Catholic Worker community, the Rochester community survived in part because of Day's willingness to tolerate a significant departure from the New York City model.

The Catholic Worker in Rochester started early, when Dorothy Day spoke to the Catholic Women's Club in 1933. A cluster of seminarians who heard her formed a study group, and soon other clusters of *Catholic Worker* readers also crystallized. By 1937 they were distributing food and clothing and running a Sunday school program. In 1939 they obtained a house and launched a meal program that fed two hundred fifty people each day, but still had no live-in community. In 1941 the Worker moved to a new location, and took the significant step of incorporating as a nonprofit corporation. This violated Dorothy Day's anarchist principle of not cooperating with the militarist state, but it did not compromise the Rochester Workers' commitment to performing the works of mercy. Two of the original five board members moved into the house, albeit for only a short time. Throughout the war years, the house was managed by a single live-in director, with the assistance of board members and other volunteers. After the war, he left to get married but returned with his family in 1948 and stayed for another four years. By this time, the homeless guests had developed a strong sense of community, and for the next fifteen years they managed themselves, with some supervision from a board member. Though the board itself met only irregularly, its members never lost their sense of connection to the house, and in 1968 the son of the board director moved in as resident director. By this time, the Catholic Worker movement nationally was beginning to expand again, and the new director was especially committed to Worker peace activism. When his draft resistance took him away from the house, the son and daughter of another board member took over. The house almost closed in 1976, but by that time the movement was booming nationally, and a series of individuals

who had experienced the Worker elsewhere began arriving to revitalize the community.[14]

Just as the communities in Rochester and elsewhere pioneered new strategies in order to survive the war years, so Dorothy Day's approach to leading the movement also evolved over the course of these years. The notorious "encyclical" on pacifism was in fact one of a series of "circular letters" that Day wrote to the local houses between 1938 and 1940. In these letters, she laid out her vision for the "lay apostolate," offering tips to people starting new houses of hospitality but also insisting that one could be part of the movement simply by taking personal responsibility for performing the works of mercy in one's own circumstances. Not all Workers needed to be at houses of hospitality; indeed, even if a hostile government were to shut down all Catholic Worker houses "our cells could never be suppressed or stopped from the works of mercy program laid down by Christ." Families could, for example, set aside one bedroom as a "Christ room" for a stranger who needed it. "The thing for us all to remember," Day wrote at Christmas 1938, "is the necessity of remaining *small* and progressing along the *little way* laid down by St. Therese." A few months later she announced the opening of several new houses but then added: "We must never cease emphasizing the fact that the work must be kept small. It is better to have many small places than a few big ones."[15]

In keeping with this advice, Dorothy Day maintained an active interest even in people who were not able to "join" the Catholic Worker movement. Indeed, one of the most decisive contributors to the Catholic Worker idea spent relatively little time at the houses of hospitality but stayed connected to the movement for nearly half a century. This was the artist Ade Bethune. Educated at a New York Catholic school, she was referred to the *Catholic Worker* by the editor of *Liturgical Arts* magazine in 1934, and her work has graced both the masthead and the pages of the newspaper ever since. A master of the woodcut, Bethune followed Maurin's advice to portray the saints as workers, and as a result she created an iconography that

translated traditional Catholic devotion into a new key. But she did much more than that to sustain the movement. After establishing an art studio in Newport, Rhode Island, she welcomed a series of young Catholic Worker women as "apprentices," often conspiring with their mothers to delay early marriages. (This was the case for Day's daughter Tamar.) She also took a long-term interest in promoting the works of mercy in her own community, and Day in turn took an interest in this work. As late as 1974, Day wrote proudly of Bethune's involvement in the Church Community Corporation, whose mission was to provide "decent housing and home ownership for families of low and moderate income in Newport." This program had allowed thirty families to become homeowners, but Day also took pleasure in the fact that most of its staff were volunteers, and that a group of high school students "had the satisfaction of building one entire house." The transformative potential of the works of mercy was clearly apparent.[16]

By 1940 Day seems to have realized that offering standardized advice to all the communities was unlikely to generate this sort of commitment; in any event, the circular letters stopped. But Day began promoting what she considered a better strategy for holding the movement together: an experience that became known among Catholic Workers simply as "The Retreat." This was a weeklong silent retreat, developed by the Canadian Jesuit Father Onesimus Lacouture, that combined the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises* with a strong emphasis on the study of Scripture. (Participants were asked to bring only a Bible and a writing pad.) The retreat offered a lofty vision of personal holiness, urging every Christian to aspire to the "counsels of perfection" that mainstream Catholicism enjoined only on members of religious orders. Participants were urged to take the Sermon on the Mount literally—to turn the other cheek and go the second mile—and to give up even minor indulgences if these stood in the way of loving Christ and the poor. In the retreat, Day explained, "We had to aim at perfection; we had to be guided by the folly of the Cross."[17]

Day first learned of Lacouture's retreat from Catholic publisher Maisie Ward, though she was more captivated when she heard of it again from Father Pacifique Roy, who began visiting the New York Catholic Worker in 1939. A Canadian Josephite stationed in Baltimore, Roy was instrumental in popularizing the Lacouture retreat in the United States, and his testimony may have inspired Day to replace the movement's biennial "colloquium" with an annual retreat. Reflecting that "we are all agreed that three days of praying together will solve more problems than three days of talk," she urged Workers to borrow whatever money they needed to get to the Easton farm in August of 1939. "It will be showing a lack of faith," she wrote in one circular letter, "to doubt it and to urge as an excuse that the money is needed for bread."[18] The result, as reported in the pages of the *Catholic Worker,* confirmed the expectation: the colloquiums had been marked by "hours of discussion" in which "problems did not seem to get settled," yet when the retreat participants broke their silence they "found such unity amongst us all, that there seemed no reason for discussion."[19] Accordingly, Stanley Vishnewski echoed Day's admonition in 1940: "With the chaotic condition of the world we cannot speak too strongly of the imperative need for making a Retreat at this time. We seek all heads of Houses of Hospitality to drop whatever work they may be doing and come to the Retreat."[20]

The first retreat was led by Father Joachim Benson and the second by Father Paul Hanly Furfey, and neither followed the Lacouture format. By 1941, though, Day and "members of our Catholic Worker family" from Milwaukee, Toledo, South Bend, Cleveland, Detroit, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, and New York had experienced the full retreat under the tutelage of Father John Hugo, whom Father Roy had recommended as the preeminent English speaking retreat master. Father Hugo was a priest of the diocese of Pittsburgh, and during the summer months he regularly conducted retreats in the empty classrooms of a Catholic orphanage. Day persuaded him to travel to the Easton farm in August 1941 to conduct a special retreat for the Catholic Worker movement as

a whole. Day's insistence reached new heights as she wrote: "No material work is being accomplished by the Catholic Worker, in any part of the country, that is as important as this retreat. . . . If you are part of The Catholic Worker movement, it is your obligation." (At the same time, she asked that "only those connected with the CW movement come to the retreat" because of limited space.)[21] This retreat was repeated annually at Easton for most of the remainder of the decade, until the farm closed amidst controversy. Day personally continued to make an annual retreat for the rest of her life. Though Father Hugo was for a time restricted in his pastoral activities because of accusations of Jansenism, he retained a close tie to the Catholic Worker, and as late as 1985 a cluster of young Workers from New York City traveled to Pittsburgh for a retreat where "Father Hugo warmly welcomed the renewed presence of young Catholic Workers."[22]

Different participants reached very different judgments about the significance of the retreat. For Dorothy Gauchat of the Cleveland community, it provided an opportunity to "reach the goal of really living the way Christ wanted us to live. Living the Sermon on the Mount."[23] Yet Julian Pleasants of South Bend, who also attended the 1941 retreat, worried that Father Hugo's Jansenist emphasis on self-sacrifice did not fit with Day's deepest insights: "Father Hugo said that the best thing to do with good things was to give them up. And I just didn't think that was Dorothy's attitude at all. She didn't want to give them up, she wanted to give them *away*."[24] Even Stanley Vishnewski, for decades the most loyal member of the New York community, sensed a troubling dualism in the retreat. "As far as I could understand from making the retreat," he wrote in his memoir, "it advocated a complete renunciation of everything that was in the natural order. . . . For the love of this world is at enmity with God and he who loves the world is an enemy of God."[25]

These diverse reactions suggest that the retreat's influence on the movement may have been more mixed than historian William Miller suggested when he wrote (in 1973) that the 1941 retreat was "the high tide of the Worker movement. It was then that

Worker houses were most numerous and Worker belief in a Church-centered social reformation strongest. One hundred and twenty-five persons were there, a figure that probably still stands as the largest get-together of Workers in the history of the movement."[26] It certainly seems possible that the retreat saved the Catholic Worker movement from complete collapse by coalescing a core group of people through an intense shared experience. But undoubtedly it also accelerated the departure of those individuals who objected either to Hugo's asceticism or to his pacifism.

Diverse judgments about the retreat are still alive and well in the Catholic Worker movement. Lawrence Holben, a longtime associate of the Los Angeles Catholic Worker who published a book-length study of Catholic Worker theology in 1997, contended that the retreat had created "Gnostic divisions . . . between those who had made the retreat and those who had not" and had even left some of its most enthusiastic proponents "psychologically and spiritually wounded." Ultimately, Holben concluded, the retreat was not central to the movement as a whole because it "represented a deviation from Maurin's message, which celebrated the good things of the natural creation and our intended place in it." In a still more recent study, though, Mark and Louise Zwick of the Houston Catholic Worker insist that those who neglect the retreat miss the "spiritual base" for all of Dorothy Day's work.[27]

Whatever the retreat's effect on the movement as a whole, it had a profound impact on Dorothy Day's self-understanding, both as a Catholic and as a movement leader. "I saw things as a whole for the first time with a delight, a joy, an excitement which is hard to describe," she wrote during one retreat. "This is what I expected when I became a Catholic."[28] The retreat gave her the time to read the Bible and the lives of the saints, and to move toward a more integrated vocation as a writer and contemplative as well as a movement leader. As Mel Piehl has perceptively suggested, the retreat taught Day to emulate not only Teresa of Avila, the energetic and intellectual reformer of her order, but also Thérèse of Lisieux, the quietly contemplative advocate of the "Little Way" of prayer and small actions.[29] She learned, finally,

that any outward work she might perform depended on her willingness to water her own garden. "It is not only for others that I must have these retreats," Day wrote in her autobiography. "It is because I too am hungry and thirsty for the bread of the strong. I too must nourish myself to do the work I have undertaken; I too must drink at these good springs so that I may not be an empty cistern and unable to help others."[30]

All of this happened because Day felt free to take an interest in Fathers Pacifique Roy and John Hugo, just as she had taken an interest in Peter Maurin almost a decade earlier. Neither man was a prospective recruit for the Worker movement: as priests, their primary work would always lie elsewhere. When she first met them, they were already somewhat controversial and would soon become more so; for a time, both Hugo and Father Lacouture himself were forbidden by their superiors from giving retreats. Day's account of her first meeting with Father Roy gives a lively sense both of the man's eccentricity and of her own capacity for reverence:

> We were sitting in the dining room having our morning coffee when Father Roy started to talk to us about the love of God and what it should mean in our lives. He began with the Sermon on the Mount, holding us spellbound, so glowing was his talk, so heartfelt. People came and went, we were called to the telephone again and again, but still Father Roy went on talking to all who would listen. The men came in from the soup kettles in the kitchen which were being prepared for the soup line and stayed to listen, tables were set around us and the people came in and were fed and went out again, and still Father talked, and so the day went. It was like the story in the Gospels, when the two apostles were talking on the way to Emmaus, grieving and fearful and lamenting over the death of their Leader; suddenly a fellow traveler came along and began to explain the Scriptures, going as far as the town with them and even going to an inn to break bread with them. They knew Him then in the breaking of bread. They had said to each other, 'Was not our heart burning within us, whilst he spoke in that way?'"[31]

Day's reaction to John Hugo was similar, and soon his ideas appeared in the pages of the *Catholic Worker* with as much regularity as those of Peter Maurin. In a series of front page articles that occupied as much as a third of some issues, Hugo provided a comprehensive justification for the Worker's understanding of the lay apostolate. Lamenting what he described as a "failure of Christian effort," Hugo drew a distinction (borrowed from Father Paul Hanly Furfey) between "two rules," a "minimum" and a "maximum" standard of Christianity. The minimum rule was simply to avoid mortal sin and thus achieve salvation. Though this was the advice that many Catholic preachers of the time offered to laypeople, Hugo decried it as a "misleading" and "inadequate statement of the truth" that "reduces Christian practice to the level of paganism." The alternative, which he provocatively called "totalitarian Christianity," took its starting point from the Beatitudes and Jesus's instruction to "Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." "This is totalitarian Christianity," Hugo thundered, "the pursuit of holiness, divine holiness. All men are called to it, and the whole plan of God for men can be summarized by saying that God wills all men to have it."[32] Dorothy Day responded to this vision by repeatedly insisting that the traditional "counsels of perfection" applied to laypeople as well as to those in religious orders, and by reprinting a series of magisterial statements to this effect.[33] Hugo also penned a series of articles that articulated the most comprehensive case for Catholic pacifism that the *Worker*—or perhaps any American Catholic publication—had yet published.[34] These articles provided the theological basis for what had been a somewhat intuitive sense of pacifism on the part of Dorothy Day and ensured that nonviolent action would remain central to the work of the Worker for the rest of its history.

Just as Dorothy Day took an interest in John Hugo, so Hugo took an interest in her. For years he served as her spiritual director and confessor but also—as he said in his homily at a memorial Mass for Day—as a disciple who "went to her for counsel."[35] Perhaps the most important piece of counsel that Hugo offered to Day was that she take an entire year of retreat in order to renew

her spirituality. Thus, in September 1943—as World War II raged in Europe and the Pacific, and Worker houses continued to close at an alarming rate—Day risked the complete collapse of her movement in order to devote a year to prayer and reflection. With her daughter Tamar, then a precocious teenager, she traveled first to the Grail (a Catholic women's movement located in Ohio) and then to an abandoned orphanage on Long Island, near an agricultural school that Tamar wished to attend.

Though the sabbatical wound up lasting only six months, a number of important things happened during that period. First, Day was able to confirm through direct experience something that she had long claimed—that no one individual was indispensable to the Catholic Worker movement, nor to the larger practice of the works of mercy. Second, she had time to heal some of the wounds in the movement by corresponding with the many Catholic Worker men who were serving in the military, as well as with the pacifists who had been sent to camps for conscientious objectors.[36] Third, because she had to rely on the income she received as a writer, she was able to renew her sense of her core vocation. And finally, she was able to devote more attention to another neglected vocation, that of mother. Tamar had fallen deeply in love with David Hennessy, one of the young volunteers at Maryfarm in Easton, and it was all Dorothy could do to delay the marriage until April 1944, just after Tamar's seventeenth birthday. The wedding provided the occasion for Day's return to the Catholic Worker, though in the quiet years that followed she devoted an increasing amount of attention to her grandchildren, to journal writing, and to caring for Peter Maurin, whose physical and mental health began to decline markedly at the time of the wedding.

[1] Day, *The Long Loneliness* (New York: Harper, 1952), 166.
[2] Ibid., 171.

[3] The numbers cited in this and subsequent chapters are drawn from a master list I compiled by consulting several sources: the files on specific communities held at the Dorothy Day/Catholic Worker Collection at Marquette University (DD/CWC); the lists of communities published in the New York *Catholic Worker* from time to time; incidental references to communities in the pages of the New York *Catholic Worker;* my personal knowledge of a few communities; and the list of currently active communities maintained at www.catholicworker.org (accessed in both 2004 and 2006). These numbers should be considered approximate for a variety of reasons. First, although many ephemeral communities appear on at least one list, there were undoubtedly others that went unnoticed by the archive, the New York paper, and the website. (I have personally identified only one community that has not appeared in any of those places.) Second, these sources don't provide clear information about exactly when (or if) a community has shut down, and the website in particular includes listings for a few communities that are definitely defunct. I do not, therefore, describe a community as surviving unless I have information beyond the mere website listing. Third, the lists include a number of entries that probably should not be classified as "communities," such as the individuals listed as Catholic Worker "cells" in the 1952 list and a handful of contemporary listings that simply advertise "rest and recreation" sites for tired Workers. Fourth, many "communities" sponsor multiple "houses," and it is not always possible to distinguish these from truly independent houses within a single city. In such circumstances, I have guessed to the best of my ability, generally erring on the side of counting distinct houses separately. Altogether, I have identified 393 local units of the Catholic Worker movement, 189 of which appear on the most current website. Though I am not at all confident that all of those 189 are still operating, I have identified at least 100 current communities that have survived more than a decade.

[4] Janice Brandon-Falcone, "Experiments in Truth: An Oral History of the St. Louis Catholic Worker, 1935–1942," in Patrick G. Coy, ed., *Revolution of the Heart: Essays on the Catholic Worker* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1988), 313–36.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Francis Sicius, "The Chicago Catholic Worker," in ibid., 337–46.

[8] Ibid., 344–49.

[9] "Our Stand—An Editorial," *Catholic Worker* 7, no. 9 (June 1940): 1.

[10] Day mentioned the burning of the papers in an interview with James Finn, *Protest: Pacifism and Politics: Some Passionate Views on War and Nonviolence* (New York: Random House, 1967), 375, and two Los Angeles

Workers, John Hollow, Sr., and E. Virginia Newell, both apologized for the incident in letters to Dorothy Day, 6 September 1940 and 22 October 1940, DD/CWC, series W-4, box 1.

[11] Dorothy Day to "Fellow Worker," 10 August 1940, DD/CWC, series W-1, box 1; and Catholic Worker Editors to "Fellow Workers in Christ," 12 December 1941, DD/CWC, series W-1, box 1.

[12] Sicius, "The Chicago Catholic Worker," 349–51.

[13] Brigid O'Shea Merriman, O.S.F., *Searching for Christ: The Spirituality of Dorothy Day* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 206–11.

[14] Harry Murray, *Do Not Neglect Hospitality: The Catholic Worker and the Homeless* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 127–33.

[15] Dorothy Day to "Fellow Workers in Christ," Christmas Season 1938, DD/CWC, series W-1, box 1; and Dorothy Day to "Fellow Workers in Christ," 21 February 1939, DD/CWC, series W-1, box 1.

[16] William Miller, *A Harsh and Dreadful Love: Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement* (New York: Liveright, 1973), 77; and Dorothy Day, "On Pilgrimage," *Catholic Worker* 40, no. 2 (February 1974): 8. For more on Bethune, see Judith Stoughton, *Proud Donkey of Schaerbeek: Ade Bethune, Catholic Worker Artist* (Saint Cloud, MN: North Star Press, 1988).

[17] Day, *Long Loneliness,* 246–47.

[18] Dorothy Day to "Fellow Workers," 9 July 1939, DD/CWC, series W-1, box 1.

[19] "C. W. Retreat," *Catholic Worker* 7, no. 1 (September 1939): 4.

[20] S. V., "Retreat," *Catholic Worker* 7, no. 10 (July-August 1940): 2.

[21] Dorothy Day to "Fellow Workers in Christ," 22 July 1941, DD/CWC, series W-1, box 1.

[22] Meg Hyre, "St. Joseph House," *Catholic Worker* 52, no. 5A (August 1985): 2.

[23] Dorothy Gauchat, in Rosalie Riegle Troester, *Voices from the Catholic Worker* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 19.

[24] Cited in ibid., 20.

[25] Stanley Vishnewski, *Wings of the Dawn* (New York: Catholic Worker, 1984), 213–14.

[26] Miller, *Harsh and Dreadful Love,* 188.

[27] Lawrence Holben, *All the Way to Heaven: A Theological Reflection on Dorothy Day, Peter Maurin and the Catholic Worker* (Marion, SD: Rose Hill Books, 1997), 143; and Mark and Louise Zwick, *The Catholic Worker Movement: Intellectual and Spiritual Origins* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2005), 247. For other reflections on the significance of the retreat, see Merriman, *Searching for Christ,* 131–69; James T. Fisher, *The Catholic Counterculture in*

America, 1933-1962 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 54–60; William D. Miller, *All Is Grace: The Spirituality of Dorothy Day* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1987), 39–150; and William D. Miller, *Dorothy Day: A Biography* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 335–41.

[28] Cited in Jim Forest, *Love Is the Measure: A Biography of Dorothy Day* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1986), 114.

[29] Mel Piehl, *Breaking Bread: The Catholic Worker and the Origin of Catholic Radicalism in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 89.

[30] Day, *Long Loneliness,* 263.

[31] Ibid., 246.

[32] Hugo, "In the Vineyard," *Catholic Worker* 8, no. 10 (September 1941): 1, 5, 8; "In the Vineyard VIII: The Two Rules," *Catholic Worker* 9, no. 7 (May 1942): 1–2; and Paul Hanly Furfey, "Maximum—Minimum," *Catholic Worker* 3 (May 1935): 5.

[33] Day, "Counsel and Precepts," *Catholic Worker* 8, no. 9 (July–August 1941): 2; Day, "Day after Day," *Catholic Worker* 10, no. 1 (December 1942): 6; Archbishop of Moncton, "Holiness for All," *Catholic Worker* 13, no. 1 (February 1946): 4; and Stephen Thomas Krupa, "Dorothy Day and the Spirituality of Nonviolence," Ph.D. thesis, Graduate Theological Union, 1997, 354.

[34] John Hugo, "Catholics Can Be Conscientious Objectors," *Catholic Worker* 10, no. 6 (May 1943): 6–8, and 10, no. 7 (June 1943): 6–9; "The Gospel of Peace: The Need for Supernatural Ethics," *Catholic Worker* 10, no. 9 (September 1943); and "The Immorality of Conscription," *Catholic Worker* 11, no. 9 (November 1944): 3–10.

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[36] Dorothy Day, "And for Our Absent Brethren," *Catholic Worker* 10, no. 11 (December 1943): 2–3.