

Tiny Drops: Henri de Lubac, S.J., Dorothy Day, & Anti-Triumphalism as Radical Praxis

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The people have asked, so what are the demands? What are the demands all of these people are making? Either they say there are no demands and that leaves your critics confused, or they say that the demands for social equality and economic justice are impossible demands. And the possible demands, they say, are just not practical. If hope is an impossible demand, then we demand the impossible...

Judith Butler¹

WE REPEAT—

The only immediate remedy is the practice of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. When asked what is the program of THE CATHOLIC WORKER by those who are interested in political action, legislation, lobbying, class war, we reply—It is the program set forth by Christ in the Gospels. The Catholic Manifesto is The Sermon on the Mount. And when we bring THE CATHOLIC WORKER into the streets and public squares, and when we picket the Mexican consulate, it is to practice the spiritual works of mercy—to instruct the ignorant and to comfort the afflicted.

Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. There is no use looking for a revival in business, a return of prosperity, until the hearts and minds of men be changed. If we wish for a program, let us look into our own hearts. The beginning is there.

Dorothy Day²

1 Transcript and video are available at: http://www.salon.com/2011/10/24/judith_butler_at_occupy_wall_street/.

2 Dorothy Day, "Mid-Winter," in *The Catholic Worker* (January 1935): 4, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/Reprint2.cfm?TextID=925>.

On October 23, 2011, Judith Butler joined the ranks of public intellectuals to come out in support of Occupy Wall Street – an ensemble that has included Slavoj Žižek and Cornel West, not to mention the next-gen radical anthropologist David Graeber, who was an early participant in the New York occupation.³ Butler’s articulation of principles during a General Assembly at Washington Square Park spoke to an internal tension within activist rhetoric that predates the recent groundswell of popular anti-capitalism. Whether ostensibly critical or sympathetic, the interpretive framework for engaging radical organizing appears bifurcated and based on a false dichotomy of activist stereotypes that have even become hot commodities in the marketing world now that protest is fashionable again – as comically exemplified by Axe Body Spray’s ludicrous marketing campaign to peddle its new scent, “Anarchy.” Whether dismissively depicting the protestors as quasi-eschatological millennial idealists (even the atheists) or bewildered, angst-ridden Holden Caulfield impostors who compulsively rally against *something* without contributing *anything* constructively to society, both renderings infantilize their subjects, because they are both escapist, and ignore the murky realities of day-to-day necessity and the work involved in building and maintaining a homeostatic social order.

These stereotypes – which mask any real diversity of thought – further marginalize radicalism, leaving the impression that temperate progressivism and nominal incremental change are the only viable options on the market for mature, socially conscious liberals. Both now-discredited tendencies are based on short-term sentimentality, and need to be endured, but not seriously addressed, because they do not provide enduring solutions. Having thus dispatched radical approaches to structural inequality, we are left with the only really “responsible” alternative – moderate reform. Incremental change is more tactful and diplomatic, therefore superior; less romantic, but more practical. In fact, it is the *only* practical option, and therefore the only truly moral option, because it is results-oriented, and relies less on enthusiastic rhetoric and quixotic militant hyperbole. It is less sexy, but more substantial. It doesn’t inspire Axe Body Spray, but it gets the job done. It also largely maintains and reinforces the very structures that precipitate inequality, while holding out hope that, this time around, things will just work out better. It maintains hierarchy, crossing its fingers for a more benevolent, benign

3 Drake Bennett, “David Graeber, the Anti-Leader of Occupy Wall Street,” *Bloomberg Businessweek* (26 October 2011): <http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/david-graeber-the-antileader-of-occupy-wall-street-10262011.html>. Until the recent success of OWS and his timely publication of his gargantuan study of the history of financial transactions – *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2011) – Graeber was perhaps best-known for being denied tenure at Yale, and has subsequently been absorbed into the rather unfortunate “Chris Hedges vs. the Black Bloc” affair (an insular, largely online debate which, frankly, appears to be overwhelmingly led by highly-educated white male progressives). Cf. Chris Hedges, “The Cancer in Occupy,” *truthdig: drilling beneath the headlines* (6 February 2012), http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/the_cancer_of_occupy_20120206/; David Graeber, “Concerning the Violent Peace-Police: An Open Letter to Chris Hedges” in *n+1* (9 February 2012): <http://www.nplusonemag.com/concerning-the-violent-peace-police>.

incarnation which requires minimal sacrifice from those in power, and in turn promises minimal returns for at-risk communities

Along with actually radicalizing, or at least galvanizing, a previously amorphous American progressive base, the Occupy movement – as part of the widespread international trend of widely-reported protests over the past two or three years – seems to have magically spawned a cottage industry of censors who point out the movement’s lack of focus, cohesive vision of the world, concrete goals, and inability to provide a comprehensive game plan for an alternate political framework.⁴ Whether it be the openly spiteful get-a-job-hippie antagonism of people like one-time-GOP-nominee-hopeful Herman Cain or the patronizing, unsolicited advice of remote armchair activist “fellow travelers” – David Brooks’ saccharine *New York Times* op-ed column entitled “How to Fight the Man” comes to mind – it seems like, almost overnight, we have witnessed a proliferation of spontaneously self-credentialed movement strategists.⁵ In October, the Vatican even tossed its hat in the ring, publishing a critique of the “economic and financial crisis gripping the world today.”⁶

One alternative to utopianism that avoids post-millennial apocalyptic “pessimism,” apathy, or the disenchanting pragmatism of compromise and dog-eat-dog moral casuistry may be found in the tradition of Christian personalism; one that does not capitulate to alpha-posturing and self-preservation, or a permissive ethical minimalism that seeks out the bare minimum required to avoid sin, while enjoying a kind of socio-economic *status quo* war-profiteering. Catholic Worker personalism – particularly embodied in Dorothy Day (1897-1980) – systematically resisted a product-oriented cost-benefit analysis, or the polar opposite trappings of utopianism and nihilism. Interpreting protest work as itself a spiritual exercise, the Catholic Worker proposed incorporating socio-political agitation into the arsenal of Christian ethical behavior codified as the Works of Mercy. Almost simultaneously, although he could only be appropriated as an “anonymous personalist” – or possibly a proto-personalist, given his symbiotic friendship with Emmanuel Mounier – the French Jesuit Henri de Lubac (1896-1991) laid a historico-theological foundation for Day’s own alternative romanticism by proposing a form of Catholic realism that, while being typically ecclesial,

4 Which is not to say that there are not very legitimate criticisms that have been – and can still be – made. From the Left, issues of race, class, gender dynamics, and indigenous rights have enriched the dialogue and shed some very good, critical light on deficiencies within the movement.

5 David Brooks, “How to Fight the Man” *The New York Times* (2/3/2012): A25; http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/03/opinion/brooks-how-to-fight-the-man.html?_r=2&src=tp&smid=fb-share.

6 Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, “Towards Reforming the International Financial and Monetary Systems in the Context of Global Public Authority (24 October 2011): http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20111024_nota_en.html. It should be noted that Vatican officials emphatically maintained that the document was only coincidentally related to international protests, and certainly has a long tradition in the modern era of speaking out on global economics and social justice. Cf. E.J. Dionne, Jr., “The Vatican Meets the Wall Street Occupiers,” *The Washington Post* (26 October 2011): http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-vatican-meets-the-wall-street-occupiers/2011/10/26/gIQAG08EKM_story.html.

nevertheless tempered the eschatological supercessionism in political theology.⁷ This more sober romanticism opened a space for Dorothy Day's own incarnational spirituality – an anarchist take on the “Little Way” of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, rooted in a lifelong commitment to absolute pacifism, communitarian self-care, staunch anti-triumphalism, and compassionate resistance to the coercive authority of “Holy Mother the State” – that “by little and by little we are saved.”⁸

In Catholic Worker personalism, a pragmatic focus on tangible objectives and end-game strategy ran up against a more emotive, *a*teleological, conscience-based impulse. While appealing to something as seemingly amorphous as “hope” was apparently sufficient for a presidential campaign, critics of radical activism – both benevolent and otherwise – often highlight a movement's lack of institutional structure, lack of ideology, and lack of civil diplomacy as indicative of emotional instability and psychological immaturity – mirroring the conventional “liberal” stipulation that impacted communities restrict self-advocacy to traditionally “respectable” means like voting, petitioning, possibly calling a representative, or maybe even starting a 501c3. While possibly less efficient, a praxis-based philosophy – while lacking a coherent ideology or comprehensive alternate system of government – seems a more organic method of engaging social inequality, more conducive to creative proactivity. Such work certainly ought not preclude collectives from participating in direct action, which in itself is not based on the substitution of one imposing superstructure for another, nor on an apocalyptic vision of a new world order, but rather the unmediated, engaged response to systematic and individual injustice.

Henri de Lubac is possibly best known to history as one of the ringleaders of the “*nouvelle théologie*” – the pejorative and unintentionally ironic nickname for a diverse and controversial school of Catholic thought in mid-twentieth century Europe that reacted against what it perceived to be the rigid, and in the end, sterile excesses of Neo-Scholasticism, and trailblazed a *ressourcement* approach to theology that was at least temporarily vindicated in the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).⁹ Its alleged membership reads like a who's who of twentieth-century theological pioneers, many of whom directly and indirectly contributed to the development of liberation theology – Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Karl Rahner, Yves Congar, and Hans Küng to name a few – along with some who are now less closely affiliated

7 Dennis M. Doyle, “Henri de Lubac and the Roots of Communion Ecclesiology,” *Theological Studies* 60:2 (June 1999): 209-227. Cf. Thomas R. Rourke and Rosita A. Chazarreta Rourke, *A Theory of Personalism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 27.

8 Dorothy Day, “Inventory – January 1951,” *The Catholic Worker* (January 1951): 1-2; <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/Reprint2.cfm?TextID=195>. Henri de Lubac, S.J., *At the Service of the Church: Henri de Lubac Reflects on the Circumstances that Occasioned His Writings*, translated by Anne Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 27. “*Catholicisme* [pub. 1938] was assuredly responding to the “mood of the times.” Emmanuel Mounier liked to use it as a doctrinal basis for his “personalist and communitarian revolution” (many have since completely forgotten the first of the two adjectives!).”

9 John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 63-4.

with progressive thought. The 1950 papal encyclical of Pius XII, *Humani generis*, was widely considered to have been a direct condemnation of the “New Theology,” couched in theological, as opposed to personal, denunciations. However, by this time, de Lubac had already found himself suppressed within his own order, having lost his authorization to teach or publish. Adding insult to injury, following the encyclical, his books were meticulously removed from the shelves of Jesuit libraries and distribution sales were recalled from bookstores.¹⁰ Later in life he would liken the experience to being struck by lightning, or being trapped in the eye of a cyclone.¹¹ Nevertheless the encyclical was anything but a deathblow, and Vatican II witnessed his theological rehabilitation, and then some.¹² De Lubac himself was involved in crafting several of the Council's major documents, first as consultant and *peritus*, and later as an official participant. After declining a “red hat” once in 1969, de Lubac was elevated to the College of Cardinals in 1983, under the watch of John Paul II.

Henri de Lubac's primary theological credential lies in being credited for dismantling the Neo-Scholastic “pure nature” hypothesis, which sought to protect the sovereignty of God by emphasizing the absolute gratuity of grace in such a manner that it was possible to posit a purely “natural” ends proper to humanity, based on a particular reading of Thomas Aquinas – who was officially installed as the baseline measure of Catholic orthodoxy in Leo XIII's 1879 encyclical, *Aeterni patris*. However, at the age of eighty, de Lubac closed out his distinguished and tumultuous career with what amounted to a massive, encyclopedic, almost-one-thousand-paged indictment of utopian idealism. The two-volume set (which had originally been envisioned as *four*) titled *La postérité spirituelle de Joachime de Flore*, isolates a genetic impulse in modern Christian and secular thought that traces back to the apocalyptic twelfth-century Calabrian abbot.¹³ De Lubac's epic treatment of Joachim's spiritual progeny conflates the more classically “Joachite” thirteenth-century *Fratricelli* and Bonaventure with the less obvious Karl Marx, Dostoevsky, and Nikolai Berdyaev. Although representing an imposing variety of social, religious, and political orientations, they are more or less unified in the expectation of an imminent, “spiritual” plane of existence that will replace our present, provisional reality:

This age of the Spirit could be envisaged in a chiliastic sense as the final epoch of history in which a radically altered Church, reformed in holiness and no longer needing clerics or institutions, would usher in

10 Henri de Lubac, S.J., *Mémoire sur l'occasion de mes écrits* (Namur, Belgium: Culture et vérité, 1989), 75. Cf. Rudolf Voderholzer, *Meet Henri de Lubac* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 72.

11 De Lubac, *Mémoire sur l'occasion de mes écrits*, 68.

12 Joseph A. Komonchak, “Theology and Culture at Mid-Century: The Example of Henri de Lubac” *Theological Studies* 51 (1990): 580.

13 Henri de Lubac, S.J., *La Postérité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore* (Paris: Éditions Lethielleux, 1981). This was a follow up to his treatment of the controversial monk in what must be a candidate for the “*longest chapter ever*” award – his 122 pages in the *three*-volume work *Medieval Exegesis*.

the Kingdom of God on earth... Or, transposed into an entirely secular vision, it would reappear in the nineteenth- and twentieth- century dreams of a future, inner-worldly, social utopia. In both cases Jesus Christ and his historical Church are left behind. They no longer occupy the ultimate position in history, as they did in the early Christian and medieval social consciousness; they represent instead a transitory stage leading to the final age of the Spirit which is still to come.¹⁴

Under the various forms it has assumed, I consider Joachimism to be a still-present, and even pressing, danger. I recognize it in the process of secularization, which, betraying the Gospel, transforms the search for the kingdom of God into social utopias. I see it at work in what is justly called the “self-destruction of the Church.” I believe that it can only increase suffering and bring about the degradation of our humanity.¹⁵

Von Balthasar succinctly paraphrases de Lubac’s objection:

In the eyes of universal history, must the Church be understood as the next-to-last reality, the work of the second Person of the Trinity, just as creation and the Old Testament were the works of the first Person—a work that will be overtaken by an age of the Spirit, long-awaited, hoped for, and still to come? Or is she, as the one, holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, invested with the Spirit of the Father and the Son, the final and definitive reality, filled with internal potentialities that will unfurl across the ages, embracing them until the end?¹⁶

Joachim’s Trinitarian stages of history are ontologically supersessionist, which, for de Lubac, trivializes the preeminent role of the Church, Christ’s eschatological significance, and reduces God to a projection of anthropocentric ego – which was, in fact, the bedrock of Feuerbach’s atheism. Henri de Lubac’s critique of “Joachimism” – which extended to Jürgen Moltmann’s “theology of hope” – was preemptively (and more succinctly) paraphrased in the Social Gospel pioneer Walter Rauschenbusch’s maxim that “the Kingdom is always but coming.”¹⁷

14 Christopher J. Walsh, *Henri de Lubac and the Ecclesiology of the Postconciliar Church: An Analysis of His Later Writings (1965-1991)* (Ph.D. dissertation, The Catholic University of America, 1993), 267.

15 Henri de Lubac, S.J., *At the Service of the Church: Henri de Lubac Reflects on the Circumstances that Occasioned His Writings*, translated by Anne Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Communion Books, 1993), 156-57.

16 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac*, translated by Susan Clements (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 124-5.

17 Christopher Hodge Evans, *The Kingdom is Always but Coming: A Life of Walter Rauschenbusch* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 322. Henri de Lubac, S.J., *La postérité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore, II. de Saint-Simon à nos jours* (Paris: Éditions Lethielleux, 1981), 442.

The “diverse forms” of Joachimism that de Lubac witnessed in contemporary society extend deeply into the secular world, into ideologies that are in no way self-consciously connected to Christianity, and many which are, in fact, explicitly self-identified as atheist. While de Lubac was certainly not opposed to social justice, he did himself participate in the resistance against Nazism in Germany and Vichy France, and has been credited for emphasizing the communal dimension of the Mystical Body. He viewed these forms of “neojoachimism,” along with more traditional permutations, as inherently “suicidal” by undermining the role of the Church, which he viewed as the only proper custodian of the human spirit.¹⁸

Although she did occasionally affiliate herself and her spiritual mentors with de Lubac – particularly when it came to mistreatment by the Magisterium and Jesuit authorities – Dorothy Day had little formal overlap with him.¹⁹ A convert, journalist, and icon of modern Catholic activism, Dorothy Day co-founded *The Catholic Worker* zine in 1933 and oversaw a network of communities throughout the United States dedicated to providing hospitality for the poor, radical pacifism, and a critique of free-market capitalism, all inspired by a committed life of prayer. As a lived protest against Christian mediocrity, she testified that “[f]or too long, too little has been expected of us.”²⁰ Day’s emphasis on the Catholic Worker’s apostolate as a non-utilitarian form of Christian witness was founded on her sense of “precarity” – an existential iteration of voluntary poverty. Although the Worker involved itself in the mundane Works of Mercy, feeding and clothing the poor, “admonishing sinners” (which she interpreted as a call to protest social injustice), and comforting the afflicted, Day refused to assess its mission in terms of measurable success. As Day confided to the Worker-turned-Harvard-psychologist Robert Coles:

You people are impractical, they tell us, nice idealists, but not headed anywhere big and important. They are right. *We are* impractical, as one of us put it, as impractical as Calvary. There is no point in trying to make us into something we are not. We are *not* another Community Fund group, anxious to help people with some bread and butter and a cup of coffee or tea. We feed the hungry, yes; we try to shelter the homeless and give them clothes, if we have some, but there is a strong faith at work; we pray. If an outsider who comes to visit doesn’t pay attention to our praying and what that means, then he’ll miss the whole point of things.²¹

18 José Ignacio González Faus, “Anthropology: The Person and the Community” in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, ed. Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J. and Jon Sobrino, S.J. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 520.

19 Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 258-9.

20 Dorothy Day, *Loaves and Fishes* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 87.

21 Dorothy Day, quoted in Robert Coles, *Dorothy Day: A Radical Devotion* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1987) 97.

Day's absolute refusal to instrumentalize (in her mind dehumanize) others in order to achieve practical ends, as well as her absolute pacifist stance, drew sharp criticism – even within the Worker community – and synced nicely with Day's own vision of engaged supernaturalism and what she glibly called “poverty of reputation.”²²

A Brooklyn native by birth, Dorothy Day was raised in San Francisco and Chicago, in a household largely devoid of religion, although the Day children were baptized Episcopalians. In her adolescence, Dorothy Day exhibited an early empathetic receptivity, which was triggered by the devastating San Francisco earthquake of 1906 and her encounter with factory labor conditions – first in the pages of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, and later walking the streets of Chicago's West Side industrial wasteland.²³ In both of these instances, she experienced a spontaneous and enduring sense of self-identification with the suffering of others. This was bolstered in the former by a recognition of humanity's innate cooperative impulse, lying beneath the apparently harsh exterior of rugged individualism. And although the Day household *did* briefly plunge into dire financial straits immediately on arrival before her father secured steady work, Dorothy's experience of urban poverty in Chicago was somewhat voyeuristic. They nevertheless gave slight glimmers of her deep incarnational aesthetics, which were marked by the ability to perceive beauty in the depths of apparent destitution.²⁴ Although, at the time, she lacked the conceptual tools to articulate her experience of divinity amidst – even fused with – the bleak suffering of humanity's underclass, Day marked this period as the very beginnings of her radical formation.

After dropping out of the University of Illinois—Urbana at the conclusion of her sophomore year in 1916, Day moved east back to New York City, where she would – with minor excursions afield – spend the remaining eighty-four years of her life. Having gotten involved in labor organizing in Chicago, she developed her craft as a journalist, writing for local Socialist publications and carousing with a mix of radicals and artists, including the perpetually-lubricated poet Eugene O'Neil.²⁵ Eventually the haze of excitement wore off, and Day broke somewhat – although never completely – from the bohemian scene that

22 Day, *Loaves and Fishes*, 71-2.

23 Jim Forest, *All Is Grace: A Biography of Dorothy Day* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 18.

24 Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 36. “I walked for miles, pushing my brother in his carriage, often with my sister at my side, she usually holding onto the carriage too. We explored until we were foot-sore, going up and down interminable gray streets, fascinating in their dreary sameness, past tavern after tavern, where I envisaged such scenes as that of the Polish wedding party in Sinclair's story, past houses which were sunk down a whole story below street level for block after block.

“There were tiny flower gardens and vegetable patches in the yards. Often there were rows of corn, stunted but still recognizable, a few tomato plants, and always the vegetables were bordered by flowers, often grateful marigolds, all sizes and shades with their pungent odor. I collected odors in my memory, the one beauty in those drab streets. The odor of geranium leaves, tomato plants, marigolds; the smell of lumber, of tar, of roasting coffee; the smell of good bread and rolls and coffee cake coming from the small German bakeries. Here was enough beauty to satisfy me.”

25 Gerald W. McFarland, *Inside Greenwich Village: A New York City Neighborhood, 1898-1918* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 159, 179.

had adopted her. She became a nurse in Brooklyn's Kings County Hospital, but returned to her vocation as a writer, eventually converting to Catholicism through an arduous process that appears to have been simultaneously both enlightening and traumatic as it marked a distinct break with older parts of her life, including the dissolution of her romantic hopes with a militant anarcho-atheist named Forster Batterham – the *bona fide* love of her life, and father of her only child.

By the summer of 1931, Day had returned to New York, and moved into an apartment in what became Alphabet City with her daughter Tamar. The United States was thoroughly steeped in the Great Depression, providing Day with ample material for introspective reflection but no *easy* avenues for change. She grew frustrated with her inability to integrate her religious and political orientations, and her own sense of personal disengagement from social movements of the era. Although she had formally joined the Church, she still had no real community, and felt crippled by loneliness and indirection.²⁶ That would all permanently change on December 9, 1932, when – seemingly out of the blue – Providence deposited on her doorstep a bedraggled, rapidly aging, idiosyncratic, loquacious little Frenchman named Peter Maurin.²⁷ Maurin was an immigrant from French peasant stock, a former Christian Brother, who had discerned a clear vocation to evangelize the modern world in these degenerate times. He had developed into an itinerant evangelist, whose preferred medium was his somewhat peculiar “Easy Essays” – pithy little rhymes infused with Catholic social teaching. Maurin appears to have immediately begun indoctrinating Day into his brand of philosophical personalism, fusing anarchism – which Day sometimes preferred to call “communitarianism,” which smacked less of the balaclava and Molotov cocktail – with Catholic social teaching and a heroic, maximalist Christian ethic of mutual responsibility that was grounded in the Sermon of the Mount, the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, and the lives of the saints.

Maurin was a “big ideas guy,” and soon convinced Day – who miraculously seems to have never wavered from her interpretation of him as a kind of *alter* Francis of Assisi – that the most efficient way for them to contribute to Catholic renewal among the urban poor was to write about it. It is worth noting that Day had always identified the Catholic Church as the “church of the poor,” which was part of its initial pre-conversion appeal. And thus on May Day, 1933, the first edition of *The Catholic Worker* hit the streets: it was a monthly paper, selling then as now for a penny a copy, discussing pacifism, labor rights, and the pitfalls of free-market capitalism. Eventually their “office” – which was actually Day's apartment – organically evolved into a flophouse for skid row outpatients and jobless war veterans, along with Peter Maurin himself. *The Catholic Worker* quite rapidly morphed into a community that provided shelter and food for folks in need, in tandem with its journalism, and advocacy for non-participation civil

26 Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 165.

27 Forest, 100-1. Cf. Fisher, 25-6. Actually Maurin had been directed towards Dorothy Day by then *Commonweal* editor, George Shuster, who thought they might be well-disposed towards one another.

disobedience, particularly on issues of war. At the height of the Depression, the Catholic Worker breadline on the Bowery routinely served a thousand meals a day, operating on virtually no budget outside donations.²⁸

The immediacy of responding to physical and spiritual needs appealed to the Catholic Worker's personalist sensibilities, and it can be noted that there was no shortage of very practical responsibilities that Day had to juggle throughout her tenure as the de facto "mother superior" of the community. However, the mundane was inextricably linked with the romantic, and Day refused on principle to incorporate the Catholic Worker as a non-profit, or to pay federal taxes, or even to vote, as part of her culture of resistance against "Holy Mother the State." However, it was her absolute pacifism which teased out Days' true spirit of radicalism and uncompromising morals – she was accused of *immorality* for her hardline position on military intervention during World War II, a position which cost *The Catholic Worker* many subscriptions, and Day many dear friends. Even within the ranks of her pacifist allies – people such as the celebrity monk Thomas Merton – it was assumed that there was a breaking point to pacifism. However, Day's more rigorist moral literalism, which mandated voluntary poverty and solidarity with the oppressed, also mandated a willingness to suffer aggression and not trade violence for violence. In all aspects of her activity, Days' work was permeated by an anti-triumphalist streak that mandated radical social engagement as a spiritual practice rather than a strategy, as a means of bearing witness rather than a tactic, and as a matter of conscience that, while certainly recognizing immediate goals – even if the Catholic Worker sometimes looked like barely organized chaos – resisted the impulse to "use" even their antagonists – and there were plenty of those to go around over the years. As inspiration, Day turned to St. Thérèse of Lisieux, a nineteenth-century French Carmelite, who's "Little Way" transfigured the seemingly mundane minutiae of everyday life into opportunities for cosmic acts of charity.

The prophetic conviction that Day brought into the public arena was an extension of her supernaturalism, and impulse to engage in direct peacemaking on interpersonal and structural levels. Day's consistent ethic of protest against the dominant secular "pagan mentality," mixed with her communitarian sensibilities and enthusiastic interior rigorism, formed a comprehensive, proactive philosophy of Catholic radicalism that blended a life of prayer with service work and civil disobedience. The CW's emphasis on interpreting their diverse tactics through an appropriation and reimagining of the traditional Works of Mercy enabled it to blur conventional distinctions between "service work" and "activism," as well as between political anarchism, traditional piety, and affiliation with the Roman Catholic Church. In Day's own maximalist engaged spirituality, voluntary poverty was a precondition for exercising both the corporal *and* spiritual Works of Mercy, and therefore at the very core of Catholic Worker theology. Day viewed voluntary poverty – in both its literal-economic and existential forms – as

28 Paul Elie, *The Life You Save May Be Your Own: An American Pilgrimage* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 89.

a critical prerequisite for the Catholic Worker's engagement with the Works of Mercy, which composed its variety of "ministries" – its hospitality houses, farms, protest activism, and journalistic endeavors. The conventional binary partition of "corporal" and "spiritual" is further subdivided into more discrete imperatives: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned, and bury the dead; also give good counsel, teach the ignorant, admonish sinners, console the afflicted, pardon injuries, bear offenses patiently, and intercessory prayer – respectively.

The conventional defensive contention that only those who have a solution should actually be empowered to critique existing systems of oppression belies the prophetic tradition of intervention in evil simply by identifying it as such, when it is generally accepted as routine. Acknowledging and confronting injustice is not itself sufficient for establishing equity, but it is a necessary, organic, first step, and ought not be suffocated simply for lack of pre-packaged systemic alternatives. Additionally, it essentially safeguards the mechanisms of transformation as the sole purview of an elusive, formless elite – those who, for various reasons have the capacity to engage in the cerebral gymnastics involved in constructing modular socio-political environments – which is itself symptomatic of structural inequality, and seems like a kind of intellectual insider trading. The parable of the Good Samaritan, not to mention the Incarnation itself, serves as a model for Christian mercy – reframed in postmodern terms as "the willingness to enter into the chaos of another."²⁹ As the constant recipients of divine mercy, the Christian imitates that supernatural activity through these expressions of charity. In the context of Catholic Worker theology, the Works of Mercy were incorporated into a radical political vision and revolutionary social framework. The Sermon on the Mount informed Dorothy Day's incarnational view of "the poor" and the inverted hierarchy of the supernatural order – which formed the basis of her "preferential option" moral theology – as well as the outlines for the Worker's ministerial activities. In the Catholic Worker, as a syndicate of "Fools for Christ," the Works of Mercy were both personal spiritual exercises – cultivating the interior life of the participants – *and* themselves expressions of compassionate justice that sought – in Peter Maurin's words – to "make the kind of society in which it is easier to be good."³⁰

29 James F. Keenan, SJ, *The Works of Mercy; The Heart of Catholicism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, Inc., 2005), 9.

30 Dorothy Day, "On Pilgrimage – July/August 1957," *The Catholic Worker* (July-August 1957): 1, 4; <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/Reprint2.cfm?TextID=724>.