

Thomas Merton and Dorothy Day: the marriage of contemplation and action: a call to radical hospitality

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IN THIS PAPER WE CELEBRATE the relationship of Thomas Merton and Dorothy Day and their mutual infusion of radical hospitality into contemplative action. Through the letters of Dorothy and Father Louis (Merton), this paper will explore the personalism at the heart of the thinking of both of them, and how this relates to their attitudes towards non-violent resistance, social action, and pacifism. Thomas Merton was a citizen of the world. Dorothy Day a woman of the North American streets. They lived their Christian vocations a universe apart. Merton cloistered, and Day on the move. Yet through their letters we find many exciting bridges in their journeys. They both were converts, writers, activists, and citizens of the twentieth century, students of literature, western and eastern mystics, and scripture, and profoundly committed to prayer. Merton and Day, living the radical call of hospitality, challenged the members of their community and the wider social structures of their day. This call continues to challenge us to deeper contemplation and more direct action.

'Personalism' is about the human person and the person's accountability for self before God, the world, and finally most deeply and difficultly to oneself. Personalism became the lifeblood that flowed through the veins of the Catholic Worker movement and continues to pump life into that movement today. It is an outlook and way of being that unites the seemingly disparate worlds of a North American lay movement, the Catholic Worker, and a Trappist monk living in a hermitage. Both Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton demonstrate the synergies of personalism and a personal commitment to

accountability in their own writings and in their specific correspondence with each other. For this discussion we will explore briefly the role of personalism in the roots of the Catholic Worker movement before considering it in relation to Dorothy Day and then Thomas Merton, and specifically the significance of personalism in the correspondence between Day and Merton. This foundation and these letters provide a paradigm of contemplative action built on prayer, conscience, obedience, and action.

Personalism and the Catholic Worker

In May of 1933 the *Catholic Worker* newspaper appeared in New York for the first time. The first edition became the tangible expression of a year-long dialogue between Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. Peter Maurin had come to Dorothy Day in 1932 with his plan of action for 'social transformation.' His simple and radical plan was made up of three distinct parts: houses of hospitality, clarification of thought, and agrarian reform. These three tenets were fueled and defined by Peter's passionate commitment to personalism. Dorothy Day, already an active advocate for the poor and the worker, found a ready home in Maurin's ideas and dreams. The personalist focus on the human person and that person's radical accountability for their own response to God, the world, and self quickly became the foundational paradigm of the movement.

Many people have found in the personalism of the Catholic Worker movement a new vision and a way of life, a way to simply live the Gospels and their Catholic faith, and a model for a communitarian and personalist non-violent evolution in order to change the social order. Sometimes discouraged about the possibility of making any changes in our world, they have found in Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day people who are examples, witnesses to a vital, lively faith and holiness which translates into hospitality for the poorest of the poor and all the works of mercy, into work for peace, not waiting for the government or other agency structures to ponderously begin to do something, but who simply try to act as Jesus did, or as He asks His followers to do in the Sermon on the Mount and Matthew 25:31ff.

Peter Maurin introduced personalism and the ideas of Emmanuel Mounier to Dorothy Day and to the Catholic Worker movement. As Dorothy said, he brought to us "great books, and great ideas, and great

men, so that over the years, we have become a school for the service of God here and now." (D. Day, "Peter's Program," *Catholic Worker*, May 1955, p.2). However, when he introduced Mounier to the *Worker*, he did not present him as the very beginning of personalism in the Catholic Church. As Dorothy Day later mentioned, "Peter is always getting back to Saint Francis of Assisi, who was most truly the 'great personalist.'" (Day, *CW*, Sept., 1945, p.6). Peter knew that Mounier was bringing together the best of personalist ideas from the history and theology of the Church for this century.¹

The thrust and meaning of personalism is vividly illustrated in Peter Maurin's poem, 'The Personalist':

The Personalist

A personalist
is a go-giver,
not a go-getter.
He tries to give
what he has,
and does not
try to get
what the other fellow has.
He tries to be good
by doing good
to the other fellow.
He is altro-centered,
not self-centered.
He has a social doctrine
of the common good.
He spreads the social doctrine
of the common good
through words and deeds.
He speaks through deeds
as well as words,
for he knows that deeds
speak louder than words.
Through words and deeds
he brings into existence
a community,
the common unity
of a community.
Peter Maurin²

The personalism proposed by Peter Maurin was not ever to be confused with a self-centered individualism. Nor could it ever be compared to Marxist social paradigms. Quite the contrary, this personalism was imbued with an intense movement towards community founded on ideal and action. In Peter and Dorothy's personalism faith, not the state, is the highest authority. Conscience tempered by obedience is the highest law. Action defined and informed by prayer is the rule. The only measure of conviction is the direct response of the individual.

Personalism and Dorothy Day

Her presence is in some ways a comfort, and in some ways a reproach. Thomas Merton³

We are urging our readers to be neither collectivist nor individualist, but personalist. This consciousness of oneself as a member of the mystical Body of Christ will lead to great things. Dorothy Day⁴

Dorothy Day was fond of sharing one of her favourite Dostoevsky folktales, *The Old Woman and the Onion*. Here is an updated version that will illustrate Dorothy's views on personalism. There was an old hag who was bitter and lonely and lived a life of harsh greediness toward all creation. One day, while at work in her garden, she dropped dead. She awoke standing before the gates of heaven and St Peter. He asked, 'Dear Sister, what righteousness, what kindness, what mercy do you wear as a crown to join the royal banquet feast of heaven?' Now the old hag was bitter, but honest, so she answered, 'Nothing.' 'Nothing?' Peter asked, 'Really nothing?' 'Nothing,' she replied. Peter with sorrow pulled the great lever to the gates of the abyss and she fell through. Millions of miles through countless screaming hordes of shame and anguish she fell until she landed with a great splash in the lake of fire. And all the demons of hell clapped and cheered!

The old hag and her poverty of virtue haunted Peter. He called for Michael, the great Archangel. He came swiftly hovering over Peter with his awful beauty. 'Michael, servant of God, search the universe. There must be one deed she could wear.' Michael went to look and to search the depths of the oceans, the valleys of Titan, the mountains of our moon and there, near the Sea of Tranquility he found it. One, old, rotten onion. He raced with angelic fury to Peter and showed him the prize. 'You see,' he told Peter, 'once the old hag was weeding her garden and Jesus appeared in the form of a beggar. He asked for food

and she threw him this onion.' Peter smiled and offered, 'God is merciful. Give it a try!' Peter pulled the great lever and Michael swept down the millions of miles to the lake of fire. The demons hissed and booed. Michael flew out to the old hag and held out the rotten onion. He said, 'Grab on.' She did, and the onion held. Michael began to pull her from the fire. The other damned seeing her escape began to swim to her and grab on and so on and so on, until all the damned were hanging on to her, hanging on to the onion. When they could almost see the gates of heaven the old hag thought, 'That's my onion!' and at that moment the onion crumbled and they all fell back into the lake of fire. The demons cheered and the damned wept. Michael flew back down and hovered over the old hag. Michael wept as well and as his tears hit the flames bitter steam rose into the abyss. Michael said, 'You fools, don't you know? Either everyone goes home or nobody does.'

Indeed, in the personalist revolution of Dorothy Day nobody was expendable. Every human person had and has the potential to bring the saving power of Christ and his love to the world. All human beings bear the indelible image of the maker and are worthy of mercy, respect, hope, and ultimately love. The love of God and the love of their fellow human beings. This love finally is characterized by the willful and free choice to be a lover. The mark of love is freedom and the mark of slavery is always terror. Free will becomes the standard in any personalist response.

We are working for a personalist revolution because we believe in the dignity of man, the temple of the Holy Ghost, so beloved by God that He sent His son to take upon Himself our sins and die an ignominious and disgraceful death for us. We are personalists because we believe that man, a person, a creature of body and soul, is greater than the State, of which as an individual he is a part. We are personalists because we oppose the vesting of all authority in the hands of the State instead of in the hands of Christ the King. We are personalists because we believe in free will, and not the economic determinism of the communist philosophy. *Dorothy Day*⁵

Personalism and Thomas Merton

Afternoon – the primary duty: to seek coherence, clarity, awareness, insofar as these are possible. Not only human coherence and clarity but also those that are born of silence, emptiness and grace. Which means always seeking the right balance between study, work, meditation, responsibility to others, and solitude. *Thomas Merton*⁶

The right balance between self and others. Thomas Merton like his contemporary Dorothy Day expressed clearly his conviction that the human person was a direct 'epiphany' of God. The life of a monk is filled with moments of self-reflection and self-examination. The order of the divine office names the hours of existence and in its prayer calls the monk to ordered accountability. Constantly emptying the monk of his own will and replacing it with the divine will. This 'perfection' is only possible because the monk, like any other human, bears the likeness and the potential of the creator. Thomas Merton expresses innumerable times, in his writings and journals, his conviction and commitment to the dignity of the human person. Emmanuel Mounier's *A Personalist Manifesto* was common reading for Catholic intellectuals of the mid-twentieth century. It is not so far fetched to imagine that Merton was well familiar with Mounier's benchmark work on personalism. Especially when one considers the consistent personalist themes that fill Merton's prose and poetry.

The joy that I am a man! This fact that I am a man, is a theological truth and mystery. God became man in Christ. In becoming what I am, He united me to Himself and made me His epiphany, so that now I am meant to reveal Him. My very existence as true man depends on this: that by my freedom I obey His light, thus enabling Him to reveal Himself in me. And the first to see this revelation is my own self. I am His mission to myself and, through myself, to all men. How can I see Him or receive Him if I despise or fear what I am—man? How can I love what I am – man – if I hate man in others?⁷

It is significant to note that in 1965 when Merton made this journal entry he was in the midst of an active correspondence with Dorothy Day. This correspondence began in 1959 and continued until his untimely death in 1968.

Personalism in the Correspondence : Prayer, Conscience, Obedience, and Action

We despise everything that Christ loves, everything marked with His compassion. We love fatness, health, bursting smiles, the radiance of satisfied bodies all properly fed and rested and sated and washed and perfumed and sexually relieved. Anything else is a horror and a scandal to us. How sad. It makes me more and more sad and ashamed, for I am part of the society which has these values and I can't help sharing its guilt, its illusions. Whether I like it or

not I help perpetuate the illusion in one way or another—by a kind of illusion of spirituality which tends to justify the other and make it more smug on the rebound. And I am not poor here. I wonder if I am true to Christ, if I have obeyed His will. I have obeyed men, all right. I have perhaps been too ready to obey them. I am not so sure I have obeyed my Lord. The equation is sometimes temptingly oversimplified. Do please pray above all that I may really and from my deepest heart obey Him, it is crucially important now.

Thomas Merton to Dorothy Day, August 17, 1960⁸

Merton in this letter to Day works to clarify his understanding of himself. He wonders aloud about his vocation and his life of obedience. Has he been too willing to obey others and not willing enough to obey his conscience, his own heart? Merton struggles to find a complete and yet not overly simple understanding of his own person. To really see himself as he is and not what he may appear to be. This intense retrospective restlessness echoes Mounier in *Be Not Afraid* where he writes, 'The Personalist is desolate, he is surrounded, on the move, under summons.'⁹ This reflection on his own personhood forces Merton's thoughts to his relationship with world. For as Merton writes 'How can I see Him or receive Him if I despise or fear what I am—man? How can I love what I am – man – if I hate man in others?' It is these questions that Merton asks that form the core of his life of social action. How can he be human, made in the likeness of God, and not be engaged in the world of humans? From the solitude of the monk's hermitage a stream of action directed by prayer and conscience begins to flow.

Every night we say the rosary and compline in our little chapel over the barn, heavy with the smell of the cow downstairs and we have a bulletin board there with names of those who ask for prayer. Yours is there. There are half a dozen old men, several earnest ones, an old woman from the Bowery, a former teacher with one eye, a mother of an illegitimate child and so on. We all say the rosary, only six remain for compline. Do pray for us too. Your writing has reached many, many people and started them on their way. Be assured of that. It is the work that God wants of you, no matter how much you want to run away from it. Like the Curé of Ars. God bless you always.

Dorothy Day to Thomas Merton, October 10, 1960¹⁰

Day recognizes the power of Merton's words to call into being radical action. Radical in the true root of the word, that is to 'return to the

roots.' Day encourages Merton to continue; to accept his summons and to actively pursue it. Early in their correspondence we see a dependence on each other for prayer. Day's hands chaffed from dishes and floors, Merton's back bent from study, both hearts looking into the darkness of doubt. Their mutual concern seems to have been a great comfort and solace to them both.

This, Dorothy, is sometimes a very great problem to me. Because I feel obligated to take very seriously what is going on, and to say whatever my conscience seems to dictate, provided of course it is not contrary to the faith and the teaching authority of the Church. Obedience is a most essential thing in any Christian and above all in a monk, but I sometimes wonder if, being in a situation where obedience would completely silence a person on some important moral issue on which others are also keeping silence – a crucial issue like nuclear war – then I would be inclined to wonder if it were not God's will to ask to change my situation.

Thomas Merton to Dorothy Day, August 23, 1961¹¹

As the letters continue between Day and Merton we see Merton focus more and more on his conscience as the catalyst for his action. Merton's journals confirm this. The struggle to discern the will of God in his conscience and yet to remain engaged actively in the life of the community: the monastic community, the ecclesial community, and community of all human beings. As the stakes rise in national and global issues Merton's summons to write, speak, and act becomes translucent. As Merton enters the public discourse his commitment to the person and personalism becomes very clear.

Persons are known not by the intellect alone, not by the principles alone, but only by love. It is when we love the other, the enemy, that we obtain from God the key to an understanding of who he is, and who we are. It is only this realization that can open to us the real nature of our duty, and of right action. To shut out the person and to refuse to consider him as a person, as an other self, we resort to the impersonal "law" and to abstract "nature".

Thomas Merton to Dorothy Day, December 20, 1961¹²

Merton clearly expresses personalism in this letter. This example could be put parallel to Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day's writings on personalism and found to be an almost perfect match. We see in this example Merton's focus on love as the primary key to understanding who we might be in relationship to God, others, and finally ourselves. Again, Merton struggles to understand the role of obedience in being true to

his own understanding of self and the call of all people to 'the real nature of our duty, and of right action.' Yet in the midst of his doubts concerning obedience this letter shows a deepening resolve to action. Merton is becoming a model of personalism. Merton's prayer is defining his conscience, his conscience is defining his obedience, and his obedience is creating his action.

I am probably going to Rome April 16 with a group from *Women Strike for Peace* who are foolishly expecting to get an audience. I told them it will probably be with 500 other people but a pilgrimage is a pilgrimage and if we can call attention to all the things the Pope has been saying about peace, that in itself is good. We can send our message of thanks to him and if you have any suggestions to offer and if you by any chance get this letter at once instead of having to wait until Easter, do write and let me know what you think.

*Dorothy Day to Thomas Merton, March 17, 1963*¹³

It seems clear that Dorothy Day depended on the counsel of Merton as well. Their relationship was based on a mutuality of purpose and outcome if not method. Thomas Merton was summoned to pray for and write on behalf of peace. Dorothy Day was summoned to pray and then to act in concrete demonstrations of her conscience. Both Merton and Day struggled during this period in their lives to achieve peace first in themselves. Dorothy had the added struggle of her daughter and son-in-law and their children. Then in their communities, the monastery at Gethsemani and the myriads of houses and communities within the Catholic Worker movement. As if their lives were not turbulent enough, the United States was engaged in a very unpopular war, the civil rights movement was struggling to breathe, and the very social fabric and society norms taken for granted were being shred and re-made into a new quilt of American society. In the centre of all this, Day and Merton continued to stand with and for the call to restorative peace and equitable justice.

Merton and Day stand as examples of personalist luminaries in the midst of the twentieth century. Their correspondence reveals lives committed to prayer and discernment of conscience. As they continued in their spiritual journeys their ideas of obedience developed in the same fashion in the context of different lifestyles: Merton, a Trappist monk; Day, a Roman Catholic laywomen engaged deeply in the social apostolate and justice advocacy; both faithful to the Christ who has summoned them both. In the relationship between

Merton and Day we find expressed and, more significantly, practiced a realistic paradigm for contemplative action. Prayer is the starting point and to quote Brother Roger of Taizé prayer is the 'school of love.' From prayer conscience is formed and defined. From conscience grows genuine obedience. Direct action is a natural consequence of obedience to self. All this being said, in the end it is their faithfulness that draws us near. Dorothy and Thomas' faithfulness to each other, their God, their Church, their world and most profoundly their own conscience. Faithfulness in times of great joy and illumination. Faithfulness that is willing to walk into the desert and peer into the dark hole of emptiness. Faithfulness to the human person made fully and wonderfully in the image of its maker. Faithfulness indeed.

Non-Violence and Pacifism

Never again war! No, never again war, which destroys the lives of innocent people, teaches how to kill, throws into upheaval even the lives of those who do the killing and leaves behind a trail of resentment and hatred, thus making it all the more difficult to find a just solution to the very problems which provoked the war.

*Pope John Paul II, 1991*¹⁴

Both Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton rooted their ethic of social responsibility in the gospel principles of nonviolence which are demonstrated clearly in their lives and found in their writing. It is based on the conviction that love is the deepest human power. As a student at Oakham School, Merton became acquainted with, and had written on, the person and the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi for the school newspaper. Here Merton discovered a philosophy of nonviolence in the life and writings of Gandhi who, in turn, based his beliefs on the teachings of Jesus, especially in the Sermon on the Mount. In the spirit of Jesus, Gandhi embraced a practice of nonviolence and the unconditional dedication to the truth whereby one seeks to overcome one's enemies by loving them. Merton agreed with Gandhi that nonviolence insists on the truth that human rights, including the rights of one's oppressor, deserve the utmost respect. Nonviolence seeks the good of the oppressor as well as the oppressed.

Merton adopted Gandhi's philosophy that social responsibility requires the use of nonviolent methods to promote a reasonable standard of living for all, universal opportunities for education, decent work, and participation in the political and cultural life of

society. Merton also felt it was imperative that issues such as racism, the Vietnam war and nuclear war be viewed from the perspective of the obligation of conscience grounded in the principles of nonviolence. Merton came to view his monastic life as a witness of nonviolence in a violent society. Although Merton was personally committed to nonviolence, he never condemned those who acted violently in self-defense. Merton's nonviolence was grounded in humility that engages the whole person in self-control. A nonviolent lifestyle offers positive, active and effective resistance to injustice and evil if it is faithful to truth and purity of conscience. The nonviolent lifestyle testifies to the truth that love is the only really nonviolent power of resistance against the forces of violence and deception.

Both Thomas Merton and Dorothy Day sought to embrace the gospel principles of nonviolence, taking seriously Jesus' commands to love one's enemies. Dorothy Day went on to adopt a position of absolute pacifism maintaining that passive resistance is the only way to oppose one's enemies. According to her, nonviolent revolution involves prayer and austerity, prayer and self sacrifice, prayer and fasting, prayer vigils, prayer and marches. The only ethical response to violence, in the teaching of Gandhi, Merton and Day, is peaceful non-retaliation which is an exercise of both freedom and love, and an outgrowth of prayer.

Both Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton decried the decision of the United States government to deploy the atomic bomb as an approach to ending World War II. In his poem 'Original Child Bomb,' in a starkly factual way, Thomas Merton narrates the brutal bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the consequent wholesale decimation of the people that inhabited these cities. Merton would advance that the bombing violated the just war theory since civilians were the primary victims. Like Merton, Dorothy Day raised her poetic voice in protest against the United States bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, when she wrote:

We have killed 318,000 Japanese. They died vaporized, our Japanese brothers scattered, men, women and children, to the four winds, over the seven seas. Perhaps we will breathe their dust into our nostrils, feel them in the fog in New York on our faces, feel them in the rain on the hills of Easton.¹⁵

For Thomas Merton, conscience obliges the human family to stop using such violent means to resolve disputes and conflicts between

and among nations. For Merton it was imperative that the human family dismantle the existing supply of weapons of mass destruction and stop building new ones. It is worth remembering there are two decisive events that seem to have shaken him to the core of his being, and helped to expand his thinking and writing. The first was the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and his horror at the bombing of innocent men, women and children to bring a hasty and abrupt conclusion to World War II. The second was the young draft dodger, Roger LaPorte, who ignited and burned himself to death in New York City, at which point Merton telegraphed Dorothy Day trying to distance and disassociate himself from such activities in the name of peace. Merton insisted that:

To allow governments to pour more and more billions into weapons that almost immediately become obsolete, thereby necessitating more billions for new and bigger weapons, is one of the most colossal injustices in the long history of man. While we are doing this, two thirds of the world are starving, or living in conditions of subhuman destitution.¹⁶

In the case of nuclear war, Merton wholeheartedly concurs with Dorothy Day that the conditions agreed upon for a just war do not apply, because citizens were the primary target. Regarding this, Merton wrote, 'A war of total annihilation simply cannot be considered a just war, no matter how good the cause for which it is undertaken.'¹⁷ Merton and Day agreed that nuclear war would never in conscience be justified and he challenged Catholics to refuse any jobs that involved them in the making of nuclear weapons. Merton argued that the most conscientious response to the possibility of nuclear war would be for sane people 'everywhere in the world to lay down their weapons and their tools and starve and be shot rather than cooperate in the war effort.'¹⁸ For Merton, nuclear war would lead to suicide of nations and cultures indeed the destruction of society itself.¹⁹

In a letter to Dorothy Day dated August 23, 1961, Merton expressed his frustration with the Church and its leadership, for their lack of a position on nuclear armaments, when he wrote:

But why this awful silence and apathy on the part of Catholics, clergy, hierarchy, lay people on this terrible issue on which the very continued existence of the human race depends?²⁰

Like Day, Merton considered nuclear disarmament an absolute moral obligation of the human community. In essence, Merton and Day

agree that the only ethical armament against nuclear war, and for that matter any war, or conflict, is love. Love alone possesses the power to affect real change in the human family which can lead to peace. Just as Merton opposes nuclear war, he considered our participation in the Vietnam war one of the worst blunders of U. S. history. Merton noted that the United States dropped more bombs on Vietnam than it exploded during World War II in its entirety, even though he didn't live to see the war to its conclusion. He emphatically declared that he was 'on the side of all those who were burned, cut to pieces, tortured, held as hostage, gassed, ruined, destroyed in Vietnam.'²¹ And Dorothy Day insisted that

Christ was crucified in the death of each person in the Vietnam war.²²

Conscientious objection was the ethically appropriate response to the war for both Merton and Dorothy Day. In her writings and actions, Dorothy consistently urged peacemaking. She believed that peace begins in each person's heart, family, office, neighborhood, and community. And that it is a telling sign of contemporary culture that most individuals and institutions fail to see war as a problem.

Like Merton, Dorothy Day constantly regretted the huge amounts of America's national budget allocated to developing weapons of mass destruction rather than, improving the life of its people. An absolute pacifist, she maintained that war is wrong under any and all conditions because it killed, maimed and rendered people homeless and hungry, destroying the land and separating families. She demanded that all weapons of war and destruction be eliminated.

Conclusion and Reflection Post-9/11

In the correspondence between Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton from 1959 until Merton's death in 1968 a wide variety of social issues were addressed (particularly in light of Merton's faith development) that related to personalism, nonviolence and the emerging social teaching of the Church. Although Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton developed a lasting friendship, it is questionable whether they actually ever met. They may have been introduced to each other when Dorothy Day came to speak at St Bonaventure's College in 1940, when Merton was on the faculty there. But an underdeveloped Merton would probably have made very little impact on the activist Dorothy Day. Over the years of their correspondence, their relationship strengthened. It is

worth noting however that even prior to their relationship, Abbot Dunne of the Abbey of Gethsemani had been a regular contributor to the New York Catholic Worker House in the 1930s. So there was in fact a relationship between these two communities prior to their letters. We are quick to call everything friendship. The relationship is important to the intellectual, social and, in some ways, moral development particularly of Merton as he tries to articulate the responsibility of action in the life of a contemplative monk. Merton characterized Dorothy as 'an example of what it means to take Christianity seriously in the twentieth century.'²³ Her total commitment to nonviolence and pacifism was clearly a source of inspiration to Merton:

When I consider that Dorothy Day was confined to a jail cell with nothing but a light wrap, (her clothes having been taken from her) and that she could only get to Mass and Communion in prison by dressing in clothes borrowed from prostitutes and thieves in the neighboring cells, then I lose all inclination to take seriously the self complacent nonsense of those who consider her kind of pacifism sentimental.²⁴

Clearly Dorothy Day was one of Thomas Merton's heroes or mentors. This was a time when he was beginning to develop his writings around the social responsibility of the Christian from his unique perspective as a twentieth century American contemplative monk. Both were convinced that love is the force that binds together prayer, conscience, and Christian responsibility. Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton were convinced that Christians who developed mature consciences must employ their informed conscience in determining the most ethical response to major issues of the time such as violence, racism, and war.

The events of September 11th, 2001 have imbedded a new date in the psyche of the people of the United States. In addition to the dates of July 4th, 1776, when America declared its independence from Great Britain; and December 7th, 1941, the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese and the subsequent entry of the U.S. into World War II, we now can add September 11th 2001, the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City. In response to the events surrounding September 11th, 2001, the current American President wants to free the world from the evil of terrorism. The same United States of America which already consumes the overwhelming majority of the earth's goods to the exclusion of much of the world's population. The United

States would choose to eliminate terrorism by terrorizing whole nations and regions. The United States would choose to eliminate terrorism while operating the US Army School of Americas at Fort Benning, Georgia, recently renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHISC), which trains terrorists as Generals and soldiers who fight against their own people in Central and South America. The United States would choose to eliminate terrorism at the same time running covert CIA operations at will. Once again by drawing together people of like minds we have identified a coalition of countries and leaders, with the British Prime Minister in so clear agreement he may as well be a cabinet member in the government of George W. Bush. The United States would free the world of terrorism at the same time considering its own people not as a royal priesthood, a people set apart, not even as citizens, but as mere things, consumers—consumers who will consume and spend themselves into prosperity and happiness.

What would Dorothy Day have to say in light of these terrorist acts? What would she have to say in light of the overwhelming military response? What would she be writing and where would she choose to protest? Sitting on what street corner? In whose driveway? What would Thomas Merton say? What would the silence of this Trappist monk have to say to us? What would Merton write?

Currently we are experiencing a deafening silence or, worse, only the complicit voices of our fellow citizens and the Christian leadership and community. To quote Gandhi,

What difference does it make to the dead, the orphan and the homeless, whether the destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty and democracy?

We need frequently to be reminded that 'some of us are uncomfortably hungry and others uncomfortably full—and it becomes clear that in our broken world we are all starved for justice.'²⁵

It is clear that in the writings and examples of both Thomas Merton and Dorothy Day, personalism demands a response from us and that response must embrace the practice of nonviolence and a commitment to Catholic social teaching.

Archbishop Oscar Romero, assassinated at his own altar, reminds us:

Peace is not the product of terror or fear. Peace is not the silence of cemeteries. Peace is not the silent result of violent repression. Peace

is the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all. Peace is dynamism. Peace is generosity. It is right and it is duty.

In conclusion, we quote Peter Maurin, co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement:

Chesterton says,
 "The Christian ideal
 has not been tried
 and found wanting.
 It has been found difficult
 and left untried."
 Christianity has not been tried
 because people thought
 it was impractical.
 And men have tried everything
 except Christianity.
 And everything
 that men have tried
 has failed.²⁶

It is our hope that some of what has been said here will spark a difficult yet fundamental response that welcomes the strangers (enemies) with warmth and generosity. Such a response to the gospel imperative, 'Love your neighbour, do good to those who hate you' would indeed be radical hospitality.

Notes and References

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