

August, 2020
Vol. 49 No. 3

SHALOM

Jewish Peace Letter

Published by the Jewish Peace Fellowship

C O N T E N T S

The life of

Dorothy Day

This Issue is Dedicated to a Radical Servant of God who Fought for all that is Good.



Photograph by
Jack Payden Travers,
used with permission.

After Dorothy's last arrest in 1973 (below) and nearly two weeks on a prison farm for picketing with farm workers in California, all the women arrested with her signed her "prison uniform." She refused to relinquish it even though it was state property.





Central to Dorothy Day's life's work are issues fundamental to Judaism and to almost every religion.

From Where I Sit

Stefan Merken

Special Issue: Dorothy Day

This issue of *Shalom* delves into the life and work of Dorothy Day. One might ask, why would a Jewish organization, with a long pacifist tradition of dealing with issues of Jewish non-violence and opposition to war, the oldest voice for peace within the American Jewish Community, publish an issue about a Catholic woman?

First and foremost, many of the issues that were central to Dorothy Day life's work are also issues fundamental to Judaism, but they are also fundamental to almost every religion: direct aid to the poor, housing for the homeless, fighting anti-Semitism, political activism to bring about change, non-violent direct action. In this issue you will find articles by remarkable writers and thinkers:

Jim Forest: "Getting to Know Dorothy Day."

Joe Fahey: "Fond Memories of Dorothy Day."

Patrick Henry, "Dorothy Day: Fighting Influenza."

Marc H. Ellis: "A Jewish Encounter with Dorothy Day."

Patrick Henry, "Dorothy Day: Fighting Anti-Semitism."

Each in his own way has been influenced by Dorothy Day and in turn has integrated her work and thought in his own writing and work.

We hope you enjoy this issue and that you will let us know what you think. At the same time, if you have an article, a book review, or a poem you would like to publish, send it along to the JPF office and our editorial staff will read it and consider it. If you know someone whom you think might enjoy this newsletter, please forward their e-mail address to the JPF office (jpf@forusa.org) and we will put them on the list. It's free after all. And last, but not least, we are always looking for donations. If you can help the JPF, it will be much appreciated. ✧

STEFAN MERKEN
is Chair of the Jewish Peace Fellowship.



Dorothy Day's acts of protest and mercy emanated from her belief in our responsibility to lead lives of active love, as demonstrated in her arrest in 1973.

Dorothy Day

*Patrick Henry
& Stefan Merken*

As early as November 1917, she protested with the suffragettes in front of the White House and was arrested and imprisoned.

Biography and Bibliography

After a bohemian life as a journalist and novelist, Dorothy Day (1897-1980) converted to Catholicism in 1927 and co-founded The Catholic Worker movement with Peter Maurin in 1932. She spent the rest of her life feeding and housing the poor in hospitality houses and farms on the East Coast. She began publishing a newspaper called *The Catholic Worker* in 1933. It is still published today at a time when this apostle of social justice is being considered for sainthood within the Catholic Church.

Dorothy Day was a dedicated activist before and after her conversion to Catholicism. She spent her life as a nonviolent peace activist in voluntary poverty in the underworld of New York City's outcasts and urban poor. As early as November 1917, she protested with the suffragettes in front of the White House and was arrested and imprisoned. In her September 1945 column in *The Catholic Worker*, she condemned the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Ten years later, on June 15, 1955, she was still among the earliest protesters against nuclear arms when she was arrested and sentenced to thirty days in the Women's House of Detention in Greenwich Village for refusing to take shelter during compulsory air-raid drills which she considered psychological preparations for nuclear war.

Day led the first protests against the war in Vietnam during the summer of 1963, almost two years before we officially had troops in that country. Finally, as late as 1973, she was arrested when she joined a banned picket line in support of the United Farm Workers.

All of Dorothy Day's works of mercy and acts of protest emanated from her strongly held faith in the nonviolent message of Isaiah and the Christian gospels and her belief in our personal responsibility to lead lives of active love caring for the poor and the discarded victims of our materialistic society.

Continued on next page



Dorothy Day

“No one has a right to sit down and feel hopeless. There’s too much work to do.”

Dorothy Day

Suggested Reading List

Dorothy Day, *From Union Square to Rome* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006).

Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1952).

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

Dorothy Day, *All the Way to Heaven. The Selected Letters of Dorothy Day*, ed. Robert Ellsberg (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2010).

Dorothy Day, *The Duty of Delight. The Diaries of Dorothy Day*, ed. Robert Ellsberg (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2008).

Dorothy Day, *Selected Writings*, ed. Robert Ellsberg (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983).

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

Patrick Jordan, *Dorothy Day. Love in Action* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015).

Kate Hennessy, *Dorothy Day. The World Will Be Saved by Beauty* (New York: Scribner, 2017).

John Loughery & Blythe Randolph, *Dorothy Day. Dissenting Voice of the American Century* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020).

SHALOM

Published by the Jewish Peace Fellowship • Box 271 • Nyack, N.Y. 10960 • (845) 358-4601

HONORARY PRESIDENT Rabbi Philip J. Bentley •
CHAIR Stefan Merken • **VICE PRESIDENT** Rabbi Leonard Beerman z”
EDITORS Stefan Merken & Richard Middleton-Kaplan
EDITOR EMERITUS Murray Polner z”

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS Patrick Henry, Susannah Heschel,
 E. James Lieberman, Adam Simms, Lawrence S. Wittner

Established in 1941

E-mail: jpf@forusa.org • World Wide Web: <http://www.jewishpeacefellowship.org>

Signed articles are the opinions of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the JPF.

Dorothy's large, quick eyes, deep blue and almond-shaped, could be teasing one moment, laughing the next, then turn grave an instant later.



Open Borders

Jim Forest

Getting to Know Dorothy Day

I had my first glimpse of Dorothy Day in the late summer of 1960, though I didn't have the nerve to speak to her. I was still in the Navy at the time, a third class petty officer stationed in Washington and working at the U.S. Weather Service. I had read her autobiography, *The Long Loneliness*, and had been deeply impressed.

The occasion was a Friday night "meeting for the clarification of thought," a phrase Catholic Worker co-founder Peter Maurin had coined back in the movement's first year, 1933, for the Worker's once-a-week evening gatherings for dialogue. A lecture or reading was the main event, followed by a lively discussion whose forty or so participants ranged from the very sane to the mildly insane, the pious to the irreverent. There were always university students, often a few seminarians, a sprinkling of scholars, bohemians, socialists and anarchists, plus staff and a few members of "the family"—people who had entered the Catholic Worker through the soup line and had become embedded members of the household.

Dorothy was sitting in the front row jotting in a reporter's notebook. Taking notes was, I soon discovered, one of her most ingrained activities, a discipline that must have taken root during her early days as a young journalist.

By happy chance Allen Ginsberg was the guest speaker that night. My attention drifted back and forth between Ginsberg, who had become one of my heroes ever since my reading of *Howl* while in high school, and Dorothy. I was astonished to find Ginsberg reciting and discussing his poetry at the Catholic Worker. His text was "Kaddish," a long poem of memory and mourning about his paranoid schizophrenic mother, Naomi, who had died four years earlier after long periods in mental hospitals. The text includes a vision of God that Naomi Ginsberg had experienced:

I was astonished to find Allen Ginsberg reciting and discussing his poetry at the Catholic Worker.

Continued on next page



Open Borders

“I knew Dorothy’s Catholicism was fervent but I didn’t know what open borders it had.”

“The greatest challenge of the day is: how to bring about a revolution which has to start with each one of us?”

Dorothy Day

Yesterday I saw God. What did he look like? Well, in the afternoon I climbed up a ladder — he has a cheap cabin in the country, like Monroe, New York — the chicken farms in the wood.

He was a lonely old man with a white beard. I cooked supper for him. I made him a nice supper—lentil soup, vegetables, bread & butter—milk. He sat down at the table, he was sad.

I told him, Look at all those fightings and killings down there. What’s the matter? Why don’t you put a stop to it? I try, he said. That’s all he could do. He looked tired. He’s a bachelor so long, and he likes lentil soup.¹

That Dorothy Day and Allen Ginsberg were together in the same room expanded my idea of both of them. From reading *The Long Loneliness*, I knew Dorothy’s Catholicism was fervent but I didn’t know what open borders it had, though given her radical background and association with many artists, writers and radicals, I shouldn’t have been surprised. Ginsberg, whose poems revealed him to be a Buddhist-flavored Jew with a warm heart for Jesus, had religious depths I hadn’t fully appreciated in earlier readings of *Howl*.

I stayed two nights at the Catholic Worker on that visit. Once again Jack Baker offered me sleeping space on the floor of his apartment on Spring Street.

Sharing Jack’s apartment at the time was Ammon Hennacy, a lanky man of sixty-seven with a lion’s mane of greying hair. Ammon had gravitated to the Catholic Worker despite his searing critique of hierarchies in general and the Catholic Church in particular, finally becoming a Catholic chiefly thanks to his ardent devotion to Dorothy. He had been imprisoned during the First World War for his refusal to submit to conscription and—thanks to a Bible in his cell—been converted by the Sermon on the Mount to non-church Christianity. An anarchist whose sentences rarely ended in question marks, Ammon saw himself as an icon of what others should become. He was, he declared, “a one-man revolution.”

When I told Ammon that I was in the Navy, his eyebrows flew upward and the corners of his mouth fell downward. “As long as you put on a uniform and obey orders, you’re a yellow-bellied chicken,” Ammon informed me before setting off to sell copies of *The Catholic Worker*. A corner on Wall Street was one of his regular locations, the entrance to Fordham University in the Bronx another. By biting my tongue, I managed to get along with Ammon but made no attempt to win his seal of approval.

The next day, entrusted with the delivery of a bag of mail addressed to Dorothy, I joined another Catholic Worker, Ralph Madden, on a visit to the Peter Maurin Farm, the community’s rural outpost on Staten Island. It was the latest of several farms that had been inspired by Catholic Worker co-founder Peter Maurin’s conviction that urbanization and industrialism were a dead-end street—the direction for society to take was back to the land. Peter agreed with Dorothy that unions might improve the working situation in factories and on assembly lines (a forty-hour work week instead of sixty, better pay, safer working conditions), but of its nature all robot-like work was dehumanizing. Thus farms, or “agronomic universities” as Peter christened them, were a key element of the Catholic Worker program.

Crossing New York Harbor by the Staten Island ferry, we continued by bus until we were in walking distance of an old farmhouse on a rural road near Pleasant Plains close to the island’s southern tip. Once inside, I found half a dozen people, Dorothy among them, gathered around a pot of tea at one end of a large table in the dining room.

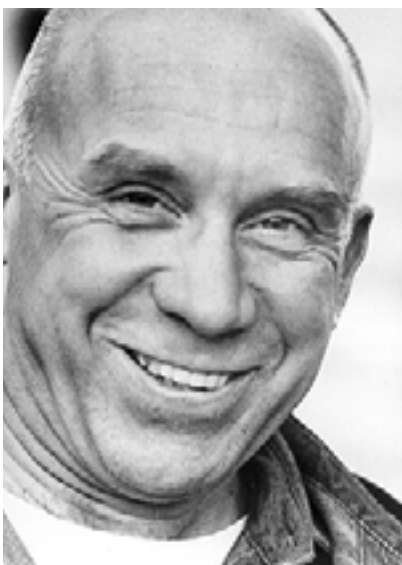
At the time, Dorothy was only sixty-three, though to my eighteen-year-old eyes she seemed old enough to have been acquainted with Adam and Eve. For the first

¹ Allen Ginsberg, *Kaddish and Other Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1961), p. 23.



Open Borders

Thomas Merton wrote to Dorothy and was one of countless people drawn to her and influenced by her.



time I was seeing her close up. What an impressive woman! Her face was long, with high, prominent cheekbones underlining large, quick eyes, deep blue and almond-shaped, that could be teasing one moment, laughing the next, then turn grave an instant later. Her hair, parted in the middle, was braided and circled the back of her head like a garland of silver flowers. She had a fresh, scrubbed look with no trace of cosmetics. The suit she wore was sober, well-tailored and of good quality.

I gave Dorothy the bag of letters that had been received in Manhattan. None had been opened—Dorothy wanted to be the first reader of any mail addressed to her. She began reading the letters aloud and commenting on them. It was my first experience of a Dorothy Day ritual, a kind of spontaneous seminar attended by whoever happened to be present, in which Dorothy wove together stories about the letter writers along with elements of history, theology and literature.

The only letter I still recall from that day's reading was one from Thomas Merton. Based on what he had written in *The Seven Storey Mountain* about Trappist limits on correspondence, I had assumed that he wrote to no one outside his immediate family, or what fragments remained of it—his mother, father, grandparents and brother all had died. The Merton I imagined had left the world and padlocked the door, yet here he was in correspondence with Dorothy Day, someone who was not only in the thick of the world but one of its more engaged and controversial figures.

Merton at that time was not a controversial figure. His books were everywhere, in churches, drugstores, and train and bus terminals. Each bore the *Imprimatur* ("let it be printed," a bishop's certification that the book was without theological error). Yet here he was, writing to the leader of the Catholic Worker community, taking its work seriously, and even encouraging those aspects of its work which were the most provocative.

In that letter, Merton told Dorothy about his visit the day before with the Little Sisters of the Poor in Louisville, a community which reminded him of the Catholic Worker: "I realized that it is in these beautiful, beat, wrecked, almost helpless old people [living with the sisters] that Christ lives and works most. And in the hurt people who are bitter and say they have lost their faith. We (society at large) have lost our sense of values and our vision. 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. [Merton skipped the commas.] 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." His note of distress was amplified in what he saw wrong with his own monastery and his role in it: "Whether I like it or not I help perpetuate [through my writing] the illusion in one way or other 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."²

Merton was one of countless people drawn to Dorothy and influenced by her. She had a great gift for making those who encountered her, even if only through letters or her published writings, look at themselves in a new light, questioning previously held ideas, allegiances and choices. I was another of those whose life was shifting direction thanks to her.

I was back at the Catholic Worker in the fall and again at Christmas, on both occasions having opportunities for conversation with

² Letter of Thomas Merton dated 17 August 1960, included in a collection of his letters, *The Hidden Ground of Love* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1985), p.138.

Continued on next page



“Don’t call me a saint, I don’t want to be dismissed that easily.”

Dorothy Day

“The legal battle against segregation is won, but the community battle goes on.”

Dorothy Day

This is an extract from **JIM FOREST**’s recently published memoir, *Writing Straight with Crooked Lines* (Orbis Books, 2020). His other books include *All Is Grace*, a biography of Dorothy Day (Orbis Books, 2011).

Dorothy. She was, it seemed, as interested in me as I was in her. I quickly discovered that she was one of the few people with whom I could talk openly and without embarrassment about my family background. Indeed she had known at least one prominent Communist whom I knew for certain was a friend of my father: Elizabeth Gurley Flynn.

“Gurley Flynn,” Dorothy told me, “was a young labor organizer when I first heard her speak. I was very young myself, a journalist about your age who had gotten a job on a socialist daily, *The Call*. Flynn had come to New York to raise money for the relief of striking miners’ families in Minnesota. One night I heard her speak and was so moved I gave everything I had down to the last penny.

I had to borrow the fare back to the office and went without lunch for days afterwards. In those days Gurley Flynn was a Wobbly [a member of the IWW—Industrial Workers of the World]. Later on she was among the founders of the American Communist Party.”

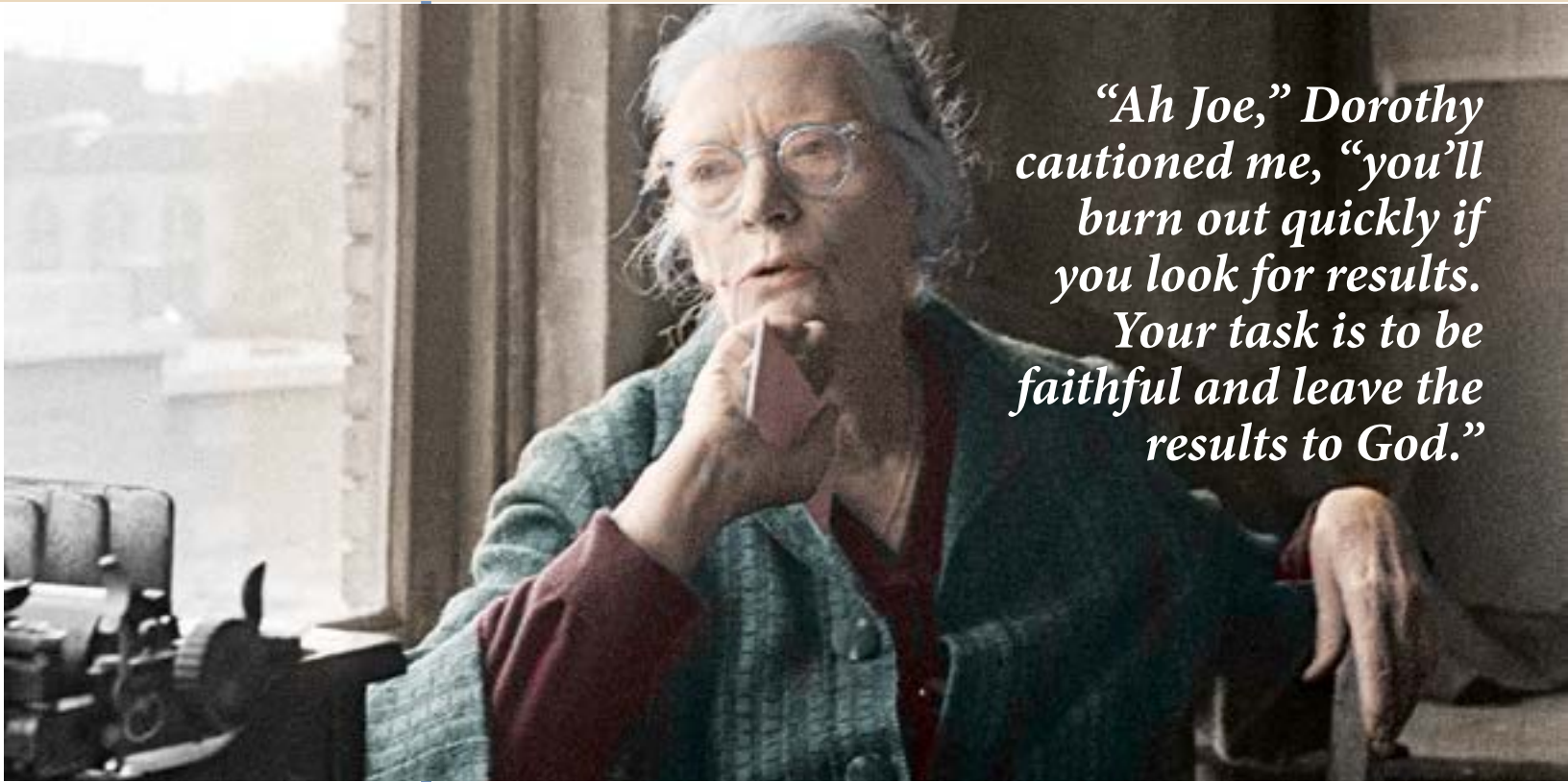
I told Dorothy about meeting Elizabeth Gurley Flynn one evening in my father’s home when I was a high-school student, an event I had never dared mention to anyone else. (When Flynn died in 1964, she left her household furnishings to the Catholic Worker. Dorothy passed Flynn’s rocking chair on to me.) “I could never agree with Elizabeth Gurley Flynn about Communism,” Dorothy said, “except in the sense that it is practiced in monasteries. Nor could I see Russia, where so many had been martyred, as a paradise. Gurley Flynn saw it through rose-colored glasses. But I have never stopped admiring her courage and her dedication to the poor. I used to visit her during the two years she was in prison under the Smith Act.”

“My father was charged under the Smith Act and also imprisoned,” I responded. “Goodness! What does he think of you becoming Catholic,” Dorothy asked. “I think it puzzles him but he’s never tried to change my mind. He had been a fervent Catholic himself as a boy. At one point he wanted to become a priest.” “The bottle always smells of the whiskey it once held,” Dorothy said with a laugh. It was a paraphrase of a sentence from St. Augustine’s *Confessions*.

Back at the Worker for Christmas, I told Dorothy of the tension I was increasingly feeling about being in the military, employment that had nothing to do with the works of mercy. “Ammon Hennessey,” I said, “told me I should take off my uniform, refuse to obey orders and go to prison, but I hope that’s not necessary. My work doesn’t involve weapons. Do you think I should follow Ammon’s advice?” “Ammon has a gift for making everyone, especially men, feel guilty if not cowardly,” Dorothy responded. Then she told me about Martin of Tours, a saint of the fourth century who became a Christian while in the army and only stopped obeying orders when a battle was due to commence the next day, saying to Julian (not Julius) Caesar, “I am a soldier of Christ. To kill is not permitted to me.” When the battle failed to happen, the emperor saw it as a sign from the gods and gave Martin his discharge. He went on to be one of the great missionaries of European history. I took Dorothy’s telling the Martin story as meaning I could continue in uniform until events forced me to withdraw my obedience.

“What do you want to do,” Dorothy asked, “when you leave the Navy? You would be welcome here.”

I quickly discovered that she was one of the few people with whom I could talk openly and without embarrassment about my family background.



“Ah Joe,” Dorothy cautioned me, “you’ll burn out quickly if you look for results. Your task is to be faithful and leave the results to God.”

Mission for Peace through Justice

Joe Fahey

Fond Memories of Dorothy Day

As a child growing up in the Bronx, I heard only negative things about Dorothy Day and The Catholic Worker. In the 1950s while we kids were being taught to hide under our desks at Holy Family School in the event of an atomic attack on New York City, some Catholic Workers including Dorothy were getting arrested in Times Square for refusing to enter bomb shelters. How dare they expose the utter nonsense of any thought of safety in the event of nuclear war!

When I entered the seminary in 1958 to study to be a missionary priest with the Maryknoll Fathers, an older seminarian, Joe Carney, invited me to the Catholic Worker “farm” on Staten Island to help with some chores during Christmas break. We didn’t think Dorothy would be there but while we were having tea with some Workers, Dorothy entered the room. She had just been to Mass and sat quietly. After a while she looked up and greeted us and told us that as priests, we must give our lives to serving the poor. She also talked about worker cooperatives and labor unions. When I arrived at the major seminary in Ossining, NY in 1963, several of us visited the various Catholic Worker houses to help with

the soup line or do minor chores. We met Dorothy who was always polite and gracious although, I thought, a bit distant.

After I left the seminary a year before ordination in 1966, I started teaching Catholic theology at Manhattan College. I was immediately thrown into a world of anti-war protests and civil rights marches. The students complained that they were learning very little in their classes to help them understand the world in turmoil all around them. One day a student suggested I teach a course on peace and I jumped

A student suggested I teach a course on peace and I jumped at the idea. But I knew I didn’t know much about peace!

Continued on next page



Mission for Peace through Justice

I was fortunate to have met Rabbi Abraham Heschel at several anti-war gatherings and one day I found him sitting alone.



at the idea. But I knew I didn't know much about peace! I began to seek the wisdom of WWII veterans, pacifists, and other wise people at the Fellowship of Reconciliation.

I was fortunate to have met Rabbi Abraham Heschel at several anti-war gatherings and one day I found him sitting alone and said, "Rabbi, I need your help. I am about to teach a course on peace to college students and I don't know where to begin." Heschel bade me sit down and surprised me by saying, "My son, you must first teach about war. Most people don't know what it really is and the depth of hatred war causes." He then told me to focus on the Prophets and on the wisdom of my own tradition of Catholic peace witness.

In 1968, after a Friday night "clarification of thought" meeting at a Catholic Worker house in Manhattan, I was fortunate to join Dorothy and Eileen Egan and a few others at Ratner's restaurant on Delancey Street for blintzes and tea. (Ratner's was a kosher dairy restaurant and a favorite of Dorothy's.) I asked Dorothy the same question I had asked Rabbi Heschel. Before she spoke, her face lit up and she was delighted to hear that I was going to teach a course on peace. "Use good Pope John's *Pacem in Terris*, Joe," she said. "This is your blueprint for peace and it is firmly rooted in the scriptures."

I followed both Rabbi Heschel's and Dorothy Day's advice and made their suggestions the foundation of a course I called "Religious Dimensions of Peace." I taught this course for forty-eight years at Manhattan College and other NYC area universities. Several of us also founded a BA degree in Peace Studies at Manhattan College and many more such programs developed around the world that continue to this day.

A year or so later I met Dorothy when she was taping a *Christophers Closeup* TV show at NBC in New York. We chatted for a while and she asked how I was. I told her I was quite upset over the war in Vietnam and it seemed like we were getting no results. "Ah Joe," she cautioned me, "you'll burn out quickly if you look for results. Your task is to be faithful and leave the results to God." What wonderful advice! It has

lightened my step to this day and I simply do the best I can and move on to new adventures without expecting results. We are all sowers of seeds. Let us hope the results will appear one day.

In 1974 when we were reorganizing Pax Christi USA (the international Catholic peace movement), Dorothy attended a two-day meeting at Manhattan College where we defined our mission and planned our strategies. Many luminaries from the Catholic peace movement from around the country were there and I still remember that Dorothy's comments were always positive and visionary. At one point we were given permission to have lunch in the President's dining room and our president, Brother Gregory, surprised me by appearing in the doorway and calling me over to ask if I would introduce him to Dorothy Day. "Of course," I said. He came over and welcomed her to Manhattan College and said he'd like to give her an Honorary Degree. She politely declined but then said, "But Brother you can do me one favor." "Sure, what's that?" Gregory said. Dorothy then held up her salad plate and said, "Can you tell me if this is union lettuce?" And she wasn't joking! That was Dorothy; a woman with a mission for justice, even at lunch.

After that, I saw Dorothy a number of times during the 1970s. I gave several talks at the Worker on Friday nights and Dorothy was always there in the front row taking notes on my talk! Afterward there or at Ratner's, she would ask many questions which revealed that she knew her theology and history quite well and I thought I was talking to a fellow professor. She quizzed me often on "What is your favorite part of St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*?" or "What do you think of Erasmus' *The Complaint of Peace*?" What wonderful conver-

Continued on next page



Mission for Peace through Justice

JOE FAHEY taught theological ethics at Manhattan College and Fordham University. He co-founded BA degrees in Peace Studies and Labor Studies at Manhattan and served on the boards of the Fellowship of Reconciliation and Pax Christi USA.

sations; I treasure them to this day.

Dorothy died in 1980. Her funeral was held in the Church of the Nativity, a block away from where she died in Maryhouse. It was heartening nonetheless that Cardinal Cooke later gave Dorothy a memorial mass at St. Patrick’s Cathedral, since she sometimes was on the “outs” with some of New York’s archbishops. (The most

notable of these was Cardinal Spellman whom Dorothy and the Catholic Worker openly resisted in 1949 for his union busting and red-baiting of a union of archdiocesan cemetery workers at Gate of Heaven Cemetery in Hawthorne, N.Y.)

In 2016, I testified before the New York Archdiocesan tribunal for the beatification and canonization of “Servant of God” Dorothy Day. Of course, I spoke about Dorothy’s virtuous life and recommended her canonization but, honestly, I was ambivalent about this since I knew Dorothy dismissed talk about her being a “saint.” She once told me that the Church needed to canonize more “normal” people like homemakers and construction workers.

I so wish you could have been with me, dear reader, when I spent those precious moments with Rabbi Heschel and Dorothy Day. You would have felt such warmth in their presence and would have experienced the twinkle in their eyes and the joy in their hearts. Above all, you would have learned so much from my conversations with Dorothy that found their way into my classes for many years. Let us continue their mission for peace through justice for all of God’s people. ✧

Dorothy told me that the Church needed to canonize more “normal” people like homemakers and construction workers.

“The Gospel takes away our right to forever discriminate between the deserving and the undeserving poor.”

Dorothy Day



Mail this slip and your contribution to:

Jewish Peace Fellowship ✧ Box 271 ✧ Nyack, NY 10960-0271

Yes! Here is my tax-deductible contribution to the Jewish Peace Fellowship!

\$25 / \$50 / \$100 / \$250 / \$500 / \$1000 / Other \$ _____

Enclosed is my check, payable to “Jewish Peace Fellowship”

(Please provide your name and address below so that we may properly credit your contribution.)

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY / STATE / ZIP _____

Phone: _____

Email address: _____

Jailed in 1917 for picketing the White House with suffragists, Dorothy was pushed, kicked, dragged, beaten, completely dehumanized. She took comfort in reading the Psalms.



The Sacrament of Duty

Patrick Henry

In 1918, Dorothy worked in a Brooklyn hospital for nine months during the heart of the influenza epidemic. 21,000 New Yorkers died during a two-month span of her work there.

Dorothy Day: Fighting Influenza

In 1917, having dropped out of college and moved to New York with her family, Dorothy Day took her first New York job, with a daily Socialist newspaper, *The Call*, and settled into her own one-room apartment on Cherry Street. She was nineteen years old and quickly overcome by the poverty she encountered and the smell of that poverty inside the tenements she frequented. At this point, she mentions, for the first time, in her major autobiography, *The Long Loneliness* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1980), that she could feel “the spell of the long loneliness descend” on her (51).

Working twelve hours a day in a politically charged atmosphere, Dorothy’s assignments for *The Call* took her all over the city to picket lines, labor strikes, peace rallies, Socialist and anarchist gatherings. At this point, she considered herself “neither a Christian, nor a pacifist” and later came to believe that, despite her pretensions, she was “not a good radical” either (LL. 58-59). In April of the same year, she was assigned to go to Washington, D.C. with a group of Columbia University students to protest the passage of the Conscription Act. After her return to New York City, she left *The Call* and began working for *The Masses*. Shortly after *The Masses* was suppressed (because it opposed entry into World War I), Dorothy once again went to Washington, D.C., this time to picket the White House with the suffragists. Those who were arrested refused bail and were put into the House of Detention for the night. Once the new prisoners received their sentences and were transferred to jail, they began a hunger strike to

Continued on next page



The Sacrament of Duty

*“As for ourselves,
we must turn the
other cheek, give
up our cloak, go
a second mile.”*

Dorothy Day

*When Dorothy moved
to the medical wards,
she met the influenza
epidemic head-on during
its most potent phase.*

protest the treatment of political prisoners. After ten days, all their demands were met. But jail was a shock to Dorothy: she was pushed, kicked, dragged, beaten, completely dehumanized. It was a “wound” (LL. 79) inflicted upon her that left her with a profound sense of social injustice. During these humiliations, she took comfort in reading the Psalms.

Back in New York, she began a literary lifestyle spending time around the Provincetown Playhouse and befriending writers like Eugene O’Neill and Michael Gold. “Suddenly,” however, she notes that a succession of events and “the tragic aspect of life” began to overwhelm her (LL. 87). “What good am I doing my fellow men?” she had written to a friend. “They are sick and there are not enough nurses to care for them” (LL 88). Dorothy didn’t want to help the war effort, but with so many nurses now overseas, she felt she had to do something. “Nursing the sick was not contrary to my beliefs,” she writes in *From Union Square to Rome* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006, p.92). By January 1, 1918, she and her sister, Della, had signed up to become nurses at Kings County Hospital in Brooklyn.

Dorothy notes that she “worked at the hospital for a year, or until after the influenza epidemic was over” (LL. 93). Her nurse’s training began in April and she left the hospital in December. She spent nine months working there during the heart of the pandemic which persisted until 1920. That pandemic may have killed as many as 50 million people worldwide out of the 500 million or one-third of the world’s population that had become infected. It killed 675,000 people in the U.S.A. and of the 30,000 New York City dwellers that succumbed to it, 21,000 died between mid-September and mid-November 1918 while Dorothy was working at Kings County Hospital.

Initially, Dorothy worked on the “fracture ward,” which was populated with old people in physical and psychic pain who took their frustrations out on the nurses: throwing things, hurling insults, spitting on the nurses when they tried to bathe them, even tossing their bedpans at them. “Working on this ward was the hardest part of my hospital career,” writes Dorothy (LL.90). The twelve-hour days, seven to seven, were brutal. It was hard labor with little respite. Many would-be nurses soon dropped out but Dorothy and Della remained in the program. Dorothy was nonetheless pushed to her limits: “This ward broke me; the work was so hard” (LL. 90). She came to realize how undisciplined her former life had been and to appreciate the order and discipline of her new life on the wards: “What discipline I submitted to because I loved the work” (LL.93).

When Dorothy moved to the medical wards, she met the influenza epidemic head-on during its most potent phase. The work was unending: change each bed, bathe all patients and rub them down with alcohol every day. At times, a single nurse was responsible for as many as fifty patients. The nurses learned to disregard fatigue but “[they] fell unconscious into [their] beds at night and had to drag [themselves] out of sleep in the morning” (USR. 98). The patients were poor and uncomplaining. They expected little and “accepted their suffering with stoicism.” “It was heartbreaking,” Dorothy admits, “to see young people all around us die of the flu” (USR. 98). Yet, “we did not have time to suffer over the human misery we saw... Often we had to prepare for the morgue as many as eight corpses a day” (USR. 98).

In both accounts that she gives of her experience as a nurse, in 1938 in *From Union Square to Rome* and in 1952 in *The Long Loneliness*, Dorothy stresses the importance of a certain Miss Adams with whom she worked closely, a particularly compassionate and understanding nurse in training, who brought joy to her work and was especially respectful to patients. Miss Adams was a practicing Catholic, close to thirty years of age, who never spoke about her faith. Dorothy immediately saw “the healthiness of her soul” (USR. 97) and began going to mass with her on Sundays. On one of those Sundays, as she knelt in the chapel, Dorothy asked: “‘What is man, that Thou art mindful of him, O Lord?’ What are we here for, what are we doing, what was

Continued on next page



The Sacrament of Duty

“We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community.”

Dorothy Day

PATRICK HENRY is a Contributing Editor of *Shalom*. This article appeared in the June/July 2020 issue of *The Catholic Worker*.

the meaning of our lives?” (LL. 93).

In January 1919, Dorothy informed the hospital that she would be leaving the nurses training program. The war had ended two months earlier, the influenza epidemic had begun to recede, hundreds of nurses would soon be returning from abroad and, more than anything, she wanted to write. “After all,” she writes in *From Union Square to Rome*, “I felt that nursing was not my vocation and that my real work was writing and propagan-

da” (USR. 99). She adds later in *The Long Loneliness*, while noting the scorn of the superintendent when informed of her leaving: “I had been a good and sympathetic nurse. I knew that I loved the work, and that if I had not had the irresistible urge to write, I would have clung to the profession of nursing as the most noble work women could aspire to” (LL. 94).

Situated about a third of the way into *The Long Loneliness*, Dorothy’s sudden, courageous, and somewhat surprising one-year nursing career slows down her readers and sends them back to the first pages of her autobiography where she describes what happened after the 1906 San Francisco earthquake which killed roughly 3,000 people. Dorothy was eight years old living in Oakland when, during the early morning of April 18, the quake hit and lasted “two minutes and twenty seconds.” Like World War I and the 1918 Influenza Epidemic, it was “an event which threw us out of our complacent happiness into a world of catastrophe.” The whole experience remains “confused in [her] mind” and linked with her mother’s sudden illness, “both part of the world’s tragedy to me” (LL. 21). What she nonetheless recalls vividly is “the joy of doing good, of sharing whatever we had with others after the earthquake...All the neighbors joined my mother in serving the homeless. Every stitch of available clothing was given away.” (LL. 21-22). “Only then,” she adds, “did people really live, really love their brothers. In such love was the abundant life and I did not have the slightest idea how to find it” (LL. 39).

When I finished reading *The Long Loneliness* for the first time and understood the scope and length of Dorothy’s deep commitment to the poor, the homeless, and the abandoned, I drifted back to the pages where she describes her days at Kings County Hospital and in particular to her conversation with the assistant superintendent of nurses who spoke of the nobility and dignity of the nursing profession and of “the sacrament of duty” (LL. 91). It was clear that “the sacrament of duty” incarnated the nature of Dorothy’s commitment. I was amazed at how the ending of the autobiography had retrospectively illuminated the path that led to it. ☆

The assistant superintendent of nurses spoke to Dorothy about “the sacrament of duty”—a sacrament that incarnated Dorothy’s life’s work.

**Shalom is
FREE**

How to subscribe & Unsubscribe

If you are receiving this copy of *Shalom*, it means that the Jewish Peace Fellowship (JPF) has your e-mail address. You will continue to receive our newsletter, free of charge, unless you unsubscribe. To unsubscribe, please send an e-mail to the JPF office (jpf@forusa.org) and in the subject line please put “UNSUBSCRIBE.”

If you have friends, rabbis, young people, temple or synagogue members who you think might enjoy receiving *Shalom*, just send their e-mail address to the JPF office (jpf@forusa.org) and in the subject line write “NEW SUBSCRIBER.”

And if you enjoy this newsletter, you can show your appreciation by making a donation to the Jewish Peace Fellowship. Details are on page eleven.



Interfaith Solidarity

Marc H. Ellis

A Jewish Encounter with Dorothy Day

I first encountered Dorothy Day in 1974 in Tallahassee, Florida. It was a brief but galvanizing encounter that culminated several months later in a decision which became foundational for my future.

My encounter with Dorothy took place during my senior year of undergraduate education when I was set to embark on life in the world beyond the university. I was in a bind, though, as I was caught between the philosophies of two powerful teachers, Richard Rubenstein and William Miller. Which path would I take?

Rubenstein, Jewish, was the noted (and controversial) pioneer of Holocaust theology; Miller, Catholic, was the biographer of the Catholic Worker movement and Dorothy Day. Their world views were quite different in tone and substance. For Rubenstein, in light of the Holocaust, the world is a perilous place for Jews and others. Only a neoconservative social and political order keeps civilization, always threatened with anarchy, in place. For Miller, as for the Catholic Worker in general, the modern social order is itself perilous, as it is organized through coercion and violence. Only by tending to those whom the social and political order harms can we, as individuals and communities, gather the knowledge and energy to create a better world.

As a Jew growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, with a liberal social justice bent but being introduced to the underside of history experienced by European Jews and others outside of Europe, I asked myself what a committed life might be like. So with Rubenstein and Miller in mind, and having met Dorothy Day, I declined a scholarship for graduate studies at a prestigious university.

Having met Dorothy Day, Ellis went against the grain of his Jewish upbringing and spent a year at the Catholic Worker.

Continued on next page



Interfaith Solidarity

*“I really only love
God as much as
I love the person
I love the least.”*

Dorothy Day

*“Dorothy sensed my
evolving vocation
before I understood it
myself.”*

Against the grain, I decided to spend a year at the Catholic Worker in New York City.

What I found at the Worker was a way of life or rather an insight into the possibility of navigating the injustices of the social and political order with a personal and communal commitment to an alternative way of being and living. My year was difficult for me and I

still think of the time I spent at the Worker as a failure of sorts. Living and working among the poor opened my eyes to a world I had only glimpsed through books. The suffering of the homeless and destitute challenged me to the core. During my time at the Worker, I often wondered what the difference was between me and those I served except circumstance and opportunity. The commonality between me and “them” that I sought to experience during my first days at the Worker soon collapsed into difference--the division between my life and theirs was too much. The commonality had been fractured. Beyond repair?

My meetings with Dorothy were infrequent but significant for my life. Dorothy was shy, already in her 70s, and with people all over the world seeking her out as a saint and a prophet, she needed a layer of protected seclusion. Who was I to intrude? But Dorothy was also friendly. She had fond feelings for the Jews she knew in her formative years in Greenwich Village and felt close to Jewish spirituality in the years following Vatican II. Dorothy was intrigued by my presence at the Worker.

Several significant encounters remain with me from my time with Dorothy and have taken on new resonance with the recent attempt to place her among the saints of the Catholic Church. The first encounter was on Christmas Day, 1974, in the soup kitchen where food for the hungry was prepared and served. Dorothy was helping peel vegetables for the soup when Henry, a street person, peaceable when sober and quite menacing when drunk, arrived for a visit. After Henry became loud and argumentative, I advised him to leave the house. Instead of taking my offer, Henry kneed me in the groin and, as I bent over in pain, grabbed me in a headlock. Henry was strong—I couldn’t breathe. Then, just as suddenly, he released his grip, let go of me and left. Shaken, catching my breath and embarrassed, I came to the table where Dorothy was sitting. In a soft voice, almost a whisper, Dorothy offered, “Marc, I was praying for you.”

A second encounter happened after Easter break, when I returned to the Worker after a week away. A friend of mine had taken me to an Easter service where, to my chagrin, the priest delivered a sermon about the blood on the hands of the Jews in relation to Jesus’ death. As I opened the door to the Worker house, I saw Dorothy coming down the stairs. Dorothy had the habit of kissing people she felt close to chastely on the lips. As the door closed behind me, Dorothy called out my name. I thought to myself, “Dorothy is going to kiss me.” She did. I remember that moment as if it was yesterday. I blushed from head to toe.

A third encounter took place as my time at the Worker was coming to a close. One beautiful spring day, Dorothy was sitting on the patio outside the soup kitchen, when I came to empty a bag of trash. Dorothy called me over and asked me to sit with her. After inquiring how I was doing, she told me it was time for me to leave the Worker. I had

thought myself a failure at the Worker—witnessing the suffering close-up was difficult for me. Still the thought that Dorothy felt I was a failure bothered me. Dorothy, though, had something else in mind. Instead of admonishing me, Dorothy offered that I had learned what I needed to learn from my experience at the Worker and that I was a thinker and teacher who, upon reflection, would one day share my experience at the Worker with others. For Dorothy, the Worker was a school of sorts, where the combination of service,

*“The suffering of
the homeless and
destitute challenged
me to the core.”*

Continued on next page



Interfaith Solidarity

MARC H. ELLIS has written extensively on contemporary Jewish thought, Jewish-Christian relations, and Catholic Worker history. Among his numerous works are *A Year at the Catholic Worker. A Spiritual Journey Among the Poor, Revolutionary Forgiveness. Essays on Judaism, Christianity, and the Future of Religious Life, Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation*, and most recently, *I Am Who Loves the Prophets: An Exile Devotional*.

spirituality and commitment is explored and developed. Dorothy sensed my evolving vocation before I understood it myself.

I am often asked how my experience with Dorothy Day influenced my Judaism. I did not arrive at the Catholic Worker in search of a different religiosity as defined traditionally. Yet the time at the Worker led to the publication of the diary I kept during that year. The following year, a Maryknoll priest read the diary, now book, and invited me to teach at Maryknoll's school of theology. In turn, my time at Maryknoll introduced me to the worldwide movement of Catholic liberation theology. Within a decade of the publication of my diary and my introduction to liberation theology, and in light of the injustices committed by Israel against the Palestinian people, I began writing a Jewish theology of liberation. Of the many books I have written since, the two most important for my life are *A Year at the Catholic Worker* and *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation*. My diary was published in 1978, my Jewish theology of liberation in 1987. They came into being close at hand—within a decade. My life's course was set.

Over the years my sense of what it means to be faithful as a Jew—to draw near, to embrace and to embody the prophetic—has deepened considerably. And, in light of this, parts of Dorothy's journey to canonization, at least that part which makes Dorothy out to be a pious social justice mother, a Legion of Mary saint, worries me. I think this was part of Dorothy's revulsion toward those who approached her on their knees and called her a saint. For me, Dorothy deserves to become a saint for other reasons; her fidelity to the poor and her critique of the social, political and economic structures that create and sustain poverty. Dorothy was shy and soft spoken but in some encounters with others, I also experienced her rage. How could her fellow Christians put up with this betrayal of the faith she held dear?

Today, Jews of Conscience ask a similar question of fellow Jews in Israel and America who violate the rights of Palestinians with impunity and seek to make the occupation of Palestinian life and land permanent. What have we become?, Dorothy often asked. With other Jews of Conscience, today I ask the same question. Perhaps Dorothy saw that question within me before I did.

Often, we talk about the new positive phase of interfaith relations. Where once Jews and Christians faced off with each other in negative ways, now we are joined at the hip. What would we be without each other? Too often, though, interfaith relations hide the dark matter of contemporary history and injustice—what I call the interfaith ecumenical deal. Could it be that I learned from Dorothy something more fundamental about interfaith encounters? Yes, looking back, and without it being spoken, I learned by Dorothy's example that the only interfaith movement worth embracing is an interfaith solidarity where we ask the most difficult questions together. ☆

“What have we become?,’ Dorothy often asked. With other Jews of Conscience, today I ask the same question.”

“Love casts out fear, but we have to get over the fear in order to get close enough to love them.”

Dorothy Day

Dorothy Day's diaries show that the centrality of Judaism in her own spiritual life never disappeared from her thoughts.



The Long Commitment

Patrick Henry

Dorothy Day: Fighting Anti-Semitism

Dorothy Day graduated from high school at the age of 16 and immediately began her studies at the University of Illinois in Urbana in the Fall of 1914. During her second semester, she applied for admission to a writers' club, the Scribblers, and was interviewed by Rayna Simons and her boyfriend, Samson Raphaelson. They immediately accepted her into the club. Rayna "stood out like a flame with her red hair, brown eyes, and vivid face," writes Dorothy in *From Union Square to Rome*. She looked "honest and sincere," and was beautiful, wealthy, joyous, and brilliant. But all this was not quite enough to get her an invitation to join a sorority. Why? Because she was Jewish. "It was the first time I came up against anti-Semitism," Day tells us. Rayna would become her best friend. Dorothy spent her second and last year of college living with Rayna in a boarding house for young Jewish women in Urbana.

During the 1930s when Jews were still routinely regarded as "Christ killers" and anti-Semitic incidents significantly increased in the United States, Day attacked the anti-Semitism among Catholics.

This initial contact with anti-Semitism marked Dorothy deeply. She would spend years fighting anti-Semitism inside and outside the Catholic Church. After her conversion to Catholicism, the founding of the Catholic Worker movement, and her editorship of *The Catholic Worker* newspaper in 1933, she informs us in *The Long Loneliness* that "In the sixth issue of the paper, we were already combatting anti-Semitism" in Europe and the United States. In 1934, Catholic Workers demonstrated in front of the German consulate against

Continued on next page



The Long Commitment

“There is plenty to do, for each one of us, working on our own hearts, changing our own attitudes, in our own neighborhoods.”

Dorothy Day

In her review, she points out that anti-Semitism is “the foremost problem of the day” and a violation of Christian beliefs.

Hitler’s anti-Semitic legislation and elsewhere against Catholic priests in America who supported Hitler’s regime in Germany.

More generally, during the 1930s when Jews were still routinely regarded as “Christ killers” and anti-Semitic incidents significantly increased in the United States, Day attacked the anti-Semitism among Catholics epitomized but certainly not limited to the rantings of the Michigan-

based Basilian Catholic priest, Father Charles Coughlin. At a time when anti-Jewish legislation was rapidly increasing in Europe, Coughlin blamed the Jews for the Depression, attacked the so-called “international conspiracy of Jewish bankers,” and justified Kristallnacht and the state-sponsored violence of the Nazi regime. He was the leader of the anti-Semitic Christian Front and founded a magazine called Social Justice. It is estimated that thirty million people listened to his weekly radio rants. For her part, until the United States entered the war, Catholic Worker people picketed the arrival of German ships sporting their swastikas into New York harbor and Day used her newspaper to urge the United States to offer persecuted Jews “free access to American hospitality.”

I want to stress three specific, significant markers in Dorothy Day’s fight against anti-Semitism. First, in 1933, when Hitler was still only the chancellor in a multiparty cabinet, Day submitted an article to Jesuit-sponsored America Magazine entitled “Our Brothers, the Jews.” The article was turned down by the magazine’s editor-in-chief, Wilfrid Parsons, SJ. The manuscript remained in her papers at Marquette University and was ultimately published by America Magazine in November 2009. In this courageous and prophetic text, Day denounces the race-baiting and “rabid anti-Jew speeches” of New York Catholics. The core of their street rantings, writes Dorothy, is that “All evils came from the Jew. Jewish materialism was the cause of all our ills. It was the Jew who brought about the revolution in Russia. It was Jews who ruined Germany. Hitler was merely trying to restore law and order.” Dorothy denounces this scapegoating of Jews—“It’s the old pogrom spirit being revived.”

Second, in May 1939, three months after 20,000 pro-Nazi Brown Shirts and their supporters rallied in Madison Square Garden to denounce President Roosevelt and so-called Jewish conspiracies, Dorothy Day co-founded the Committee of Catholics to Fight Anti-Semitism. The formation of this group followed two key statements by members of the Catholic hierarchy: in September 1938, Pope Pius XI denounced anti-Semitism explicitly and claimed that it was incompatible with Christianity; shortly thereafter a group of American bishops urged Catholics to “guard against all forms of racial bigotry.” The stated purpose of the group, which was overwhelmingly supported by the American Catholic Church’s hierarchy, was “to reach those who, contrary to the teachings of Christianity and the principles of democracy, are taking part, unfortunately, in spreading race and minority hatreds in the United States.” The Committee’s activities included radio broadcasts, speakers’ bureaus, educational programs for schools, and information services, while its journal publication, The Voice, was disseminated in direct opposition to Father Cough-

lin’s Social Justice and its anti-Semitic propaganda.

Third, six months later in November 1939, Dorothy published her important review of Jacques Maritain’s A Christian Looks at the Jewish Question in The Catholic Worker. It had appeared a month earlier in The Jewish Frontier. In her review, she points out that, for Maritain, anti-Semitism is “the foremost problem of the day” and a violation

In May 1939, Day co-founded the Committee of Catholics to Fight Anti-Semitism.

Continued on next page



The Long Commitment

“Words are as strong and powerful as bombs, as napalm.”

Dorothy Day

“I knew nothing of Jews,” she writes in April 1972, “until I lived with a Jewish family on the lower East Side when I was eighteen.”

of Christian beliefs. He urges Christians to renounce fighting hatred with hatred and to seek “the real power of love and truth even over political and social relations.” Although Maritain considers emigration only “a palliative,” he insists that Jewish emigration must be facilitated. Maritain was one of Europe’s leading Catholic intellectuals and by publishing his views in a Jewish periodical and then in a Catholic one, Day was widely signaling the plight of European Jewry and the complete incompatibility of all religious sentiment with anti-Semitism.

During the war years, years marked by papal silence regarding the plight of the Jews, The Catholic Worker drew attention to the persecution of the Jews throughout Europe and called for nations to open their borders to them. Dorothy Day’s diaries (The Duty of Delight. The Diaries of Dorothy Day (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2008) make it clear that , until her death in 1980, Jewish writers, the Jewish situation in Israel and Russia, “the latent anti-Semitism in Catholics and Protestants,” and the centrality of Judaism in her own spiritual life never disappear from her thoughts.

Dorothy Day openly opposed anti-Semitism, even when it was dangerous to do so. But this hardly tells the story of her relationship to Jewish people and to Judaism. We began with her friendship with Rayna Simons at the University of Illinois. Later during her bohemian years in New York City, her early romantic interest was Mike Gold (né Itzok Granich), author of Jews Without Money and future editor of The Daily Worker, who remained her closest friend during her years as a journalist. She would later fall hopelessly in love with a noted Jewish reporter, Lionel Moise, with whom she lived on and off in New York City and Chicago. In addition to these personal relationships, her diary reveals her as an avid reader of Jewish literature: Elie Wiesel’s Souls on Fire, and Night, and Chaim Potok’s My Name Is Asher Lev, In the Beginning, The Chosen, and The Promise. As regards Potok’s novels, she notes: “It fascinates me to read of the deep spirituality of the Orthodox Jews in Potok’s books. The devotion to Scripture, the Talmud, the Sabbath.” On May 8, 1977, after having finished three Potok novels over “these last months,” she writes in her diary: “I was again living on the East Side [on] Cherry St. with that Polish-Jewish family. And meditating on the Jews. It has made me devour the Scriptures, the Psalms with new intensity.”

In her first autobiography, From Union Square to Rome, published in 1938, she describes the room she rented and tells her readers about the Gottlieb family and their four children with whom she lived for a year on Cherry Street. They lived in deep poverty, “no electricity, no bath, no hot water, no central heating...public showers around the corner.” But Mrs. Gottlieb was an excellent housekeeper and cook who knew Dorothy had little money and “left a plate of soup or fish for me at midnight so that I fared very well.” In 1952, in The Long Loneliness, Dorothy reminds us that “I always loved that little room of mine on Cherry Street.” But, now, here in the diaries, fifty-five years removed from “that little room” in the tenement, she dramatically explains the tremendous impact that this Orthodox family had on her sense of the sacred and her conversion to

Christianity. “I knew nothing of Jews,” she writes in April 1972, “until I lived with a Jewish family on the lower East Side when I was eighteen.” She then relates that when the meal was left for her by Mrs. Gottlieb, there was often a note written by one of the children (“the parents knew only Yiddish”) explaining “no milk or butter, if I had meat.” This “ritual about food gave me a sense of the sacramen-

Dorothy Day openly opposed anti-Semitism, even when it was dangerous to do so.

Continued on next page



The Long Commitment

PATRICK HENRY is Cushing Eells Emeritus Professor of Philosophy and Literature at Whitman College. He is the author of *We Only Know Men: The Rescue of Jews in France during the Holocaust* (The Catholic University of America Press, 2007) and the editor of *Jewish Resistance Against the Nazis* (The Catholic University of America Press, 2014).

tal,” she explains; “living there brought my conversion to Catholicism closer.” Finally, she remarks “I began to know the Jewish people then in the breaking of bread, as I was later to know Christ.”

Dorothy Day had an absolute reverence for Judaism and always considered Catholicism umbilically linked to it. She read the Psalms dutifully every morning of her post-conversion life and recognized that salvation for Christians came from the Jews. She notes in her diaries in October 1978: “[The Jews] are indeed God’s chosen. He does not change” and, for her, as she insisted in her 1939 review of Jacques Maritain’s *A Christian Looks at the Jewish Question*: “All Christians are converts to the God of Israel who is the true God.” Finally, influenced by St. Paul’s epistles to the Corinthians and the Romans, she stressed often in her writings that we are all members of the same body. As Pope Pius XI said and Dorothy Day was fond of repeating “Spiritually we are all Semites.” Therefore, for true Christians, not only is there not a fundamental antagonism between Christians and Jews but anti-Semitism constitutes a serious violation of Christian doctrine, a wound inflicted on the body of which we are all members. ✧

She stressed often in her writings that we are all members of the same body.

“What we would like to do is change the world . . . by crying unceasingly for the rights of the workers, of the poor, of the destitute. We can throw our pebble in the pond and be confident that its ever widening circle will reach around the world.”

Dorothy Day