

***The Catholic Counter-Culture in America 1933-1962. James Terence Fisher. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989.***

**Chapter ONE: The Conversion of Dorothy Day**

Day “boldly defied the United States government while preaching gentle obedience to church authority.” [1]

She “... sought in God the warmth and intimacy lacking in her home.” [4]

“Experiential Catholic piety provided Dorothy Day with the right sensation she found lacking in Protestant worship.” [5]

Romanticism (e.g., Swinburne) which exalted death and suffering.” [7ff]

“... her obsession with death.” [9]

In Chicago (and having read *The Jungle*): “The discovery of the immigrant poor lent a direction to the intense feelings of compassion and sorrow which had been bottled up amidst the nervous silence of her parents’ home.” [11]

“Accounts of Day’s conversion have suffered from a tendency to search for causes rather than meaning.” [14]

“Sister Aloysia typified Day’s experience with Catholics, the one group Day felt was fundamentally estranged from the culture which had offered her loneliness and despair.” [17]

“In America, the church was the church of the poor.” [18]

Influence of the Dutch-French Decadent novelist, J.K. Huysmans. [19ff]

**Chapter TWO: Fools for Christ – Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement 1933-1949**

Day’s 1929 pilgrimage to Guadalupe; her daughter “brought some saving light-heartedness to the experience.” [26]

“Day’s discovery of peasant Catholicism in Mexico intensified her equation of suffering with salvation and heightened the contrast between the spiritual community she sought and the loneliness of American life.” [27]

“Day’s first editorial was one of the most moving pledges ever uttered by an American Catholic: ‘For those who are sitting on park benches in the warm spring sunlight. For those who are huddling in shelters trying to escape the rain. For those who are walking the streets in the all but futile search for work. For those who think that there is no hope for the future, no recognition of their plight – this little paper is addressed. It is printed to call their attention to the fact that the Catholic Church has a social program – to let them know that there are men of God who are working not only for their spiritual, but for their material welfare.’ [30]

“Day’s genius resided in her ability to reverse the trajectory of the conventional American conversion narrative... Day offered deconversion, or breakdown, as a permanent state of grace.” [32]

“Maurin was the first real Catholic she had ever met because he seemed so intimately devoid of self.” [34]

“... his acceptance of poverty as a goal in itself, even as one to be worked toward.” [34]

Peter Maurin’s “achievement entailed the legitimation of suffering and self-humiliation as the foundation of spiritual excellence.” [38]

“... it often seemed that the mark of a Catholic Worker was a general unfitness for the competitive marketplace.” [39-40]

“The movement was committed above all to performing works of mercy in a nonproselytizing atmosphere which blurred the distinction between volunteers and afflicted so radically that evangelical programs such as the Salvation Army and professional social service agencies seemed patronizing by comparison.” [40]

Day, regarding an irascible Catholic Worker ‘scholar:’ “I know that if we send him to a hospital, he will, with his present temper and shoutings and cursings, land in the psychopathic ward. Can you imagine Christ in the psychopathic ward?” [41]

Day’s interest “in the radical distributism of the English Dominican Vincent McNabb, who wore handwoven clothes, refused to use a typewriter, and travelled nearly everywhere on foot.” [43]

“Maurin even thought the farms would make a good place for prostitutes and alcoholics to marry and take care of one another.” [43]

Catholic Worker personalism – “the pressing need to define a new American Catholic vision of selfhood.” [43]

“Nationalism of any kind was totally rejected by the Catholic Worker movement.” [46]

Dorothy Day’s “commitment to the concrete and personal.” [46]

Day “provided a celebrity ideal for immigrant Catholics wary of the evolving secular ‘culture of personality.’” [47]

Quoting Day regarding the Catholic Church: “I think it’s the church of all immigrant populations that came over or [were] brought over for prosperous Puritan, money-making, developers of this country, ravishers of it, you might say.” [48]

Jansenism as “a kind of Catholic Calvinism without the profit ethic.” [48]

“Whereas the theologians conceived the Mystical Body as a symbol of the church’s resistance to paganism, Dorothy Day interpreted it as a summons to share in Christ’s crucifixion, and she boldly identified the victims of suffering with Jesus Himself.” [50]

“She sought to dissolve the barriers between sufferers just as the distance between Christ and persons was dissolved in the Mystical Body.” [50]

“... an interpretation of the concept which set the suffering and compassionate – regardless of outward belief – against the comfortable and affluent.” [51]

She ignored neoscholasticism, and criticized the corporatist basis of *Quadragesimo Anno*. [52]

Day’s personalism offered Catholics an unprecedented opportunity for religious *experience*, the experience of intimate union with Christ. [52]

“... while she freed her followers from the sterile piety of the neo-Thomists, she could really only offer them resignation to suffering and death at the essence of experience.” [52]

“Her celebrated pacifism was thus explicitly linked to the imitation of Christ in his martyrdom.” [52]

“Images of dissolution, breakdown, pain, and martyrdom pervaded the Catholic Worker movement.” [53]

The 1930s “witnessed the birth of a host of decentralist, communitarian and distributist movements.” [53]

Tom Joad: “I’ll be everywhere...”

Participation in retreats (John Hugo) “introduced Day to an interior landscape which vindicated her withdrawal from the American demand for measured productivity in the world. She was pointing toward a reversal of the process Weber saw as central to the Protestant ethic.” [55]

“Day could finally admit her estrangement from the American church, which had come to resemble nothing so much as a place for bourgeois social ritual.” [56]

The retreats “fostered a radically personal spirituality unlike anything ever encountered by the American laity.” [57]

“Dorothy was the first American Catholic who could have written: ‘God is a sensitive lover... Think of world only in terms of Him... We are in love with God... In the Mystical Body, Christ changes us into Christ. The higher takes the lower... I’m selfish when I pray. All I want is God... I become a fool for Christ. If you are not a fool, you are not a Christian.’” [57]

The Mystical Body is “a genuine reality” – “The Mystical Body is the union of the human race through His redemptive will.” [59]

Hugo was criticized, especially in the *American Ecclesiastical Review*, and eventually silenced. [58-59]

One critic: After *Mystici Corporis*, there is no excuse for teaching that a man is constituted as a Christian by the possession of the theological virtue of faith. [59]

It was, theologically, the nature/grace controversy. [59]

Hugo: “So the enemies of Father Lacouture are triumphant. So, likewise, were the enemies of Him who hung upon a gibbet.” [59]

“Dwight MacDonald wryly argued that the Workers were tolerated because ‘there are many mansions in the Church of Rome, an ancient bureaucracy that rules with a sophisticated tolerance not yet achieved by its Communist rivals, and the Catholic Workers have been allotted if not a mansion at least a hall bedroom.’” [60]

“... a type of reverse pilgrimage in which rugged American individualism would be deconstructed by the sufferings of Christians.” [64]

“... she recognized the necessity of fashioning the story of one’s soul out of plain speech” (unlike the neo-Thomist). [64]

“in a passage mixing Scripture and Steinbeck, she wrote ‘No more would he be alone. He could walk with a Friend. And he and all those others would be stronger because of the presence of that Friend. And whether any of the others knew it or not, He would be there, lying in the next bed in the Municipal Lodging House, walking with them on the picket line, working beside them in the factory, in the fields, along the highways.’” [65]

Ben Joe Labray (a Dorothy Day pseudonym) began writing for the *Catholic Worker* in 1939 – his dispatches “represented the first attempt to wed Catholic romanticism with a distinctively American tradition.” [65]

Day wondered if comfortable Catholic parishioners would have sat next to their patron, Benedict Joseph Labre, “the ragpicker hero of Huysmans and Catholic bohemians.” [66]

“Day had thus created both a literary genre and a model of personality which was defined by its ironic rejection of the American ethic and its central tenet: the necessity to work in a productive calling in the world.” [66]

“She clung to a vision of Catholicism which demanded not a monastic respite but a field upon which to dramatize the ongoing cruelty in the world, where fools for Christ could convert the taunts into unmistakable signs of their election.” [66]

“Day invested deeply in the humble estrangement of American Catholics from the centers of cultural power.” [68]

“... the Workers were led by a woman convert moving in precisely the opposite direction from most of her coreligionists.” [69]

### **Chapter THREE: The Catholic Workers and Catholic Culture 1933-1940**

“The Catholic Worker movement was radical only so far as it was radically Catholic.” [71]

William Sperry, dean of Harvard Divinity School, in 1946, remarked that the average Protestant only knows Catholics “by the arrangements which must be made to allow maids to attend Mass.” [71]

Day’s original intent was “radically separatist.” [72]

“Dorothy Day’s unwavering hostility to capitalism and the secular state.” [74]

"For just as Catholics sought to escape from the conditions which brought them hardship, the *ritualization* of suffering became an even more pervasive feature of their world." [80]

During the 1930s and 1940s she worked to make the language of sorrow the normative and unequivocal mode of Catholic expression." [53]

Maurin blamed John Calvin (not the Jews) "for the growth of usury in early modern Europe." [84]

"That an individual (Fr. Charles Coughlin) so prone to irrationality and violent rages could capture the allegiance of so many indicates the level of tension within a group still torn between the demands of the gospel of acceptance and the gospel of success." [89]

"The downward path Day had chosen for herself and her movement symbolized the Catholic path to authenticity amidst an unreal bourgeois culture." [93]

Myles Connolly's Mr. Blue – "A classic fool for Christ's sake, Blue's life stands as a challenge and indictment to those who, like the narrator, enjoy money and warm, clean rooms." [96]

#### **Chapter FOUR: The Limits of Personalism – Integrity and Marycrest**

"Between 1946 and 1951 *Integrity* published some of the most caustic critiques of American culture ever to issue from a Catholic journal." [107]

Ed Willock in *Integrity*: "The working man of all his troubles / the social worker rids. / Freud relieves him of his soul, / And Sanger takes his kids." [108]

"Willock felt spiritually poisoned by American culture." [113]

"Perhaps the most striking feature of the *Integrity* group was its absolute commitment to procreative sexuality unbound by the slightest concession to family planning." [114]

"... the extraordinary longing of radical Catholics for the kind of religious experience seemingly denied to them in a civilization of machines and insurance." [117]

"The personalists thought continence was for the unmanly nascent bourgeoisie." [119]

Marycrest as sign of contradiction. [120]

"Rather than achieving purification through separation from society, the Catholic Worker movement, by its antitriumphant nature, seemed only to magnify existing social and personal problems." [121]

Day's "Dostoyevskian hero, 'Prince Myshkin'..." [121]

Marycrest always suffered from the profound uncertainty of its founders over the nature of Catholic success." [122]

"A wildly antinomian spirit thus clashed with a need to provide shelter for enormous families." [122]

"Fertility was the community's most conspicuous sign of contradiction." [123]

"Marycrest made unplanned and prodigious reproduction the most visible sign of its antirationalist convictions." [125]

“... a critical insight about the connection, in middle-class America, between sexuality and the spirit.” [125]

Anti-Catholic Paul Blanshard as “ardent eugenicist” – “fear of the nonrational and spontaneous which Catholic personalism fostered.” [125]

Moderation of Integrity: “... bidding farewell to an era in which Catholic lay people viewed the relationship between themselves and secular culture in radically adversarial terms.” [127]

“... we are often so busy combating the contemporary error that we fail to strive for wholeness.” [128]

“For the radical personalists of the 1950s, children of the Catholic Worker movement, success demanded a wild abandonment to the providence of a God whose ways had become more mysterious than ever.” [128]

“They were the last Catholics to risk everything.” [129]

### **Chapter FIVE: Thomas Dooley and the Romance of Catholic Anticommunism**

“... the dramatic convergence of Catholic anticommunism with both the imperative of American foreign policy and the domestic mood.” [131]

“... the compelling tale of a young Irish American imbued with the feisty ‘can-do’ spirit of American overseas adventure.” [132]

Michael Harrington saw the neoscholastic syllogisms through which his Jesuit teachers “derided secular thought and experience” as symptoms of cultural impoverishment masked by triumphalist rhetoric.” [134]

Tom Dooley as “ a highly refined aesthete, yet within a distinctly Catholic aesthetic idiom.” [135]

His impressions of Guadalupe, e.g., were aesthetic. [135]

Notre Dame “symbolized the fortuitous wedding of triumphalist Catholicism and militant patriotism.” [135]

“This tendency to define Catholic culture’s distinctiveness in terms of its greater appreciation of suffering suggests that to the extent Catholicism resisted the dominant culture, it did so from a source rooted in melancholic passivity.” [137]

“He was, for the most part, a spy.” [143]

*Deliver Us from Evil* “rings false less from his infidelity to the ‘facts’ that from his willingness to subordinate the meanings of his own unique experience to the exigencies of American foreign policy and American Catholic mores.” [144]

Edward Lansdale (*The Quiet American?*) and Dooley [146-147].

“Tom Dooley became a legend primarily because he was useful in promoting American interests in Vietnam.” [149]

“... Anticommunism was thus the key to consensus in a church confronted with a variety of potentially divisive issues.” [153]

Notre Dame 1956 commencement address by Admiral Arleigh Burke: “Notre Dame stands for faith – faith in self and faith in country.” [155]

“Certainly the most striking aspect of Catholic anticommunism in that period was the dramatically elevated status of the Virgin Mary to an exalted position virtually equal to that of Christ.” [157]

Mrs. Van Hoof was a Spiritualist as well as a Catholic.” [159]

“And if Catholicism appeared increasingly ‘Americanized’ in the late 1940s, perhaps those Catholic mores least susceptible to assimilation likewise grew more prominent, as surviving signs of contradiction.” [161]

“But if discourse on sexuality was denied Catholics, this only intensified the obscure relationship between sexuality and worldview.” [162]

“The exaltation of Mary was generally linked with women’s special, and superior, vocation to suffering and self-martyrdom.” [163]

“The Mystical Body linked the vocation to suffering with a warming dissolution of the self; it became, more than ever, the central metaphor of Catholic estrangement within American culture.” [164]

Transformation of Tom Dooley accompanied his becoming entranced with Oriental thought and Buddhism.” [165]

#### **Chapter SIX: A Catholic Errand in the Wilderness: Tom Dooley in Laos and America 1956-1961**

Dooley lectures on behalf of Pfizer, his corporate benefactor. [167]

Dooley left the Navy because of his homosexuality. [167]

“... an anticommunist mystic.” [169]

“But the Laotians represented something to Dooley which transcended politics” – he won unqualified affection. [172]

Dooley’s “small-is-beautiful ideology.” [174]

The growing popularity of ‘Tom Dooley’ “obscured Dooley’s growing alienation from American policy, a condition aggravated by his inability to precisely locate the source of his disaffection.” [176]

“... beginning with *The Edge of Tomorrow*, he expressed a vague estrangement from life in his native land, which stood in stark contrast to the primitive spirituality of Laos.” [177]

“... by the end of his first year in Laos he had developed an impassioned affinity for the people he originally merely expected to ‘save’ from communism.” [179]

“Dooley was moved by their gentleness just as he grew aware that conventional American foreign policy had precious little to offer them.” [180]

In *The Night They Burned the Mountain*, Dooley “reiterated the contrast between the materialism of America and the raw spirituality of Asia.” [182]

“His cancer also provided American Catholics with the final text through which his sainthood was assured: a fate he would ultimately resist.” [183]

“The Brotherhood of Man does indeed transcend the sovereignty of nations.” [185]

“Dooley’s blend of self-aggrandizement and selfless mysticism presented Catholics with an unprecedented conflict of interpretation.” [189]

“... as though he had already outlived his own legend.” [194]

Fragments of an intended final book “disclose the extent of Dooley’s alienation from this public image, from the masses of his supporters, and, more subtly, from orthodox Catholicism.” [195]

“... the fragments represent his embrace of a romantic homosexual American poetic which runs from Whitman through Hart Crane to Dooley’s contemporary Allen Ginsburg.” [196]

Thoreau: “I am not sure but this Catholic religion would be an admirable one if the priest were quite omitted.” [199]

“Dooley’s secret affinity for the bohemian beat movement of the 1950s...” [200]

Gays “as nonconformists rather than deviates.” [201]

“Dooley was a genuinely American character who offered a variety of mystical self-expression which had never before been seen within American Catholicism and which, by the time of his death, could no longer be contained within Catholic culture.” [203]

“... as a self-described ‘old romantic’ he managed to move Catholic personalism close to the sources of classic American selfhood and self-expression.” [203]

“... the last Catholic hero” – “... he provided an obscure, fragmentary model for a new Catholic identity in which the story of one’s soul could be told as part of an American adventure.” [204]

## **Chapter SEVEN: Jack Kerouac and Thomas Merton, the Last Catholic Romantics**

“Like no Catholic before him, Kerouac was able to blend mystical imagery with materials from the American popular culture he adored with equal fervor.” [208]

“Kerouac’s attentiveness to ethnicity... was an aspect of his resistance to the growing conformity of American culture after the Second World War.” [210]

“... concerned with the loss of community in America.”

“... one of the main components of Kerouac’s beat sensibility was a jeremiadic obsession with the loss of immigrant culture.” [210]

“By the time *The Seven Storey Mountain* was published, a prior flirtation with communism was virtually obligatory for converts to Catholicism.” [215]

“... Kerouac’s work was antithetical to the experience-denying scholasticism of official Catholicism.” [220]



"His inability to fulfill the dreams of his immigrant parents accounts for much of the guilt and the profound sense of loneliness which permeates his work." [220]

Kerouac "had to make the difficult choice between searching for his own true voice and 'making it.'" [222]

Kerouac and Merton were above all writers with serious religious interests." [222]

"... there is an unconscious complementarity about their work which illustrates like nothing else the ironic character of Catholic literary culture in the final years of its special mystique." [222]

"Merton projected a dual image as romantic and as obedient monk." [223]

"Merton's monastic career provided a striking if tentative model for a new Catholic selfhood still firmly embedded within the bosom of the church." [224]

"Spontaneous prose was Kerouac's way of creating a form to harmonize with the spiritual content of his work." [224]

"*The Ascent to Truth* was Merton's last fully triumphalist work." [226]

"The dialectical beauty of Kerouac's work embodied the major struggle of American Catholics with creative gifts: how to work in the world without doing violence to the mysticism of a Catholic childhood." [229]

For Kerouac, "Buddhism worked for a time in the absence of an explicitly personalist Catholic ethos." [229]

For Merton, "Eastern religions served not as a surrogate faith system but as a sign of his gradual rejection of Catholic triumphalism." [229]

"Merton's pursuit of Eastern wisdom freed him from his role as exemplar of selfless Catholic obedience." [229]

"Merton possessed just enough of an air of puckish irreverence, along with his inexorable spiritual gifts, to make him an ideal hero for a generation of Catholics anxious to show secular intellectuals that their church embodied more than 'a mass of Irish pastors truckling to Italian cardinals.'" [233]

Kerouac was "the complete fool for Christ" – reminiscent of Dorothy Day's Ben Joe Labray. [235]

"To sanctify the world from the most 'profane' perspective was a major part of Kerouac's artistic goal." [236]

"... the vision of the word Beat as being to mean beatific." [237]

"Disoriented by his new role as a celebrity, Kerouac now played the fool for Christ with a man's intensity." [239]

Kerouac: "Christ invites everyone, including the outcasts." [240]

"... the Cross remained primarily a sign of contradiction for Kerouac, a personal cross he shouldered in the depths of loneliness and alcoholic despair." [242]

In the late 1950s, Merton became interested in “the implications of mystical awareness for promoting world peace.” [243]

Merton: “to be a fool for Christ and really enjoy it”... “all the solemn stuff given out by professional asses about the spiritual life.” [244]

“... for the remainder of his life he grew more and more fascinated with such unchurched figures as Lenny Bruce, Bob Dylan, and the great saxophonist John Coltrane.” [244]