Dorothy Day: On Love for God, Neighbor, and Self

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Dorothy Day
On Love for God, Neighbor, and Self

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“What else do we want, each one of us, except to love and be loved, in our families, in our work, in all our relationships? God is Love. Love casts out fear. Even the most ardent revolutionist, seeking to change the world, to overturn the tables of the money changers, is trying to make a world where it is easier for people to love, to stand in that relationship to each other. We want with all our hearts to love, to be loved. And not just in the family but to look upon all as our mothers, sisters, brothers, children. It is when we love the most intensely and most humanly that we can recognize how tepid is our love for others. The keenness and intensity of love brings with it suffering, of course, but joy too, because it is a foretaste of heaven.”

-Dorothy Day, On Pilgrimage

In the book Agape and Eros, Anders Nygren proposes a way to understand and analyze Christian love in four “dimensions.” He writes:

Love expresses a relation between a subject who loves and an object that is loved. If we turn our attention to the object, and confine ourselves to personal objects, love will be seen to take four different forms, which we shall here describe as the ‘dimensions’ of love. These are (1) God’s love for man, (2) man’s love for God, (3) man’s love for his fellow-man, and (4) man’s self-love.

Throughout the course of her writing, Dorothy Day addresses each of these “dimensions of love” and proposes that none can exist properly in isolation from the other three. How did Dorothy Day understand the proper relationship between these four dimensions? Is her description of the integration of these four dimensions of love appropriate to Christian theology and ethics, and is she consistent in her theology?

I argue that Day’s writing reveals a harmonious and proper integration of these four dimensions of love, and that she does so properly within the framework of Christian theology. I will do so in the following steps: I will begin by examining Day’s understanding of God’s love for humanity (Part I), our love for God (Part II), proper love for neighbor (Part III), and proper love for self (Part IV). I will then present a counter-argument (Part VI), and will conclude with an explanation of Day’s integration of the four dimensions of love (Part V).

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PART I: GOD’S LOVE

I began to be afraid of God, of death, of eternity. As soon as I closed my eyes at night the blackness of death surrounded me. I believed and yet was afraid of nothingness. What would it be like to sink into that immensity? If I fell asleep God became in my ears a great noise that became louder and louder, and approached nearer and nearer to me until I woke up sweating with fear and shrieking for my mother. I fell asleep with her hand in mine, her warm presence by my bed... [God was] a tremendous Force, a frightening impersonal God, a Voice, a Hand stretched out to seize me, His child, and not in love. Christ was the Saviour, meek and humble of heart, Jesus, the Good Shepherd. But I did not think of Jesus as God. I had no one to teach me, as my parents had no one to teach them.³

In this early childhood memory, Day described God as frightening, impersonal, overwhelming, and intimidating. A few years later, there was a drastic change in her writing. She began to describe God revealing Himself to her in the joy she felt while carrying her child and through the beauty of nature. In another passage, she wrote, “How much did I hear of religion as a child? Very little, and yet my heart leaped when I heard the name of God. I do believe every soul has a tendency toward God.”⁴

She describes her own “journey to God” by referring to Francis Thompson’s poem “The Hound of Heaven,” and to a character in one of Dostoyevsky’s novels: “‘All my life I have been haunted by God,’ [she] says. And that is the way it was with me.”⁵ In another passage she wrote “through all my daily life, in those I came in contact with, in the things I read and heard, I felt that sense of being followed, of being desired; a sense of hope and expectation.”⁶

God takes special interest in the destiny of each person’s life and loves each human being uniquely. Day characterized God as an unrelenting and persistent force in

⁴ Ibid., 12.
⁶ Ibid., 6.
her life. She believed that God calls each human being to enter into a personal relationship with Him. Some choose not to answer the call, but this does not in any way lessen God’s desire or concern for each one of us.

The love Day demonstrated as an activist, participating in protests and demonstrations, serving food, offering shelter and writing prophetically was her response to God’s persistent and unrelenting outpouring of love. She was fascinated by the development of her own relationship with God, and chose to describe its the progression in great detail, beginning with her earliest childhood memories and as it continued to evolve later in life.

Day struggled to overcome deep-seated religious skepticism. In order to become Catholic, she sacrificed human tenderness and affection when it was most dear to her, but she was convinced that the constant longing that she, along with all other human beings, experienced could never be fully satiated except through the development of an active relationship with God.

The struggle itself served to reveal different aspects of God. God is full of desire for each human being and full of infinite compassion. Through the miracle of the Incarnation, God has revealed his desire to be in mutual and close relationship with creation, despite our sinful and often self-destructive nature. Christian faith holds that God’s ultimate desire and will brings us the truest and most lasting happiness and satisfaction. Confidence in God’s divine benevolence is the most important underpinning of our relationship with God:

Without faith it is impossible to please God. Faith that works through love is the mark of the supernatural life. God always gives us a chance to show our preference for Him. With Abraham it was to sacrifice his only son. With me it was to give up my married life with Forster. You do these things blindly, not
because it is your natural inclination—you are going against nature when you do them—but because you wish to live in conformity with the will of God.  

Day was convinced that God’s love is indiscriminate. God graces each of us, regardless of merit and regardless of our personal sinfulness or holiness:

The soul is petulant and wants to know what kind of a love is that which loves everyone indiscriminately, the thief and the Samaritan, the wife and the mother and the harlot? The soul complains that it wishes a particular love, a love for herself alone. And God replies fondly that, after all, since no two people are alike in this world, He has indeed a particular fondness for each one of us, an exclusive love to satisfy each one alone.

Divine love is simultaneously particular and universal. God is incomprehensible and cannot be fully realized in human terms.

Following her conversion, Day felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude for God’s particular attention to her soul, and for the unique love God extends to each human being. She emphasized the gratuity of God’s gifts, especially of forgiveness and love. God’s love became most evident in the strength to overcome natural desires.

During her pregnancy with Tamar and on the beached of Staten Island, Day was overwhelmed with experiences of God’s presence. She described constantly being in awe and gratitude for the goodness and beauty of creation. She explained:

Always the glimpses of God came most when I was alone. Objectors cannot say that it was fear of loneliness and solitude and pain that made me turn to Him. It was in those few years when I was alone and most happy that I found Him. I found Him at last through joy and thanksgiving, not through sorrow. Yet how can I say that either? Better let it be said that I found Him through His poor, and in a moment of joy I turned to Him. I have said, sometimes flippanly, that the mass of bourgeois smug Christians who denied Christ in His poor made me turn to Communism, and that it was the Communists and working with them that made me turn to God.

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9 Ellsberg, Dorothy Day, 7.
In the passage above, Day wrote “I found Him at last through joy and thanksgiving… in a moment of joy I turned to Him.” Had Day’s life changed drastically when she was overcome with joy for the world around her? What brought about this new understanding of the world around her? Day had experienced the wonders of nature during her lifetime, and she had even experienced pregnancy once before (albeit under much different circumstances), yet it was God’s love which was able to cure her of the particular blindness to the beauty and joy which had always surrounded her. Ultimately the experience of God’s love converted her heart and allowed her to “see” in new ways.

Day also described God as “tremendous” and intimidating. This depiction of God seems to be in keeping with her earliest impressions of God (see page 2). However, as an adult, these characteristics of God no longer frightened her, but instead lent her courage. She explained:

It is hard to believe in this love [of God] because it is a tremendous love. ‘It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God.’ [Heb 10:26-39] If we do once catch a glimpse of it, we are afraid of it. Once we recognize that we are sons of God, that the seed of divine life has been planted in us at baptism, we are overcome by that obligation placed upon us of growing in the love of God. And what we do not do voluntarily, He will do for us.10

As she implies in the last line of the citation above, God’s “tremendous” love is at once terrifying and freeing. As I will discuss later in the paper, firm and clear orthodoxy provoked a similar sense of freedom within structure. She insisted that God, though tremendous and incomprehensible, provides infinite support and strength when one acts according to the divine will (which is congruent with our own deepest desires). She described God as omniscient; the divine will is ultimately that which is best for each

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human being, and for society as a whole. She wrote: “God expects something from each one of us that no one else can do. If we don’t, it will not be done.”\textsuperscript{11}

Day addressed the anxiety haunting many activists in the face of the overwhelming problems of the world. As discussed earlier, God’s desire to enter into partnership with her is what freed her from despair and frustration. She was confident that God would make the best use her gifts and talents, according to the world’s needs. As she wrote, “God will raise up amongst us all those He wishes to work for Him, and He will give us all the strength we need for the work we all will have to do.”\textsuperscript{12}

While Day attested to God’s self-communication, love, omnipotence and omnipresence, she also noted the hiddenness of God. Human beings are not capable of fully grasping God’s vision of justice. The world often seems to be the scene of senseless pain and suffering. She asked “How can we be happy today? How can we transcend this misery of ours? How can we believe in a Transcendent God when the Immanent God seems so powerless within time, when demonic forces seem to be let loose? Certainly, our God is a hidden God.”\textsuperscript{13}

Day’s faith in the coming of a real, though distant, Kingdom of God freed her from being paralyzed with frustration, exhaustion and “burning out.” She insisted that the commitment to an active relationship with God necessarily inspires a commitment to doing the work of God in the world and to sharing God’s love with others:

We are children of God because we have His own divine life in us by grace. Grace life goes on into eternity...We form part [of] God because He has given us of His life. We must cultivate divine life, let it get all the nourishment... God gives us natural happiness, too, in order to help us to love Him. We do not give

\textsuperscript{13} Ellsberg, \textit{Dorothy Day}, 174.
up spaghetti because we like it. We eat to nourish, to serve God because we Love Him.\textsuperscript{14}

Because divine love cannot be properly compared in a simple way to our experience of human relationships, one must think of it through the use of analogies.\textsuperscript{15} She wrote “In the Old and New Testaments there are various ways in which the relationship of God and men [is] mentioned. There is the shepherd and his sheep… The animal and the man. There is the servant and the master, there is the son and the father, and there is the bride and the bridegroom… The Song of Songs, the Canticle of Canticles, is all about love. ‘Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth.’” \textsuperscript{16} The Catholic Encyclopedia explains:

We can conceive of [God’s] perfections only by an analogy; not by an analogy of proportion, for this analogy rests on a participation in a common concept, and, as already said, there is no element common to the finite and the Infinity; but an analogy of proportionality [two objects are related one to the other not by a direct proportion but by means of another and intermediary relation]…In Revelation, analogy is necessary, since God cannot reveal the mysteries to men except through conceptions intelligible to the human mind, and therefore analogue. After Revelation, analogy is useful to give us certain knowledge of the mysteries, either by comparison with natural things and truths, or by consideration of the mysteries in relation with one another and with the destiny of man. \textsuperscript{17}

Day’s writing, reflective of Scripture, portrays God as “parent,” “friend,” “Spirit,” and “lover.” Sometimes God is even described in a few of these roles simultaneously. In describing her experience of God as lover, Day offered “God is a sensitive lover. God will not force you to choose Him. It is an insult to God to worry so about the things of

\textsuperscript{15} The notion of analogy is critically important for all theological reflection, especially when it concerns the attributes and actions of God. One necessarily speaks analogically about God’s “love” and “goodness” since these and other divine virtues surpass in an infinite way the human experience of love and goodness. Unfortunately the space limitations imposed on a paper as short as this do not allow a detailed examination of this topic here.
\textsuperscript{16} Day, On Pilgrimage, 233-234.
The love poetry of the Song of Songs, the desire and tenderness expressed in many of the psalms, and well as the writing of St. Teresa of Ávila provided a foundation for this type of theology for Day. All descriptions of relationship with God are simply analogy and cannot fully or adequately express God’s mystery. Accordingly, Day often shifts back and forth between a few different analogies:

The more I thought on this subject of the love of God and the love of man, the more I thought of the nuptial love spoken of so often in the Bible. There are other relationships used as an expression of the kind of love which must govern our conduct. On this earth we must often be thinking in terms of the love a child has for its parent. When the heart is dull and work oppresses, we think in terms of the duty of servant to master, the created to the Creator…A great controversy has arisen…mainly because of the implications of the teaching that we are sons of God and must so behave…. The teaching has been that love which is of the Lover for the Beloved can only be between equals, and so to achieve this we must die to the natural and live supernatural lives, doing everything for the love of God.19

Day insisted “Not being a theologian or a philosopher, I have written little on the subject and wish to talk and write less.”20 Although the description of God and humanity in a nuptial relationship is not featured prominently in her writing, it is present. In one of her columns, she quoted a book by Father John Hugo called *A Sign of Contradiction* at length in order to describe this relationship:

The analogy of Bridegroom with Bride teaches us, as no other method could, that the love of God is one almost of equality (we having been elevated to the supernatural plane by grace), of deep and intimate and lasting affection, as between spouses. Of these analogies, the most perfect is that between Bride and Groom: better even than the other it shows us the real nature of love: union between those who are beloved of each other. It also shows us the perfection of the union that should exist between God and the soul, since the union between husband and wife is the most perfect known to human love and friendship.21

In another passage, she writes:

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20 Ibid., 137.
21 Ibid., 144.
The love of God and man becomes the love of equals, as the love of the bride and the bridegroom is the love of equals, and not the love of the sheep for the shepherd, or the servant for the master, or the son for the father. We may stand at times in the relationship of the servant, and at other times in that of son, as far as our feelings go and in our present state. But the relationship we hope to attain to is the love of the Canticle of Canticles.  

Day placed the relationship described in the Canticle of Canticles as a model of love to be strived towards. She often writes “I loved, in other words, and like all women in love, I wanted to be united in my love.” In another passage she asks: “Who does not aspire to the joys of marriage, that love which makes all things new? Who does not long to dissolve and be with Christ? The pleasures of the beatific union are described as those of the wedding banquet or an embrace.”

In an article exploring different depictions of God’s involvement in human existence, Anne Carr cites Rahner’s ideas about God’s relationship with humanity. She asserts: “God is not a person like created persons, any more than the horizon of objective knowledge is an object like other objects within the horizon. The horizon of mystery, the personal God who is creator does not merge with creation but establishes it in its autonomy.” She continues by writing, “While God is in no way dependent on creation, the radical dependence of creatures grounds their autonomy. It is created personal autonomy which is the condition for the possibility for the self-communication of God, as the truly personal other, in grace.” Day would agree with Carr’s statement: “There is today a theological insistence, rooted in interpretations of the Bible and of contemporary experience, that the God of Christian faith, while remaining God, is intimate to the joy

22 Ibid., 235.  
23 Ellsberg, Dorothy Day, 39.  
and the pain, the victory and the defeat, the struggle of human existence, and comes to be known precisely there.”

**Manifestations of God’s Love in the World**

Day understood the events of her daily life as sacramental communication with God. The birth of her daughter, Tamar, caused an overflowing joy in her heart, and she was very much affected by the beauty of the natural world which she came to appreciate through Forster’s eyes. Even before her conversion, she understood God working through people and nature alike.

Day’s post-conversion experience of God was firmly grounded in the sacramentality of the Roman Catholic faith. The mystery of the Incarnation figures prominently in Day’s writings. One of her newspaper columns related the mystery of the Incarnation to the birth of a child in the house of hospitality:

William (a baby born at Mott Street) himself is worth more than that sum, more indeed than all the money in the world. He is indeed but dust, the Lord knoweth it, but he is also little less than the angels. He is a creature of body and soul, a son of God and (by his baptism down at Transfiguration Church last Sunday) a temple of the Holy Ghost. For his sake our Lord God came down from heaven, was begotten by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, was made man, lived with us for thirty-three years, and suffered and laid down His life. For William’s sake as well as for the sake of each one of us.

Her focus upon redemption from sin as a result of Christ’s sacrificial offering further illustrates her experience of God as infinitely merciful and loving, and who intimately understands and desires to alleviate human trials and suffering.

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26 Ibid., 314.
27 Ellsberg, *Dorothy Day*, 57.
In a very real way, the sacraments for Day served as reminders of God’s infinite generosity. We become participants in the miracle of redemption through our baptism. Day derived much strength from this assurance, as she described in the passage below:

Our heaven starts immediately with baptism. God is most generous in increasing this Heaven within us. We must try to amass more and more God in our hearts. ‘Our hearts were made for Thee, O Lord, and find no rest until they rest in Thee.’ We have such a capacity for happiness that nothing here will satisfy it. ‘Enlarge Thou my heart that Thou mayest enter in.’ If we had not heard of God, if we had not been baptized, we could not go on looking for happiness here with no fault.28

Day was very committed to exploration of the Catholic faith. While attending the University of Illinois, and in her later work with labor movements, she was surrounded by Marxist and Communist theory. She had heard (and probably argued herself) the case against religion. She criticized the wealth and indifference of many of the bishops and members of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in the face of the suffering faithful, always noticing that the generous contributions of the poor filled the collection baskets at mass. She mourned the idea that the pennies donated by servant girls went towards the construction of extravagant cathedrals and the majestic robes of priests and bishops.

In the end, however, she was convinced that grace was embodied not only in the sacraments, but even in the institutional Church itself. As she explains: “It was ever in my mind that human frailties and the sins and ignorances of those in high places throughout history only proved that the Church must be divine to have persisted through the centuries. I would not blame the Church for what I felt were the mistakes of churchmen.”29 God, in His perfection, is present in the mystery of the Church, despite the sinfulness and imperfections of its members.

Day also felt that the ability to appreciate sacraments was a gift from God. She described the day of her baptism as being clouded by the difficult rush of emotions she felt when she finally had to give up her natural love for Forster. She felt that this attachment to human love prevented her from full appreciation of the gift of divine love being deepened within her through the sacrament of baptism. In contrast, the sacrament of confirmation brought her great joy. She wrote “A year [after my baptism], my confirmation was indeed joyful and Pentecost never passes without a renewed sense of happiness and thanksgiving. It was only then that the feeling of uncertainty left me, never to return, praise God!”

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30 Ibid.
PART II. OUR RESPONSE TO GOD’S LOVE—OUR LOVE FOR GOD

Often images of Dorothy Day picture a saintly old woman, her worn hands folded solemnly in prayer. During her life, she famously pleaded “Don’t call me a saint. I don’t want to be dismissed that easily.” Nevertheless, she believed that all believers are called to sainthood. Twenty years after her death, her teachings have not yet been dismissed, but the process for her canonization is well underway. Day dedicated herself to living each day as an offering, as “prayer” to God. Amidst the hustle and bustle of the Catholic Worker community, she carefully reserved time each day for personal reflection. She spent at least two hours daily in meditation on the Scriptures, attended daily mass, and often recited the rosary. These traditional practices, however, do not adequately encompass her broad understanding of “prayer.” In her own words, she issues a challenging definition of prayer:

Does God have a set way of prayer, a way that He expects each of us to follow? I doubt it. I believe some people—lots of people—pray through the witness of their lives, through the work they do, the friendships they have, the love they offer people and receive from people. Since when are words the only acceptable form of prayer? While she does not deny the importance of personal time devoted to reflection, this definition of prayer is inclusive of any communication with God and all demonstrations of love for God.

As we have seen, Day firmly believed that God desired to be in personal relationship with each of us, regardless of our merits or faults. It was not God’s love that changed when she was “converted,” but rather how she reacted to the divine. We do not

31 Day often made this statement. It is often quoted and repeated. It can be found, among many other places in: Jim Forest, Love is the Measure: A Biography of Dorothy Day, (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 206.
control the love God chooses to bestow upon us, but we are able to control how we choose to respond to God’s love.

Day often quoted St. Augustine when discussing the proper human response to God’s love. Below is a passage she attributes to St. Augustine which she quotes:

What is it that I love when I love my God? It is a certain light that I love and melody and fragrance and embrace that I love when I love my God—a light, melody, fragrance, food, embrace of the God-within, where for my soul, that shines which space does not contain; that sounds which time does not sweep away; that is fragrant which the breeze does not dispel; and that tastes sweet which, fed upon, is not diminished, and that clings close which no satiety disparts—this is what I love when I love my God.  

In this passage, Augustine uses familiar images to describe his love for God, and then uses the same imagery in a different, unusual way in order to express the incomprehensibility and mystery of God. However elusive, the description above tries to describe what one loves when he is loving God.

Loving God includes accepting God as unknown, hidden, and mysterious and realizing that love for God can never be fully expressed in human terms. There is no “formula” to loving God. Love for God can be expressed in simple gratitude or in one’s dedication to others. She admitted the difficulties she experienced in responding properly to God’s love:

One time I was traveling and far from home and lonely, and I awoke in the night almost on the verge of weeping with a sense of futility, of being unloved and unwanted. And suddenly the thought came to me of my importance as a daughter of God, daughter of a King, and I felt a sureness of God’s love and at the same time a conviction that one of the greatest injustices, if one can put it that way, which one can do to God is to distrust His love, not realize His love. God so loved me that He gave His only begotten son. ‘If a mother will forget her children, never will I forget thee.’ Such tenderness. And with such complete ingratitude we forget the Father and His love.  

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33 Ellsberg, 179.
34 Day, On Pilgrimage, 197.
As discussed earlier, Day described her relationship with God through the use of different analogies, and her response to God depended upon how she experienced God in specific situations. As a child, she responded to the tremendous Father-God with fear. Much later in her life, she described more intimate experiences of God:

The love of God and man becomes the love of equals, as the love of the bride and the bridegroom is the love of equals, and not the love of the sheep for the shepherd, or the servant for the master, or the son for the father. We may stand at times in the relationship of the servant, and at other times in that of son, as far as our feelings go and in our present state. But the relationship we hope to attain to is the love of the Canticle of Canticles.35

Response to God within this relationship of bride and bridegroom is the most natural and selfless outpouring of love possible for human beings.

**Concrete Practice**

Practically speaking, how did Day define the proper human response to God’s love—how does one “love God”? Day expressed the importance of reserving time for silence and reflection, in daily life and on retreat. Day often made retreats and made sure that others were able to do the same. In the fall of 1944, she began what was projected to be a year-long retreat (she only lasted six months). In community, most of Day’s time was spent serving others and it was important for her to retreat in order to allow God to renew her strength. She writes that when she returned from retreat, she was better able to respond to others with love. By providing space for God to work in her heart, she was also indirectly caring for (and loving) herself. She described her retreat experiences in this way: “It is not only for others that I must have these retreats. It is because I too am hungry and thirsty for the bread of the strong. I too must nourish myself to do the work I

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35 Ibid., 235.
have undertaken; I too must drink at these good springs so that I may not be an empty cistern and unable to help others.”  

In another passage, she described the “spiritual weapons of love” which are only discovered by spending time in prayer and meditation:

> While it is true that love sweetens all of life and makes light of pain and suffering and brings us to the happiness we all desire, one must learn to love, and there is no place better than a retreat house to learn such lessons. We must withdraw for a time to renew our strength for the great struggle of the apostolate. Without the use of our spiritual weapons of love, which include prayer and penance and work and poverty and suffering, our future is harsh and ugly to contemplate.  

Day explains that one is most able to discern God’s presence in prayerful reflection. While it would seem most natural that one must learn to love through interaction with other people, she claims that love is best “learned” and understood in the reflective environment of a retreat house, though such a definition is quite contrary to popular culture’s somewhat sentimental and highly interpersonal definition of love.

Although Day did not feel called to a life devoted to contemplation, she found much wisdom in the writings of contemplatives. She often quoted St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Ávila. She was also in regular correspondence with Thomas Merton. The time and space reserved for silence and contemplation was an essential part of the retreat experience for Day. She writes “[I] realize that often talk is an escape from doing anything. We chatter on and on to cover our feelings and to hide from ourselves and others our futility.” As Day explained, silence allowed her to recognize God’s presence in her life with more clarity, and then allowed her to respond to God in different ways: “Christ is with us, though our eyes are blinded, just as He was with the disciples at

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38 Ellsberg, 26.
Emmaus. Keep the attitude of listening. The retreat will be as successful as your silence. Silence is of the whole being, all our senses, of all our powers. Keep only the power of loving.”

Day also stressed the importance of finding silence and peace amidst the action of everyday life. Each person must take advantage of moments during the day to think of God:

To ride on a bus is my way of being a hermit. I am away from everyone, no telephones, no door bells, and am content with relaxing and just seeing, just being. I cannot read or talk to fellow travelers. To me it is rest and relaxation and renewal, and a time for praying. It is certainly conducive to the pilgrim spirit and the hermit spirit, in a strange way, and though on the move, one still has time to hearken to the inner voice which says ‘be still and see that I am God.’ A happy halt in the pressure of daily living.

This assertion is very much in keeping with the theology of St. Theresa of Liseux, who advocated “the little way” of loving God in each action of life, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant. Day further explored such ways of loving God, “What do you think about all day? Worldly things? There is your heart. Are you concerned about health, bodily goods? There your heart is. If one falls in love, all the habits of life are ruled by that love—letters, telephone calls, whatever we do.”

Day used the image of two people in love to describe how one’s thoughts and actions must be constantly directed towards God. “Two people who are deeply in love are thinking of each other all the time, and what they can do for each other. So we must be with God. The love of God is more intense than any human love. Keep asking for this

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love.\textsuperscript{42} Here she makes an important distinction about relationship with God. Although it is possible to compare love for God with love for others in our life, love from and for God is without human equivalent. In another passage, she asserted that divine love is radically superior to human love somewhat in the same way that human love is superior to animal love. \textsuperscript{43} She also recognized, of course, that God’s love is infinite, rendering this an analogy of proportionality.\textsuperscript{44}

If the believer truly “falls in love” with God, each thought and each action necessarily will be directed towards God. The love she feels for God will be for God’s own sake, rather than for her own selfish motives. Love allows the transformation from egocentrism to theocentrism. This transformation forms the “heart” as well as the “mind.” Day writes “Our greatest danger is not our sins, but our indifference. We must be in love with God. It is not so much to change what we are doing, but our intention, our motive. It is not sufficient that we refrain from insulting a person, we must love.”\textsuperscript{45} If one loved God enough, Day would argue, one would be able to avoid sinning.\textsuperscript{46}

One must allow God to teach her to love Him. She writes:

We should ask God to teach us the secrets of His love. Insist on this love with importunity. No other love is happy unless it finds its roots in this. Loving God seems to be loving nothing? But there is a definite way. We must learn the rules. There is infinite happiness waiting. Also it will free us from the slavery of other loves. God is nothing else but love. ‘Where love is, there God is.’ All other loves pale in comparison. Our nature is not built for so strong a love, so we must change our nature. ‘Enlarge thou my heart that thou mayest enter in.’\textsuperscript{47}

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\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 192.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 191.
\textsuperscript{44} See Suavage, “Analogy.”
\textsuperscript{45} Day, On Pilgrimage, 191.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 194.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 190-191.
Day insisted that love for God is different from all other experiences of love, and in this love all other love is transformed. Divine love can never be fully understood, but living with such mystery must also be embraced.

As the next section will discuss in much greater depth, Day believed that love for God is demonstrated in love for neighbor. Day explains using examples from Church history and Catholic literature. “St. Teresa [of Ávila] said that you can only show your love for God by your love for your neighbor, for your bother and sister. Francois Mauriac, the novelist, and Jacques Maritain, the philosopher, said that when you were working for truth and justice you were working for Christ, even though you denied him.”

In another passage, she refers to the theology of St. Therese of Liseux. She explains how daily action, especially the treatment of others, directly effects how effectively one is able to love and serve God in this world.

St. Therese said her aim was to make God loved. And I am sure that we pray to love God with an everlasting love, and yearn over our fellows in desire that He should be loved. How can they hear unless we take seriously our lay apostolate and answer them when they speak to us? We believe that God made them and sustains them.

Loving and serving others, however, must not be improperly motivated (e.g., by pride, vanity, power or any other human reward). We ought to love others out of love of God:

If we did our works of mercy to be praised by men, or from pride and vanity and sense of power, then we had had our reward. If we did them for the love of God, in whose image man had been made, then God would reward us; then we were doing them for a supernatural motive. There was little freedom in this life, except in the realm of motive or intention. We could do things either because we were compelled to, or because we loved God and wanted to. And never mind, if we did not by our own sacrifice put off the old man and put on the new; God would see

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49 Ibid., 273.
to it that we did so in the natural course of events, just as we grew in age, losing little by little our sense of life, our eyesight, our teeth, our hearing.\textsuperscript{50}

The sacramentality of the Church was very important to Day. She embraced the piety and tradition of the Catholic Church. She felt particular devotion to Mary as an intercessor and spiritual companion. She explained “I always say to the Blessed Mother after Communion—‘Here He is in my heart; I believe, help thou mine unbelief; Adore Him, thank Him and love Him for me. He is your Son; His honor is in your hands. Do not let me dishonor Him.”\textsuperscript{51} Long before she became Catholic, she had been “introduced” to the Virgin Mary by a friend, and saying the Rosary somehow comforted her:

Every night I used to go to [the Cathedral] for Benediction…My roommate Mary Gordon and that Christmas she gave me a rosary. So in this case I was led to the Church through two Communists. I did not know how to say the rosary but I got a little prayer book at a Catholic bookstore which I often visited and I learned how.\textsuperscript{52}

In another passage, she spoke of the statue of the Virgin Mother that a cellmate at Occoquan workhouse gave to her and which she later passed along to Tamar. She relates an anecdote about her relationship with the Blessed Mother: “‘You’ I told the Blessed Mother, ‘will have to be [Tamar’s] mother. Under the best of circumstances I’m a failure as a homemaker. I’m untidy, inconsistent, undisciplined, temperamental, and I have to pray every day for final perseverance.’”\textsuperscript{53}

Personal sacrifice and penance are means of demonstrating love for and devotion to God. Personal suffering enables one to participate in Christ’s suffering in a small way. Jesus’ sacrifice was something that was very real to her. As she explained:

\textsuperscript{50} Day, \textit{The Long Loneliness}, 247.
\textsuperscript{51} Ellsberg, \textit{Dorothy Day}, 159.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 160.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 161.
[Mike Gold, who she describes as her ‘oldest friend’] seemed to understand my misery and to sense that there had to be a price to pay, sometimes a heartbreaking price, in following one’s vocation. Neither revolutions nor faith is won without keen suffering. For me Christ was not to be bought for thirty pieces of silver but with my heart’s blood.\(^{54}\)

Day learned to balance asceticism and enjoyment of life through the writing of St. Teresa of Ávila. She treasured stories of Teresa’s spontaneous spurts of dancing in the convent and occasional indulgences in partridge dinners. Day writes: “It is a choice, a preference. If we love God with our whole hearts, how much heart have we left? We must live this life now. Death changes nothing. If we do not learn to enjoy God now we never will. If we do not learn to praise Him and thank Him and rejoice in Him now, we never will.”\(^{55}\)

Day also considered obedience to the Church’s teachings a way of loving God. She submitted to the guidance of the Church in hopes of overcoming her human failings:

I do know that my nature is such that gratitude alone, gratitude for the faith, that most splendid gift, a gift not earned by me, a gratuitous gift, is enough to bind me in holy obedience to Holy Mother Church and her commands… My gratitude for this sureness in my heart is such that I can only say, I believe, help Thou my unbelief. I believe and I obey.\(^{56}\)

This description exemplifies a child-parent relationship with God, in keeping with the theology of St. Therese of Liseux, who she held in great esteem.

Although Day herself never thought in terms of a clear succession of stages of love for God that one must pass through, she refers to lessons she learned from Father Farina about “stages of love” for God:

Father Farina, in his retreats at Oakmont, used to emphasize the stages love must pass through—all love, whether love of friend, spouse, child, work, or a book one is writing: infatuation, indifference, repugnance, irritation, even hatred itself. I

\(^{54}\) Ibid., 149.
\(^{55}\) Forest, \textit{Love is the Measure}, 116.
\(^{56}\) Ellsberg, \textit{Dorothy Day}, 173.
cannot remember the exact order, but all loves, even the love of God, must be purified by being tested, by going through the Garden of Gethsemane, through the Passion, and at whatever stage we stop, we must start again, go over it again, go through it, or rather meet the same situations and perhaps next time with greater courage. 57

She often returned to the idea that our daily habits helped in either bringing us closer to God or moving us further away from God. In a passage quoted earlier (see page 9), she specifies that a relationship of equals, such as is depicted in the Canticle of Canticles, is the relationship with God for which we should all be striving to live out each day of our lives. In the passage below, she elaborates upon this idea:

A mystic may be called a man in love with God. Not one who loves God, but who is in love with God. And this mystical love, which is an exalted emotion, leads one to love the things of Christ. His footsteps are sacred. The steps of His passion and death are retraced down through the ages. Almost every time you step into a Church you see people making the Stations of the Cross. They meditate on the mysteries of His life, death and resurrection, and by this they are retracing with love those early scenes and identifying themselves with the actors in those scenes. 58

Ultimately, relationship with God is dependent on God’s grace. Day explains that one’s response to God’s love is important for interior transformation, but even these acts cannot be fully understood or easily categorized because God is ultimately far beyond human comprehension. In her words:

The grace of hope, this consciousness that there is in every person that which is of God, comes and goes in a rhythm like that of the sea. The Spirit blows where it listeth, and we travel through deserts and much darkness and doubt. We can only make that act of faith, ‘Lord, I believe, because I want to believe.’ We must remember that faith, like love, is an act of the will, an act of preference. God speaks, He answers these cries in the darkness as He always did. He is incarnate today in the poor, in the bread we break together. We know Him and each other in the breaking of the bread. 59

57 Day, On Pilgrimage, 199.
58 Ellsberg, Dorothy Day, 7.
59 Ibid., 175.
PART III: RELATIONSHIP WITH NEIGHBOR

“We are all one,” Day often writes. “We are one flesh in the Mystical Body, as man and woman are said to be one flesh in marriage. With such a love one would see all things new; we would begin to see people as they really are, as God sees them.”\(^{60}\) Day was deeply shaped by the doctrine of the Mystical Body, rooted in the twelfth chapter of Paul’s letter to the Romans and again articulated in various Vatican documents such as Mortalium Animos and writings of Pope Pius IX and Pope St. Pius X. In another passage she wrote:

True love is delicate and kind, full of gentle perception and understanding, full of beauty and grace, full of joy unutterable. Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, what God hath prepared for those who love Him. And there should be some flavor of this in all our love for others. We are all one. We are one flesh in the Mystical Body, as man and woman are said to be one flesh in marriage. With such a love one would see all things new; we would begin to see people as they really are, as God sees them.\(^ {61}\)

In loving her neighbor Day felt she was most concretely able to love God, and that such acts of love were in themselves a form of prayer. Is it reasonable to assume that, according to Day, loving one’s neighbor is the most appropriate expression of one’s love for God? On the other hand, is it even possible to make the distinction between loving God, loving one’s neighbor, and even loving oneself (which will be discussed in Part IV)? Throughout this section, I will attempt to trace the various ways in which Day understood relationship with “neighbor,” and her definition(s) of neighbor.

Day’s sense of connection with the neighbor had origins in her childhood. She described feeling connected to her community after the San Francisco earthquake, explaining “In times of catastrophe we are all willing to share. In an earthquake,


\(^{61}\) Ibid., 240.
hurricane, war, or plague, people begin to love one another.” She also recalled feeling connected to the poor she discovered on the streets of Chicago while walking her younger siblings around town. She was deeply affected by the descriptions of poverty in Upton Sinclair’s book *The Jungle*, and responded to such feelings of connection with the poor by associating herself with the communist party during her years at the university. She offered an analysis of love “of a radical for his brother” and the eventual connection which she made with religious faith:

> Often there is a mystical element in the love of a radical for his brother, for his fellow worker. It extends to the scene of his sufferings, and those spots where he has suffered and died are hallowed… You know this feeling, as does every other radical in the country. Through ignorance, perhaps, you do not acknowledge Christ’s name. Yet I believe you are trying to love Christ in His poor, in His persecuted ones. Whenever men have laid down their lives for their fellows, they have done it in a measure for Him… ‘Insasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.’ Feeling this as strongly as I did, is it any wonder that I was led finally to the feet of Christ? I do not mean at all that I went around in a state of exaltation or that any radical does. Love is a matter of the will…

Because of the strong connection she had always felt to the suffering poor, she understood her conversion to Catholicism as inevitable. She often cited the French author, Mauriac, in order to explain her analysis of the compassionate work of her radical friends versus professed devotion to Christ lacking proper action. Her radical companions, truly loving and giving people who often vehemently rejected religion, attend to the Works of Mercy much more faithfully than did most Catholics with whom Dorothy had come into contact. She struggled to understand the relationship between faith and the Works of Mercy. Ideally, of course, both should exist complimentarily, but

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62 Ibid., 238.
63 Ellsberg, *Dorothy Day*, 7.
she wrestled with the question of whether professed faith or genuine love demonstrated for others was most important for “salvation”:

It is impossible for any one of those who have real charity in his heart not to serve Christ. Even some of those who think they hate Him have consecrated their lives to Him; for Jesus is disguised and masked in the midst of men, hidden among the poor, among the sick, among prisoners, among strangers. Many who serve Him officially have never known who He was, and many who do not even know His name will hear on the last day the words that open to them the gates of joy. 64

Day encountered God most powerfully in the poor and working class people for whom her heart had always broken. The love she felt for suffering people fueled and strengthened her political and social agendas. When she became a Catholic, her “radical” concerns for the workers did not dissolve, but instead intensified. She felt even more keenly the responsibility to help to build what, in the vocabulary of her newfound faith, is termed the “Kingdom of God” on earth. Insofar as the poor or exploited were genuinely (not metaphorically) Christ being crucified in our world, she felt compelled to work to change the system which allowed for such suffering. She wrote: “We believe in loving our brothers, regardless of race, color, or creed and we believe in showing this love by working, immediately, for better conditions, and ultimately, for the ownership by the workers of the means of productions.” 65 In what seems to be a mixture of “revolutionary” and Christian rhetoric, she articulates how her two seemingly divergent allegiances, to the Church, and to the worker overlapped and complimented one another:

‘All men are brothers.’ How often we hear this refrain, the rallying call that strikes a response in every human heart. These are the words of Christ, ‘call no man master, for ye are all brothers.’ …Going to the people is the purest and best

64 This quote begins “What glorious hope! There are all those who will discover that their neighbor is Jesus himself, although they belong to the mass of those who do not know Christ or who have forgotten Him. And nevertheless they will find themselves well loved…” Ellsberg, Dorothy Day, 6.
65 Ibid., 271.
act in Christian tradition and revolutionary tradition and is the beginning of world brotherhood.\textsuperscript{66}

\textbf{Christ and the Neighbor: Seeing the Neighbor through Christ and Seeing the Neighbor as Christ}

Day spoke of loving the neighbor for Christ’s sake in two ways. First, she described the challenge of seeing and loving people as Christ sees and loves them: “I watched that ragged horde and thought to myself, ‘These are Christ’s poor. He was one of them. He was a man like other men, and He chose His friends amongst the ordinary workers. These men feel they have been betrayed by Christianity.’\textsuperscript{67} She was convinced of the need to love the poor, after Christ’s own example in order to live out Christianity in a truer way, in order to counteract the “betrayal” felt by the poor which was caused by false projections of Christianity.

Secondly, she was dedicated to \textit{actually} seeing Christ revealed in people, and to suffer along with them through their trials. Day believed that Christ continued to be incarnate in the world, alive in each person in a way at once concrete and mysterious. She explained:

\begin{quote}
How do we know we believe? How do we know we indeed have faith? Because we have seen His hands and His feet in the poor around us. He has shown Himself to us in them. We start by loving them for Him, and we soon love them for themselves, each one a unique person, most special! \textsuperscript{68}
\end{quote}

Christ comes alive in humanity, especially in the poor. He is not alive simply in a metaphorical sense but also realistically. Day explained that by loving the poor, we are most concretely able to love Christ incarnate. In another passage, she related: “Christ

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\textsuperscript{66} Day, \textit{The Long Loneliness}, 216.
\textsuperscript{67} Ellsberg, \textit{Dorothy Day}, 41.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 330.
\end{flushright}
Himself came so truly to us this Christmas Day in this baby boy, just as in the persons of the hungry men.”

Abandoning the security of the senses and modern skepticism, actually “seeing” Christ is admittedly difficult for rational human beings. Day responded to this challenge by citing personal experience:

A religion class…asked the question ‘How can you see Christ in people?’ And we only say: it is an act of faith, constantly repeated. It is an act of love, resulting from an act of faith. It is an act of hope, that we can awaken these same acts in their hears, too, with the help of God, and the Works of Mercy, which you, our readers, help us to do, day in and day out over the years.

These two descriptions of Christ’s relation to the neighbor are, of course, interconnected. Seeing people as Christ saw them meant acknowledging God’s presence within them, and it meant striving only to see the good. “When you love people, you see all the good in them, all the Christ in them. God sees Christ, His Son, in us and loves us. And so we should see Christ in others, and nothing else, and love them.”

As Robert Ellsberg, editor of a collection of her writing, explained:

Day understood the Incarnation to be an ongoing fact: God had once and for all assumed our humanity, and we could not hope to know Him without also turning to our neighbors in love. Such a love was not merely a passing glow, but something concrete and active. It meant extending fellowship, sharing bread with the hungry, clothing the naked, standing beside those who were outcast and persecuted.

In loving her neighbor, Christ was acting through Day in order to love the Christ within others. Love for the neighbor is a direct response to love from God. Mercy is part of this love only as an outgrowth of God’s mercy for the lover herself.

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69 Ibid., 159.
70 Ibid., 329-330.
72 Ellsberg, Dorothy Day, xvi.
Day believed that serving Christ through the poor directly affects one’s salvation. “I firmly believe that our salvation depends on the poor with whom Christ identified Himself. ‘Inasmuch as you have not fed the hungry, clothed the naked, sheltered the homeless, visited the prisoner, protested against injustice, comforted the afflicted… you have not done it to Me.’” 73

**Difficult love**

Day explicitly acknowledged that loving the neighbor would not always be easy or natural, however necessary it may be. In fact, she admits that most often loving the neighbor forces us to move beyond our natural inclinations. She insisted, however, that “the final word is love. At times it has been, in the words of Father Zossima, a harsh and dreadful thing, and our very faith in love has been tried through fire.” 74 In another passage, she again addressed this idea of “difficult love”:

> All men are brothers, yes, but how to love your brother or sister when they are sunk in ugliness, foulness, and degradation, so that all the senses are affronted? How to love when the adversary shows a face to you of implacable hatred, or just cold loathing? The very fact that we put ourselves in these situations, I think, attests to our desire to love God and our neighbor. 75

She herself had to struggle to try to love the most difficult members of the community and unfriendly or hostile guests. She insisted that deliberate intention to love only helped one to become a better Christian.

I remember asking Father Roy how God could love a man who came home and beat up his wife and children in a drunken rage… and Father Roy shook his head sadly and said, ‘God loves only Jesus, God sees only Jesus.’ A hard lesson to take, to see Jesus in another, in the prodigal son, or members of a lynch mob. Have we begun to be Christians? 76

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73 Ibid., 271.
75 Ellsberg, *Dorothy Day*, 175.
76 Ibid., 323.
She admitted that seeing only the good in people is a nearly impossible feat without the help of God. She admitted the difficulty in loving those who asked too much of her, those she felt no natural affection towards, and the increased difficulty of trying to love when she was tired and worn out. At the same time, however, she described the strength provided by God and the absolute necessity of fostering love even during difficult times. She articulated such doubts:

...And the burden gets too heavy; there are too many of them; my love is too small; I even feel with terror ‘I have no love in my heart; I have nothing to give them.’ And yet I have to pretend I have. But strange and wonderful, the make believe becomes true. If you will to love someone, you soon do. You will to love this cranky old man, and someday you do. It depends on how hard you try.”77

Day described the act of faith required in order to pretend to love a difficult person against natural inclination. She equated this act of faith to the faith of Abraham described in the Hebrew Bible.

Of course, critics will identify a concern that such generosity is easily and often exploited. In response, Day provided many concrete examples of times when people did indeed take advantage of her or the community at large, when people received services without gratitude, or failed to respect the community. She responded by insisting that we should not be looking for reassurance or reward for our goodness on earth, but should instead trust in our heavenly reward. Citing a concrete example outside of the context of soup kitchens and houses of hospitality, she offered:

What is hard to make the labor leader understand is that we must love even the employer, unjust though he may be, that we must try to overcome his resistance by nonviolent resistance, by withdrawing labor, i.e., by strikes and by boycott. These are nonviolent means, and most effective. We must try to educate him, to convert him. We must forgive him seventy times seven just as we forgive our

fellow worker and keep trying to bring him to a sense of solidarity... It is only through a Christ-like love that man can forgive.  

Day pointed out “It is not decent poor, it is not the decent sinner who was the recipient of Christ’s love.” Neither should we expect the recipients of our love to always be the “decent poor” or the “decent sinners.”

Why did she chose to try to love the difficult person? Was it for God’s sake? Was it out of a sense of duty or responsibility that she felt for her fellow human beings?

She would argue that she tried to love the difficult person in response to the love she herself constantly experienced from God. She offered an insight into the sense of responsibility towards humankind. “God help us if we got just what we deserved! It is a terrible thing to see the ugliness and poverty of the cities, to see what man has made of man.”

God’s overwhelming forgiveness and mercy in the face of human sinfulness rightfully inspired in her a desire to bestow mercy upon others. In another passage, she wrote “I cannot get over the feeling that if we loved enough, if we were patient enough, if we were saintly enough, if we prayed enough, we would move hearts, effect conversions, and would save the lost, in other words.” Loving the neighbor, no matter how difficult the challenge to natural affection, is the responsibility of those who have been given the gift of realizing forgiveness in their own lives.

**Love for the Enemy**

Although Day often referred to the scripture passage “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,” (Luke 6:27-36) she never explicitly identified anyone as her

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78 Ellsberg, Dorothy Day, 8.
79 Ibid., 263.
80 Day, On Pilgrimage, 125.
81 Ibid., 202.
own “enemy.” Those who might have been considered her “enemies,” she instead classified as brothers and sisters who she found more difficult to love (as discussed above). Nevertheless, she challenged Christians to pay special attention to those who had been publicly labeled “enemies” by society during times of war, and who had been too easily dismissed and distanced by such labeling. She spoke of those (sometimes unfairly) branded “enemies” by our nation, explaining:

Of course we do not talk of brothers in wartime. We talk of the enemy, and we forget the Beatitudes and the commandment to love our enemy, do good to them that persecute us. ‘A new commandment I give you, that you love one another as I have loved you.’ One said that who did lay down His life for all men. 82

She insisted that love and faith need be strong enough to look past labels. “Love casts out fear, but we have to get over the fear in order to get close enough to love those we fear…we are all one, all one body, Chinese, Russians, Vietnamese, and He has commanded us to love one another.” 83 Our Christian love also has very concrete implications. “Love is not the starving of whole populations. Love is not the bombardment of open cities. Love is not killing, it is the laying down of one’s life for one’s friends.” 84 She took quite literally the gospel’s challenge to “lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

Such challenges have necessary political implications. On one hand she conceded “We must love our enemy, not because we fear war but because God loves him.” 85 On the other hand, her strict reverence for life guided her towards strong pacifist commitments. She explained that, “If the comfort one achieves results in the death of

82 Ibid., 236.
83 Forest, Love is the Measure, 164-165.
84 Ellsberg, Dorothy Day, 265.
85 Ibid., 322.
millions in the future, then that comfort shall be duly paid for.” 86 Furthermore, she considered it her personal responsibility—and the responsibility of all believing Christians—to work towards peace. We are all should feel responsible to help end war. “We must do penance for what we have done to our brothers… But meanwhile in this hushed room there is prayer, for strength to know and to love and to find out what to do and set our hands to useful work that will contribute to peace, not to war.” 87

Voluntary Poverty

Day chose to live in voluntary poverty in order to share in the suffering of others, and simultaneously live out the gospel message of simplicity and generosity. The choice she made did not stem from a desire for penance, but rather out of a desire to live in solidarity with others who did not have the choice to live otherwise.

She believed that stripping herself of material goods better enabled her to accept spiritual gifts. Detachment from worldly “treasures” allowed for a more genuine appreciation of love and God’s presence in the world. As she explained “The mystery of the poor is this: That they are Jesus, and what you do for them you do for Him. It is the only way we have of knowing and believing in our love. The mystery of poverty is that by sharing in it, making ourselves poor in giving to others, we increase our knowledge of and belief in love.” 88 Living in voluntary poverty requires great leaps of faith in God’s providence. She wrote: “Sometimes I think the purpose of the Catholic Worker, quite

87 Forest, Love is the Measure, 164.
88 Ellsberg, Dorothy Day, 330.
aside from all our social aims, is to show the providence of God, how He loves us.”

Living in voluntary poverty, Catholic Workers have no choice but to trust in God’s providence.

**Solidarity**

Day’s understanding of Christ alive in the world naturally supported her desire to live in solidarity with the poor. She referred to an early church father’s difficult challenge: if you have more than one coat, the second coat really belongs to someone else. In other words, while others were suffering and left wanting, Day did not feel it was appropriate to enjoy the privileges her education and social status might have afforded her. Solidarity is not simply defined as the acknowledgement of injustice or even as the choice to live in material poverty. She wrote:

> Going around and seeing such sights is not enough. To help the organizers, to give what you have for relief, to pledge yourself to voluntary poverty for life so that you can share with your brothers is not enough. One must live with them, share with them their suffering too. Give up one’s privacy, and mental and spiritual comforts as well as physical.  

Although she made every effort to live in solidarity with the poor and marginalized, she understood that she would never be completely freed from her “privilege.” While Day often considered her privilege a burden, she also realized it as a gift (and a particular challenge). Education and social status allowed her a more respected voice in society, and she was able to use this “authority” to communicate the suffering of others more effectively than they might have been able to do for themselves. At age fifty, she made this observation:

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I cannot say that I have been disillusioned. I cannot either say that I yet share the poverty and the suffering of the poor. No matter how much I may live in a slum, I can never be poor as the mother of three, six, ten children is poor (or rich either). I can never give up enough. I have always to struggle against self. I am not disillusioned with myself either. I know my talents and abilities as well as failures. I am fifty, and more than half of my adult life is past. Who knows how much time is left at fifty? Newman says the tragedy is never to have begun. I have been disillusioned, however, this long, long time in the means used by any but the saints to live in this world God has made for us. 91

**Hospitality**

As evidenced in practice and in writing, Day considered hospitality one of the major ministries of the Catholic Worker Movement. Using the models of hospitality from Scripture, specifically drawing inspiration from the unlimited generosity of Mary and Martha and of Peter’s mother-in-law, Day explained:

If that is the way they gave hospitality to Christ it is certain that is the way it should still be given. Not for the sake of humanity. Not because it might be Christ who stays with us, comes to see us, takes up our time. Not because these people remind us of Christ… but because they are Christ, asking us to find room for Him exactly as He did at the first Christmas. 92

She also wrote:

It is no use to say that we are born two thousand years too late to give room to Christ. Nor will those who live at the end of the world have been born too late. Christ is always with us, always asking for room in our hearts…Giving shelter or food to anyone who asks for it, or needs it, is giving it to Christ…If we hadn’t got Christ’s own words for it, it would seem raving lunacy to believe that if I offer a bed and food and hospitality for Christmas—or any other time, for that matter—to some man, woman or child, I am replaying the part of Lazarus or Martha or Mary and that my guest is Christ. 93

She believed that being able to serve Christ in such a way should be considered a privilege: “For a total Christian the goad of duty is not needed—always prodding him to

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93 Ibid.
perform this or that good deed. It is not a duty to help Christ, it is a privilege.”  
Hospitality includes listening, showing kindness, and offering shelter and mercy. First and foremost, hospitality is a reaction to Christ’s teaching that in serving others, one is truly able to serve Christ.

She distinguished “spectacular” from “unspectacular” acts of hospitality. The former are “extreme” and tend not to endure because they do not prepare for failure from the start. The latter, on the other hand, are more likely to endure because they are more prepared to recover from “failure.” Although the intention of “spectacular” acts of hospitality may be sincere and good, most of their “value” lies in their capacity to be learning experiences for those serving. She added “One must have a sturdy endurance and a lively faith that God will repair our own failures and to remember that we are but unprofitable servants and these guests are His guests, and not our own. We are there to wash their feet, as it were, and preferably in silence, which St. Brendan said is two thirds of piety.”  
Hospitality includes the need for acceptance of the mundane and even discouraging experiences along with experiences that are “more rewarding.”

The hospitality offered by Catholic Workers was sometimes accused of being a superficial band-aid that simply covered deeper social injustices rather than addressing the root of problems. Day, however, defended the ministry of hospitality:

Many times we have borne the charge that Houses of Hospitality…do more harm than good. It is said that they perpetuate chronic laziness and drunkenness… Christ exercised His good works among those who today would be lumped with ‘chronics.’ Hospitable in His heart, He took in the sinning woman and the thief beside Him on the Cross. As for perpetuating the social order, we consider the spiritual and corporal Works of Mercy and the following of Christ to be the best revolutionary technique and a means of changing the social order rather than

94 Idid.
perpetuating it. Did not the thousands of monasteries, with their hospitality change the entire social pattern of their day? They did not wait for a paternal state to step in nor did they stand by to see destitution precipitate bloody revolt.96

In the passage below, she evoked the gospel’s call to offer hospitality to others. Ultimately, hospitality must not be judged on its “success” but instead understood as an outpouring of God’s own generosity:

The ‘blessed of the Father’ are those who fed the hungry and thirsty, gave hospitality to others, clothed the naked, visited the sick and the prisoner. They will possess all things, more even that the hundredfold promised. O the importance of hospitality, how it is stressed! In Luke 11 right after teaching the disciples how to pray He goes right on to tell the story of the friend coming to ask for bread for still another fried who has just come ill off a journey. This work of mercy isn’t even for ‘the poor’ but for a friend. Over and over again we are asked to imitate God’s generosity, because everything we have belongs to Him anyway and He can give or take away in the twinkling of an eye. ‘Keep on asking for help for the works of mercy for hospitality,’ He tells us, ‘and if only for your importunity, you will get help.’97

Community

Another integral part of Day’s “radical” Christian vision was the choice to live in community. Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day founded the Catholic Worker movement in order to build “a community in which it is easier for man to be good.” She believed “The goal of the movement is stated simply: ‘to realize in the individual and society the expressed and implied teachings of Christ.’”98 The choice to live in community hearkened back to the example of early Christian communities, and drew inspiration from the convents and monasteries, which were founded as places where there was more freedom to devote time to prayer and contemplation. Authentic Christian life cannot be lived in isolation from others. As she put it famously, “The only answer in this life, to

97 Day, “Fall Appeal, November 1953."
98 Ellsberg, Dorothy Day, xvi.
the loneliness we are all bound to feel, is community. The living together, working together, sharing together, loving God and loving our brother, and living close to him in community so we can show our love for Him.” 99 She felt that the isolation and individualism encouraged by modern society only served to further distance us from God, who is most vividly revealed when we love one another. She admits that “[Living in Catholic Worker communities] has always required an overwhelming act of faith.”

Ultimately, living in community and learning to love others more fully is a choice we must each make. It is a choice to follow the deepest and most pure desires of our hearts. “I believe because I wish to believe, ‘help Thou my unbelief.’ I love because I want to love, the deepest desire of my heart is for love, for union, for communion, for community.”100

Over and over again she insisted that human beings are not meant to live alone. We are bound to one another in order to better learn to how to love. There is a salvific significance in loving the neighbor, the other members of the community, and the people being served by the community.

As Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin envisioned the movement, members of the community were responsible for manifesting love for and faith in God to each other and to the larger society in which they lived. Living out the Christian faith is difficult, made easier only by companionship and proper friendships rooted in the love of Christ. Day issued this challenge to Christians around the world:

I believe that we must reach our brother, never toning down our fundamental oppositions, but meeting him when he asks to be met with a reason for the faith that is in us. ‘We understand because we believe,’ St. Anselm says, and how can our brothers understand with a darkened reason, lacking this faith which would

100 Ellsberg, Dorothy Day, 175.
enlighten their minds? The bridge—it seems to me—is love and the compassion (the suffering together) which goes with all love. Which means the folly of the Cross, since Christ loved men even to that folly of failure.\textsuperscript{101}

True Christian love should inspire in others a respect for and a deeper consideration of the Christian faith. The witness of faith of the Catholic Workers was an important way that the community was able to love its neighbors.

While she was realistic about the difficulties of community living, Day understood that even interpersonal tension and trials are necessary parts of the process of learning to love more deeply. Father Roy, she wrote, “made us know what love meant, and what the inevitable suffering of love meant. He taught us that when there were hatred and rivalries among us, and bitterness and resentments, we were undergoing purifications, prunings, in order to bear a greater fruit of love. He made us feel the power of love, he made us keep our faith in the power of love.”\textsuperscript{102}

\textbf{Church as Community}

Sister Brigid O'Shea Merriman explained “In becoming Catholic, Day sought not only a profound relationship with God but also a sense of community and a means of engaging in social reform.”\textsuperscript{103} Day explained the strength and support she felt as a member of the Church:

I had heard many who would say that they wanted to worship God in their own way and did not need a Church in which to praise Him, nor a body of people with whom to associate themselves. But I did not agree to this. My very experience as a radical, my whole make-up, led me to want to associate myself with others, with the masses, in loving and praising God.\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{101} Ellsberg, Dorothy Day, 273.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 135.
\textsuperscript{104} Day, The Long Loneliness, 138.
She was initially attracted to the Roman Catholic Church because of the makeup of its community. As she explains, “I felt that the Church was the Church of the poor, that St. Patrick’s had been built from the pennies of servant girls, that it cared for the emigrant, it established hospitals, orphanages, day nurseries, houses of the Good shepherd, homes for the aged…” 105 Just as the establishment of community as part of the Catholic Worker Movement was important, the community of the Church, comprised of the saints of the tradition as well the living community, was important to Day’s identity as a Catholic.

Natural Affection

Although Day wrote very explicitly about the necessity of surpassing natural affection in order to love the difficult neighbor, how she came to terms with the natural affection she herself felt is much less explicitly addressed in her writing. Her descriptions of her inter-personal relationships with her daughter, family, friends, and former lovers are very enigmatic. She seemed very suspicious of human friendship and affection as potential traps of selfishness which had the ability to distance us from God. She also worried about close ties blinding one to the needy stranger.

Rarely does she discuss the role of her family in her life, especially after she left home for the first time. She often romanticizes the positive elements of her childhood and young adult life. She describes her father as protective of his children and writes that he was particular about their friends and the books they were allowed to read. Because she was a woman, he did not support her work, even though she chose to work as a journalist following in his footsteps. As a result, he was absent from her later life.

105 Ellsberg, Dorothy Day, p. 39.
This strained relationship with her father certainly influenced the succession of unhealthy romantic relationships she had with men. Soon out of college she became involved with a journalist, Lionel Moise, who was very chauvinistic and refused to support her even when she became pregnant with his child (in fact, he ordered her to have an abortion). Very soon after her tragic relationship with Moise ended, Day married a significantly older, wealthy Greenwich Village resident, Barkley Tobey who took her on a tour of Europe, but they promptly divorced upon return to the states.

In many ways, her “common-law marriage” to Forster Batterham was more “healthy” than her previous two serious romantic relationships. As she repeatedly pointed out, he taught her to appreciate the beauty of nature, which she considered to be a major factor in her conversion. Unfortunately, her conversion also meant the end of their relationship:

I have always felt that it was life with [Forster] that brought me natural happiness, that brought me to God…His ardent love of creation brought me to the Creator of all things. But when I cried out to him, ‘how can there be no God, when there are all these beautiful things,’ he turned from me uneasily…I could not see that love between man and woman was incompatible with love of God. God is the Creator, and the very fact that we were begetting a child made me have a sense that we were made in the image and likeness of God, co-creators with him…Because I was grateful for love, I was grateful for life, and living with Forster made me appreciate it and even reverence it more.

Forster distrusted all institutions. He did not believe in marriage, and he feared bringing children into such a broken world. Though she loved him deeply, she was unable to continue living with him once she decided to become Catholic because he vehemently disapproved of her association with the Church. She wrote:

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Footnotes:

106 For a more detailed description of Dorothy’s relationship with Lionel Moise, please see Forest, Love is the Measure, 48.
107 For a more detailed description of Dorothy’s relationship with Barkley Tobey, please see Ibid., 51.
I was living a married life, spending a good deal of time reading and going through a painful and tortured, yet joyful process of conversion to a public acknowledgement of faith. It was painful because I had to give up a common-law husband with whom I was very much in love and with whom I still feel a most loving friendship. 109

After her conversion, Day committed herself to a life of celibacy. She wrote: “To offer the suffering of celibacy, temporary or permanent, to the Lord is to make use, in the best possible way, of man’s greatest joy.” 110 She considered ideal relationship with Christ to be the relationship between the lovers described in the Canticle of Canticles. She wrote “I loved, in other words, and like all women in love, I wanted to be united in my love.” 111

Although she chose the path of celibacy in her own life, she often writes of the beauty of natural human love. She wrote “Being ‘in love’ is a reflection of the love God has for each and every one of us.” 112 The sexual expression of this natural love between man and woman is a gift of God:

The act of sex in its right order in the love life of the individual has been used in Old and New Testament as the symbol of the love between God and Man. Sexual love in its intensity makes all things new and one sees the other as God sees him. And this is not illusion. In those joyful days when one is purified by this single heartedness, this purity of vision, one truly sees the essence of the other, and this mating of flesh and spirit, the whole man and the whole woman, is the only way we know what the term ‘beatific vision’ means. It is the foretaste we have of heaven and all other joys of the natural world are intensified by it, hearing, seeing, knowing. 113

During the early years of the movement, Ammon Hennesey, a worker who she deeply respected, fell in love with her. Jim Forest explained:

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109 Ellsberg, Dorothy Day, 149.
111 Ellsberg, Dorothy Day, 39.
112 Ibid., 143.
For years, [Ammon Hennesey] was ardently in love with her. He left only when he was drawn to another member of the community. While the love lasted, he poured it out to Dorothy in frequent notes and letters, even while expressing (one senses with reluctance) his admiration for Dorothy’s celibacy. Dorothy’s feelings about Ammon are obscure. She was in her fifties and was still afflicted with a loneliness that was made only more acute by the admiration so many had for her. It may well be that she was grateful that Ammon not only found her admirable but attractive.114

It is unclear whether Hennesey’s feelings for Day were reciprocated, but in any case, she held steadfastly to her commitment to celibacy. Forest mentioned that Day carefully saved all the letters that Hennesey wrote to her, though she never responded to them. Day often quoted Fr. Roy in saying “If you wish to grow in love, in supernatural love, then all natural love must be pruned, as the vine is pruned. It may not look as though love were there, but have faith.” 115 This ascetic philosophy profoundly affected her life as well as her writing.

As mentioned above, Day’s relationship with her father was strained. Her family was featured prominently in the narratives of her early life, but they are very rarely even mentioned in any of her later writing, with the exception of reflections she made upon the death of her mother and her sister.

Day was grateful to be with her mother as she was dying, explaining “How necessary it is for one of their loved ones to be beside them [upon their deathbed], to pray for them, to offer up prayers for the unceasingly, as well as to do all those little offices one can.”116 She also wrote of her sister’s death, recalling (briefly) that she considered her sister a friend, and that despite their differences they had loved each other.

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114 Forest, Love is the Measure, 123.
115 Ellsberg, Dorothy Day, 131.
Day’s relationship with her daughter, Tamar Teresa, is also fascinating. Although she describes in flowery detail the joy of Tamar’s birth, her relationship with Tamar was made difficult because of the conditions in which they were living. During Tamar’s childhood, there were always other people competing for Day’s attention, and Tamar was often sent away to boarding school or camps. Tamar wrote “I think Dorothy was very aware of the fact that you can’t do both well [parenting and being a devoted Catholic Worker], and she was right.” Later in the interview, Tamar explained “She loved her family so much, and in so many, many ways she kept me going,” but she also described the tension she felt in trying to live up to Day’s standards. “She wanted everybody to be like saints. I mean, who can measure up to that?”

Day wrote “No matter how many times I gave up mother, father, husband, brother, daughter, for His sake, I had to do it over again.” She consistently seems to have chosen to prioritize the work of the movement ahead of her responsibilities as a mother. Tamar left the Catholic Worker community to marry very young, perhaps out of a desire to find the stability she had never experienced during her childhood. For the most part Day seemed to deny her natural affections (for Forster, Tamar, perhaps Hennesey), and instead constantly strove to “transcend” her natural affections in order to love God more “purely.”

In Day’s writing about friendship, there is a great change in her description of friendship before and after her conversion. Although she maintained contact with a few old friends upon her entrance into the Church, for the most part she seems to have rejected ‘natural’ friendships after her conversion as a distraction, perhaps as a form of improper love of neighbor. She wrote of her life before conversion:

117 Quoting Tamar Day Hennessy; Margot Patterson, “An Extraordinary, Difficult Childhood,” (National Catholic Reporter, 7 March 2003), 14.
118 Day, The Long Loneliness, 239.
There were too many people passing through my life—too many activities—too much pleasure (not happiness). I have been passing through some years of fret and strife, beauty and ugliness, days and even weeks of sadness and despair, but seldom has there been the quiet beauty and happiness I have now. I thought all those years that I had freedom, but now I feel that I had neither real freedom nor even a sense of what freedom meant.\footnote{Ellsberg, \textit{Dorothy Day}, 22.}

Within this framework, she surely considered those who supported and inspired her work within the movement her friends, and these friendships she would have considered proper expressions of neighborly love. She considered Peter Maurin a friend, and felt a profound sense of loss at his death. Although she intellectually accepted the necessity of death and detachment from individuals, Maurin was her most steady spiritual companion, and his death was difficult for her to endure. As she explained “No matter how much you expect a death, no matter how much you may regard it as a happy release, there is a gigantic sense of loss.”\footnote{Ibid., 125.} Day’s friendship with Maurin was a concrete way in which she experienced God’s love. Their friendship was one of mutuality and self-gift.

At the end of \textit{The Long Loneliness}, Day describes companionship as a good: “We cannot love God unless we love each other, and to love we must know each other. We know [God] in the breaking of the bread, and we are not alone anymore. Heaven is a banquet and life is a banquet, too, even with a crust where there is companionship.”\footnote{\textit{Day, The Long Loneliness}, 285.} This companionship most likely refers to reciprocal relationships within the Christian community.

Day’s understanding of the proper way of loving the neighbor is complicated and encompasses a family of ideas. She rejected natural human love that was not grounded in divine love. She was suspicious of following natural inclinations and seemed to go to
great lengths to avoid them. She was careful to avoid relationships in which she felt her self was being indulged, relationships in which happiness and fulfillment in human terms was more important than the fulfillment of God’s will. At the same time, she was conscious of trying to live out the commandment to love others as fully and universally as possible. She wrote:

Much as we may want to strike our roots in, we are doomed to disappointment and unhappiness unless we preserve our detachment. It is the paradox of the Christian life, to hate father and mother, sister and brother and children on the one hand, if they stand between us and God, and on the other hand to follow the teaching of St. Paul, ‘if any man have not care of his own, and especially those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel;’ not to be solicitous for the things of the world, and yet to do everything with love, for the love of God.122

For the most part, when Day referred to loving her neighbor, she emphasized the importance of serving the difficult neighbor as the most concrete way of reciprocating love from God through loving Christ as revealed in the neighbor.

PART IV: LOVE FOR SELF

Day wrote “If we cannot deny the self in us, kill the self-love, as He commanded, and put on the Christ life, then God will do it for us. We must become like Him. Love must go through these purgations.” What exactly does she intend when referring to the need to “kill the self-love”? In another passage, she speaks of “dying in order to live, putting off the old man and putting on Christ”:

I wanted to be poor, chaste, and obedient. I wanted to die in order to live, to put off the old man and put on Christ. I loved, in other words, and like all women in love, I wanted to be united in my love. Why should not Forster be jealous? Any man who did not participate in this love would, of course, realize my infidelity, my adultery. In the eyes of God, any turning toward creatures to the exclusion of Him is adultery, and so it is termed over and over again in Scripture. I loved the Church for Christ made visible. Not for itself, because it was so often a scandal to me.

Although this harsh language seems to imply self-contempt, I would argue that this is not really the case. In the passage below, she speaks of a painful “dying to self” as necessary to gain greater understanding of the “supernatural love” of God:

I expect that all our natural love for each other which is so warming and so encouraging and so much a reward of this kind of work and living, will be killed, put to death painfully by gossip, intrigue, suspicion, distrust, etc., and that this painful dying to self and the longing for the love of others will be rewarded by a tremendous increase of supernatural love amongst us all.

Day’s writing seems to imply that if one conforms her will to the will of God, her love for the authentic self will then actually be love for God. Here, denying the “self” means denying human gratification in lieu of a supernatural reward. She does not link such sacrifices and the “painful dying to self” to an ascetic desire for discomfort or happiness,

123 Ibid., 235.
124 Ellsberg, Dorothy Day, 39.
but instead is suggesting that these actions ultimately lead to a more genuine and pure happiness and sharing of love.

In writing about retreats, Day pays special attention to their value as a way that she is able to care for “her self.” The time she took to rejuvenate herself was a clear manifestation of proper self-love. At the same time, in her choice to deny the desire to live with Forster in order to conform her will to God’s will, she seemed in some sense to be denying herself. In fact, however, this was to choose to give priority to the deeper part of herself that yearned to be in right relation with God over the more superficial part of herself that desired close romantic and interpersonal love. Both are valid and valuable, but the latter cannot be given priority over the former.

As may be inferred, “self-love” as Day describes it is very different from popular definitions of self-love as appreciation and admiration for oneself, and the desire for self-preservation. While her definition does leave room for appreciation of the mystery within oneself as a sign of God’s presence in one’s life, it does not seem to include physical beauty, nor does it advocate the quest for physical comfort. Day quotes St. Teresa of Ávila in The Way of Perfection on this matter:

The first thing we have to do, and that at once, is to rid ourselves of love for this body of ours—and some of us pamper our natures so much that this will cause us no little labor, while others are so concerned about their health that the trouble these things give us is amazing… Resolve, sisters, that it is to die for Christ, and not to practice self indulgence for Christ, that you have come here [the convent]. The devil tells us that self indulgence is necessary if we are to carry out and keep the Rule of our Order… Learn to suffer a little for the love of God without telling everyone about it… Believe me, my daughters, once we begin to subdue these miserable bodies of ours, they give us much less trouble…And believe me, slight as it may seem in comparison with other things, this resolution is much more important than we may think; for if we continually make it, day by day, we shall gain dominion over the body… No one will regret having gone through trials in order to gain tranquility and self-mastery.126

Loving oneself, then, certainly does not mean prizing one’s existence, or indulging oneself but rather being content with one’s existence insofar as it is part of God’s will and plan, and having control over sinful desires.
PART VI: COUNTER-ARGUMENT

“I never liked the appeal to enlightened self-interest,” Day wrote in one passage.

She continued:

I wanted to love my fellows; I loved the poor with compassion. I could not be happy unless I shared poverty, lived as they did, suffered as they did... I can never give up enough. I have always to struggle against self. I am not disillusioned with myself either. I know my talents and abilities as well as failures. I am fifty, and more than half of my adult life is past. Who knows how much time is left at fifty? Newman says the tragedy is never to have begun. I have been disillusioned, however, this long, long time in the means used by any but the saints to live in this world God has made for us. 127

While this statement does not demonstrate self-interestedness, neither is it self-deprecating. Some critics, such as Anders Nygren, might argue that Day was incorrect in identifying self-love as a necessary component of Christian love. He defined “love” as manifested in essentially two forms, eros and agape.

Self-love is the basic form of all love that bears the stamp of Eros. Love for God and love for one’s neighbour (or for any other object than God) can alike be reduced to self-love. Neighbourly love, for which there would seem to be no room in the realm of Eros, is none the less provided with a satisfactory motive in the thought that it represents a stage in one’s own ascent to higher things. And love for God is firmly founded on the conviction that He is the satisfaction of all man’s needs and desires. 128

In contrast, he defined agape as such:

Agape...excludes all self-love. Christianity does not recognize self-love as a legitimate form of love. Christian love moves in two directions, towards God and towards its neighbour; and in self-love it finds its chief adversary, which must be fought and conquered. It is self-love that alienates man from God, preventing him from sincerely giving himself up to God, and it is self-love that shuts up a man’s heart against his neighbour... We must not, of course, overlook the fact that when a place is sought for self-love within the context of Agape, it is always a higher, refined and spiritualized self-love, a love for one’s ‘ideal self’ that is intended and that a distinction is therefore drawn between a legitimate and a sinful self-love.

127 Ibid., 204.
128 Nygren, Agape and Eros, 217.
But not even this distinction can prevent the love from losing its Agape-character. Agape recognizes no kind of self-love as legitimate.\textsuperscript{129}

Nygren was preoccupied with the corruption of love. He rejected the legitimacy of any self-love. Nygren explained that in all human and natural forms of love there is a measure of desire and that all such desire is self-centered and sinful. He was careful to make a distinction between the need for faith in God rather than love for God. Day’s striving for proper love for God is in direct conflict with Nygren’s assertions. She wrote:

The love of God and man becomes the love of equals, as the love of the bride and the bridelgroom is the love of equals, and not the love of the sheep for the shepherd, or the servant for the master, or the son for the father. We may stand at times in the relationship of the servant, and at other times in that of son, as far as our feelings go and in our present state. But the relationship we hope to attain to is the love of the Canticle of Canticles.\textsuperscript{130}

Nygren warned against the desire to learn to love God in any sense. The love Day spoke of could essentially be defined in Nygren’s vocabulary as erotic and human, and essentially improper and selfish. He wrote:

Eros is primarily man’s love; God is the object of Eros. Even when it is attributed to God, Eros is patterned on human love. Eros is determined by the quality, the beauty and worth, of its object; it is not spontaneous, but ‘evoked,’ ‘motivated.’ Eros recognizes value in its object—and loves it...Agape is primarily God’s love; God is Agape. Even when it is attributed to man, Agape is patterned on Divine love. Agape is sovereign in relation to its object, and is directed to both ‘the evil and the good’; it is spontaneous, ‘overflowing,’ ‘unmotivated.’ Agape loves—and creates value in its object.\textsuperscript{131}

Is Day’s understanding of a proper love of self and neighbor as a continuation of love for God fundamentally flawed and wrought with improper human desire for satisfaction from God? Day’s own position was that natural human love can be

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 217
\textsuperscript{130} Day, On Pilgrimage, 235.
\textsuperscript{131} Nygren, Agape and Eros, 210.
transformed by grace so that it can lead one to a deeper and more authentic love for God, even an eros for God.

Stephen Post, author of *Christian Love and Self-Denial* would fundamentally disagree with Nygren on this point. His writing instead supports Day’s understanding of the need for proper self-love within Christian ethics:

The ideal of Christian love which I defend is one defined by complete and continual exchange as well as affirmation, a perfect interaction and communion, inclusive of true self-love. Participation in the mutual good is the irreplaceable basis of moral growth. Granted, Christian love does assume the posture of radical self-denial when the circular flow of give and take is interrupted; yet finally, the true meaning of love is not the cultivation of disinterestedness. There is sublime beauty in the harmony and joy of communion which simply cannot be dismissed as sub-Christian.132

He later wrote “If the Christian transcends all love of self, then the ideal of communion is undercut completely, for what is communion if not the reciprocal meeting of needs and wants? The transcending of all self-love is only possible if the last vestige of inclination and desire is driven from the self.”133 Day’s understanding of self-love also finds support in the fourteenth chapter of Book XIX of Augustine’s *City of God*. He wrote:

God teaches him two chief commandments, the love of God and the love of neighbor. In these precepts man finds three beings to love, namely, God, himself, and his fellow man, and knows that he is not wrong in loving himself so long as he loves God. As a result, he must help his neighbor (whom he is obliged to love as himself) to love God… He must wish, moreover, to be similarly helped by his fellow man, in case he himself needs such assistance. Out of all this love he will arrive at peace, as much as in him lies, with every man—at that human peace which is regulated fellowship. Right order here means, first, that he harm no one, and second, that he help whomever he can.134

Augustine understood love of the true self as necessary and implicit in order to properly love God and neighbor.

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133 Ibid., 112.
Day’s theology gives primacy to love for God. God loves humanity, and all other loves, properly ordered, should emanate from this divine love. As such, Day defined proper human existence as living in accord with God’s love, which is manifested in the divine will, and in the proper expression of love for God, love for neighbor, and love for self. Day understood healthy attention to and appreciation for the self as essential to a full appreciation of God’s goodness and grace.

According to Nygren, God’s love for humanity forgives but does not change human sinfulness. Day instead appreciated God’s grace as elevating and sanctifying. In cooperation with grace, we are healed. In turn, we are better able to love. God’s love is transformative and restorative. Grace enables us to love and appreciate the good in our neighbor and to love our sanctified self. This same position is expressed aptly in a letter Thomas Merton wrote to Day, dated December 20, 1961, “Christ the Lord is the Word Who has assumed our nature, which is one in all of us. He has perfectly fulfilled and so to speak transfigured and elevated not only nature but the natural law which is, in its most basic expression, treating our brother as one who has the same nature as we have.”135

Roger Haight also wrote about the transformative power of grace for humanity. Using the theology of Augustine and Aquinas as points of reference, he offered:

The grace of Christ constitutes human autonomy and expands human freedom giving it a new depth and power. And it overcomes the egoism and selfishness that is sin. This understanding of grace as a dynamic liberating force for freedom and action for the good remained the dominating conception of grace right up to the thirteenth century when, around the time of Aquinas, the understanding of grace underwent a dramatic shift.136

Grace in the Augustinian tradition was healing, sanative, medicinal; it straightened out human motivation and will. Grace in Aquinas is before all else

elevating. This is the primary need in human nature and the primary role that grace fulfills according to the logic of viewing human existence as nature oriented to an end that transcends its created force and capacity…Grace is inserted into a system in which the end of human existence is seen as absolutely transcending human nature and its proportionate power of activity so that a new elevating nature is required proportionate to that supernatural end.\footnote{Ibid., 61.}

Day’s writing has historical roots in the theology of both Augustine and Aquinas, which provide a comprehensive interpretation of proper love for God, love for neighbor and love for self as interconnected and interdependent.
PART V: INTEGRATION OF LOVES AND CONCLUSION

Christian ethics of love is generally divided into two schools of thought: the sacramental and the dialectical. The sacramental view of love finds a basic harmony and complimentarity in the love of God, neighbor, and self. Sin disrupts this harmony and grace restores and elevates it. The dialectical view of love, on the other hand, tends to see perpetual competition and conflict between love of God, neighbor, and self. One can either love God or the self, love either the neighbor or the self.138

Are love for God, self and neighbor related sacramentally or dialectically in Day’s thought? Day regarded God as the origin of all love, especially as both Creator and Redeemer. Her position often sounds dialectical because she draws from ascetical literature focused on “reforming the sinner.” However, I would argue that she in fact works more fundamentally from a sacramental perspective. The deepest inspiration of her thought and piety was sacramental. She argued that there must be a proper ordering of love, with the love of God the center of all other loves and action. This love for God is also present in love for neighbor and love for self. When one loves her neighbor, one simultaneously is able to love God. Day explained that it is part of Christian responsibility to act upon the grace given to us by God. Appreciation for God’s love is naturally reciprocated in a commitment to loving others and ourselves.

What should really set us apart from all other men is our love. ‘See how they love one another.’ In the Bible which is still, after all, the Book for all who have faith, the relationship between God and man is described as that between animal and master, between servant and lord, between child and father, and between husband and wife. Right now, by our baptism we have been made sons of God. But who does not aspire to the joys of marriage, that love which makes all things new? Who does not long to dissolve and be with Christ? The pleasures of the beatific

union are described as those of the wedding banquet or an embrace... And strange and wonderful to think of, we should have something like this love for all creatures—for mate, for friend, for child, for enemy too—the kind of love that makes all things new. For God first. ‘My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.’ The love of the will, the memory, the understanding, and the love of the flesh... How much there is to learn of love, that feeling of the body and soul, that teaches us what God is, that He is love. 139

God is most present in friendships. Friendships are most genuine when God is consciously recognized as their origin and center; through God’s love they are “made new.”

All the other loves I have must be a sample of the love of God. All the world and everything in it must be samples of the love of God. We must love the world intensely, but not for itself. We are human beings; we do not cease to be human beings, but we are baptized human beings. At death we are going to join God with the amount of love we have gathered for Him. What we have when we die we will have for all eternity. 140

Stated in another way, Day challenged us to strive to experience everything through God, and to have the courage to live in conformity with God’s will. Authentic love is theocentric. She wrote, “All the things we can love outside of God are three: the world goods, body goods, soul goods. Goods of the soul are friendship, love honor, praises, glory. The goods of the world and body are obvious. Every action has an end, a means and a result. He commends their use for God. He condemns their use for natural motives.” 141

Day believed that God was revealed through relationship, in nature and also through humanity’s ability to “create.” God’s glory is revealed in the beauty of paintings and sculpture and in the emotion expressed in a symphony or opera, just as God’s love is manifested in friendships between people. She offered:

139 Day, On Pilgrimage, 205.
140 Ibid. 192.
141 Ibid., 195.
Faith is required when we speak of obedience. Faith in a God who created us, a God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Faith in a God to Whom we owe obedience for the very reason that we have been endowed with freedom to obey or disobey. Love, Beauty, Truth, all the attributes of God which we see reflected about us in creatures, in the very works of man himself whether it is bridges or symphonies wrought by his hands, fill our hearts with such wonder and gratitude that we cannot help but obey and worship. Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief. My faith may be the size of a mustard seed but even so, even aside from its potential, it brings with it a beginning of love, an inkling of love, so intense that human love with all its heights and depths pales in comparison. Even seeing through a glass darkly makes one want to obey, to do all the Beloved wishes, to follow Him to Siberia, to Antarctic wastes, to the desert, to prison, to give up one’s life for one’s brothers since He said ‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto me.’

Although Day admitted that God is revealed in countless wonderful ways, ultimately, she herself was most drawn to a personalist God revealed through other people. She explained, “I am sitting here in the church on Mott Street writing this in Your presence. Out on the streets it is quiet, but You are there, too, in the Chinese, in the Italians, these neighbors we love. We love them because they are our brothers, as Christ is our Brother, and God our Father.”

“What else do we want,” Day asked,

each one of us, except to love and be loved, in our families, in our work, in all our relationships? God is Love. Love casts out fear. Even the most ardent revolutionist, seeking to change the world, to overturn the tables of the money changers, is trying to make a world where it is easier for people to love, to stand in that relationship to each other. We want with all our hearts to love, to be loved. And not just in the family but to look upon all as our mothers, sisters, brothers, children. It is when we love the most intensely and most humanly that we can recognize how tepid is our love for others. The keenness and intensity of love brings with it suffering, of course, but joy too, because it is a foretaste of heaven.

Ultimately, we are called to become agents of grace for one another. We are bound together in our search to reveal God, as agapic love, more fully in this world. Our lives

142 Ellsberg, Dorothy Day, 171.
143 Ibid., 261.
and our selves must become sacraments for other people. God has given us one another as a foretaste of heaven.
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