

## Catholic Allies in Truth

### DOROTHY DAY - A CONTROVERSIAL FIGURE

by David Rippe

On November 13, American bishops unanimously backed the advancement of the cause of Dorothy Day through the process leading to sainthood. Day, an American social worker and anti-war activist, died in 1980. She was first proposed for canonization by the late Cardinal John O'Connor of New York. Her case is now in "Servant of God" status, awaiting further developments.

For her charity work, Day is popular with many Catholics, especially clergy, some of whom find her iconic. In 1933, together with fellow social activist Peter Maurin, she founded the Catholic Worker Movement which is perhaps best known for its 201 U.S. communities that feature soup kitchens and various other ministries to the poor and disadvantaged.

But while she has the unanimous support of the bishops, Day is a controversial figure among many rank and file Catholics who do not consider her an acceptable role model. For them, she exemplifies the archetypal "liberal Catholic" or "social justice Catholic." These terms refer to individuals who are often disposed to try to change the Church in various ways and who are strongly animated and influenced by left-leaning political ideology. Many such Catholics became emboldened following Vatican II and made chimerical interpretations of its documents.

Chief among the objections to Day's nomination for sainthood is the belief that she embraced the doctrines of Marxism and made them the framework of her social activism. Carol Byrne, a British researcher, has investigated Day's life extensively and has chronicled her activities and writings, along with those of Peter Maurin, in *The Catholic Worker Movement, 1933-1980: A Critical Analysis* (AuthorHouse UK Ltd.) While Day's defenders insist that she fully disavowed Marxism after her conversion to Catholicism, Byrne's research leads her to conclude otherwise. Byrne contends that Day continued to espouse Marxist ideals after her conversion, blending them with her Catholic beliefs, and that she affiliated with individuals and organizations of similar persuasion. Tragically, in the years that followed, communism spread globally, taking over massive chunks of the world and decimating human freedom. Courageous opposition to it was badly needed.

Day's supporters argue that her empathy with communists' ideas was simply borne of a mutual concern for the poor and how best to help them. However, the great irony of communism is that it is not about helping the poor—it is about amassing power and equalizing and neutralizing individuals in order to make them serfs of a

Godless state. Joseph Stalin's "Great Purge" left no doubt about the level of compassion that exists in communism.

Communists seize control through force and also through deceit. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many intellectuals and critics of America's capitalist system and market economy became "fellow travelers" when they were naively seduced by communist propaganda disseminated by the Soviet Union, Cuba and other Marxist states.

Despite the writings of numerous popes on the evils of socialism and its incompatibility with Christianity, its threats have been severely downplayed if not all but forgotten by the western world. Yet it remains the system of choice for those who, driven by a fanatical obsession with forced human equality, seek control over the lives of men. In the former Soviet Union and eastern Europe, the great socialist experiment was temporarily defeated and discredited in the late 1980s, principally through the efforts of Pope John Paul II and U.S. President Ronald Reagan. But this primary tool of evil has not disappeared; it has merely gone dormant, simmering on the back burner, awaiting the day when human weakness and naiveté will again permit it to rise and flourish.

Socialism is not a solution to poverty. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Godless totalitarian governments driven by socialist ideals ruthlessly terminated 100 million human lives around the world- a fact still ignored by elitists, educators and politicians who, while professing concern for the downtrodden, nonetheless eagerly advance the deadly agenda. In Latin America, proponents of liberation theology have tried for decades to weave Marxist dogma into Catholicism, hoping to lend credibility to the former.

Galvanized by the strictures of political correctness, this gradual softening seems to have dulled post-modern sensitivities. With socialist ideas no longer taboo in polite discussion circles, the pressure is off, or at least it has shifted elsewhere. One has to wonder: Would enthusiasm for Day be as high if, instead of Marxism, she had been drawn to and influenced by the ideals of something equally egregious but more politically volatile and unpopular—the white supremacist movement, for example, or the Ku Klux Klan?

It is unlikely that many would object to the Church giving Day special recognition for her exemplary charity work, but sainthood is another matter entirely until the serious questions about her political philosophy and affiliations are resolved beyond reasonable doubt.

Communists, after all, have persecuted and suppressed the Catholic Church and will continue to do so.

Sadly, while Europe begins to crumble under the weight of its entitlement societies and secular libertine attitudes, people are looking less to God and more than ever to the all-powerful state as their salvation. Never before has there been a more urgent need for heroic saints who have bravely and vociferously denounced socialism, together with all its tricks and disguises.

Those among the laity who seek the truth by questioning Day's eligibility for sainthood are doing precisely what they and Church officials should be doing - exercising prudence and extreme caution in a very serious matter. Hopefully, the process of scrutiny will be thorough and will not casually dismiss the findings of Byrne and others simply because they run counter to a wave of popularity. If the allegations against Day are faulty, they should be addressed and disproved—but not ignored. Too much is at stake.

The honor of sainthood is conferred on servants of impeccable goodness who have truly washed their robes white. The process must not be fast-tracked to serve the adherents of any bandwagon or cult of personality. If Day is worthy of beatification and canonization, then let nothing obstruct it - but let all the evidence be fairly and objectively examined beforehand.

Surely, Day herself, like any faithful Catholic, would insist that all stones be overturned in this most critical process. Let us pray fervently that the examination of her life will be fair and thorough, and tempered with wisdom, and that the truth will prevail.

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