New Blackfriars

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Making the Encyclicals Click: Catholic Social Teaching and Radical Traditions

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Abstract

The radical Catholic movement that takes its name from the *Catholic Worker* paper and the communities inspired by it has had an important influence on the life of the Church both in the United States, where it was founded, and elsewhere in the world. This paper looks at ways in which its distinctive theological vision and praxis can revive and focus the presentation and living-out of Catholic Social teaching in this country – particularly with regard to unconditional love for the poor, a commitment to pacifism, and a grounding of this work in Catholic sacramental and devotional life.

Keywords

Catholic Social Teaching, encyclicals, Catholic Worker, Dorothy Day, Peter Maurin, Personalism, Pacifism

Occasionally at this conference people have referred to Catholic Social Teaching having reached a stage of maturity. Sometimes it is claimed that it is no longer 'the Church's best kept secret' but that it has, rather, 'come of age', which is also linked, as some have remarked, to the publication of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* in 2004.[1] At an earlier stage, when presumably the tradition was childlike or adolescent, social teaching could cause outrage and anger, as children and adolescents often do. When the Bishops of England and Wales published their ground-breaking document *The Common Good* at the end of 1996, it caused a great deal of outrage (in the same way as the Church of England had done in the 1980s with the *Faith in the City* report) – outrage that Christian

[1] London: Burns and Oates. Other lectures in this conference have drawn attention to some criticisms which can be made of this document. I have another one: permanent deacons are expected by the Church to have a specialist knowledge of the Church's social teaching and this is supposed to be reflected in their formation, presumably because many of them are in secular employment. This is made clear in official documents from the Holy See, and yet they are not mentioned once in the *Compendium*.

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leaders should seek to write about topics considered 'political'. Even earlier the best known critic of social teaching in the 1930s, who had been baptised a Catholic in Austria, once said: 'When they [the churches] attempt by any other means – writings, encyclicals, etc. – to assume rights which belong only to the State, we will push them back into their own proper activity.'[2]

Over the years I think many Catholics have at gut level shared Hitler's view, but nowadays, partly because of the success of the *Common Good* and campaigns by groups like CAFOD, far fewer people question the right and freedom of Catholics and other Christians[3] to talk of these things, even when they disagree with what is being said. But the lack of outrage means that what is said is no longer seen as a threat. I think that in this country, at any rate, much of the tradition has become harmless and inoffensive. For example, key terms of the tradition – solidarity, subsidiarity, the Common Good (above all), even the 'option for the poor' – have become like motherhood and apple pie. Everyone can sign up to them, and politicians sometimes like to use them. People have forgotten what they meant when they were first formed; they have become slogans which can mean whatever the hearer wants. It is the contention of this paper that only by engaging with the most radical and authentic parts of the tradition can we keep social teaching 'on track' and recover something that I think we have lost.

The most radical 'movement': The *Catholic Worker*

I am going to look at only the most radical contemporary Catholic movement which has a bearing on Catholic social teaching: the *Catholic Worker* movement, founded by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin in New York in early 1933. I use the term 'movement' in a very qualified and hesitant way: in accordance with the principles of personalism, the 'houses of hospitality' and other communities which were formed in relationship to the CW paper eschewed organisation and formal structures, and still do. I am not implying, then, that I think that the paper and the communities constitute a 'movement' in a formal sense – it's simply shorthand. The distinctive *Catholic Worker* papers and the communities that bear the name do have recognisable features. First of all a disclaimer: although I have studied Day and the CW movement a lot in recent years, I am conscious that any picture of what is basically a very practical Christian movement really ought to be painted by someone living its life. But Day did once write

[2] Adolf Hitler, May Day address 1937, quoted in E. C. Helmreich, *The German Churches under Hitler* (Detroit 1979), p. 282.

[3] Many courses on *The Common Good* were organised by other Christian churches.

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of those who came into contact with her great mentor Peter Maurin without being able to join CW communities that 'though they themselves fail to go the whole way, their faces are turned at least toward the light.' I hope that the CW movement may turn our faces toward the light.

I don't want to spend time describing Day's life. Her early life and involvement with the far Left in America during and after the First World War, her conversion to Catholicism, her meeting with the French peasant Peter Maurin and the establishment of the *Catholic Worker* paper in 1933, the consequent setting up of 'houses of hospitality' and farms, and the subsequent growth and development of the movement, give us the context for these reflections. By the time Day died at the age of 83 in 1980, she was a renowned figure in America's Catholic world, a friend of Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta, feted by cardinals and bishops.

Theological distinctiveness

I want to emphasise three distinctive aspects of the life of the Christian Worker 'movement', as shown in what happens in its communities and what is presented in the CW paper, Day's other writings, and studies of her and the movement (both during her lifetime and since her death in 1980). It seems to me that these principles are essential to the nature of the movement. I will then apply them to the challenges the Church faces, so that we can try to revive and strengthen the proclamation of social teaching in this country.

(i) Unconditional love for the poor

Alongside the theological witness of the CW paper, from the very beginning those who wrote for and produced it lived in communities which were called 'houses of hospitality'. In the poorest parts of cities like New York and Chicago, these houses offered food and shelter to the destitute in houses run by volunteers. They would not seek state help or tax breaks – they simply appealed to the readers of the paper for help. The relationship with the poor was *personal* – as Peter Maurin famously put it: 'People said of the earliest Christians "See how they love one another"; now they say of us "See how they pass the buck"'. If you read the recently published diaries of Dorothy Day you see the daily struggle of this sort of life for her and those around her: the unpredictable numbers of those needing soup or a bed for the night, the fights and drunkenness, the constant threat of eviction, the serious health problems, the unending shortage of money – one cannot glamorise this life. For Day and Maurin this way of life was not simply about showing love and charity; indeed it

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is very different from, and in some ways at odds with conventional ways of 'being charitable'. What they were about was the *works of mercy*, defined here by Day:

> The Spiritual Works of Mercy are: to admonish the sinner, to instruct the ignorant, to counsel the doubtful, to comfort the sorrowful, to bear wrongs patiently, to forgive all injuries, and to pray for the living and the dead. The Corporal Works are to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to ransom the captive, to harbour the harbourless, to visit the sick, and to bury the dead.'[4]

This way of looking at the communities' work meant that the two types of works of mercy went together. So feeding hundreds of people on the 'bread line' would be accompanied by talking to people about papal social encyclicals or the lives of the saints, or spiritual reading at meals. Resident communities in urban houses of hospitality or in CW farms would also gather for daily prayers and Mass, and for regular retreats. Maurin unashamedly believed in 'indoctrination' – sharing the truths of the Catholic faith in a direct way, in long round-table discussions into the night, a process he called the 'clarification of thought'. Another feature of the way the corporal works are looked at – as you find in the lives of countless saints – is that there is no place for the modern notion of whether people *deserve help,* you simply help those who are in need, without calculation. It's simply about love.[5] In recent times and indeed even today these characteristics remain, as is shown in the writings of Marc Ellis[6] and the Gifford family.[7] The CW houses have resolutely refused to develop in the ways that 'charities' have – partnership with the State, tax exempt status, professionalization, regulation. The call to show a personal commitment to the poor ruled out such shifts. Moreover the personalistic principles which Day and Maurin promoted insisted on the primacy of the small unit.[8]

[4] 'The Scandal of the Works of Mercy', *Commonweal* 4 November 1949, in Patrick Jordan (ed.) *Dorothy Day Writings from Commonweal* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press 2002), pp. 103ff. [there is an abridged version in Robert Ellsberg (ed.) *Dorothy Day Selected Writings* (London: DLT 2005) pp. 98ff.]

[5] For an exploration of Day's theology of love see Mary Louise Bozza, *Dorothy Day: Our Love for God, Neighbor and Self*, unpublished thesis, Boston College, 2003, available online, dissertations.bc.ed/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&context=ashonovs.

[6] *A Year at the Catholic Worker* (New York: Paulist Press 1978)

[7] Betty Gifford and Bill Gifford, *Catholic Worker Daze* (Xlibris 2008). Current issues of the *Catholic Worker* from different parts of the world bear this out.

[8] On personalism and its influence on Day see Mark and Louise Zwick, *The Catholic Worker Movement Intellectual and Spiritual Origins* (New York: Paulist Press 2005), pp.97ff., Thomas R. Rourke and Rosita A. Chazarreta Rourke, *A Theory of Personalism* (Lanham: Lexington books 2005), Emmanuel Mounier, *Personalism* (Notre Dame 2001). See also Hans Urs von Balthasar, 'On the concept of person', *Communio* 13 (1986), pp. 18ff.; Joseph Ratzinger, 'Concerning the notion of person in theology', *Communio* 17 (1990), pp. 439ff.; and William Cavanaugh, 'Balthasar, Globalization and the Problem of

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Personalism is a political philosophy pioneered by Emmanuel Mounier and the journal *L'Esprit* in the 1930s. While it is difficult to summarise briefly these quotations give the core of the idea, first from contemporary American advocates:

> Western political thought and practice has for centuries been severing itself from one of its richest and morally ennobling insights, namely, that the entire political, economic and social order should be centered around the human person. Although easily demonstrable, this insight is not commonly recognised today. Ideologies left and right claim to be in favor of the "individual," and few have come to understand the fundamental difference between this "individual" and the real human person. The concept of the individual is distinctively modern and abstract. Although attempting to build on the moral capital accumulated by its predecessor, the person, it is different in kind. The person is concrete, historically and culturally situated, and a member of a specific community. The modern individual is detached from all these connections . . ..[9]

The second quotation is from Peter Maurin himself, one of his renowned 'easy essays' – short pithy exhortations, often laid out as if they were poetry; they are still reprinted in issues of the *Catholic Worker.*

> A personalist
> is a go-giver,
> not a go-getter.
> He tries to give
> what he has,
> and does not
> try to get
> what the other fellow has.
> He tries to be good
> To the other fellow.
> He is altro-centred,
> Not self-centred.
> He has a social doctrine
> of the common good.[10]

Personalism is a different way of looking at life and 'doing politics'. Another influential figure was the Russian philosopher Nicolas Berdyaev (1874–1948) who taught that human history is not to do with progress or material success, but rather that Christ is at the centre

the One and the Many', *Communio* 28 (2001), pp. 325ff. For a study of the concept of the person which seems to be strangely unaware of the Catholic tradition, see Alistair McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood* (Cambridge 1990). Also of relevance to the background of personalism is Yves R. Simon, *Practical Knowledge,* ed. Robert J. Mulvaney (Fordham University Press 1991).

[9] Rourke and Rourke, op.cit., p. x.

[10] Quoted in Zwick and Zwick, op.cit., p. 113.

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of human history in his Incarnation and in his redemption of the world; the human person, made in the image of God, is intended 'to participate with God in the building of the New Creation.'[11]

The whole tradition of reflection on the primacy and the centrality of the human person is a major component of the theology of Blessed John Paul II, and Donal Dorr has reminded us how important this was in *Redemptor Hominis*, *Laborem Exercens* and elsewhere. It is important for the *Catholic Worker* tradition in two respects: first, as I mentioned earlier, a *personal* sense of commitment, in this case to the needs of the poor, based on our inter-relatedness as human beings; and second, flowing from this, a negative and suspicious view of the state. This distances the original CWs from, on the one hand, classic democratic Socialism and Communism, and, on the other, from attempts by the state to alleviate the sufferings of the poor, such as President Roosevelt's 'New Deal' in the 1930s (which was warmly welcomed by the Catholic hierarchy). There was a tension here: the movement supported a number of big strikes in the 1930s, and Day retained her links after her conversion with Communists and people in the Labour movement. This commitment was not shared by Maurin, who disapproved of working for wages and most of the industrial system *per se*.

For Day and Maurin, this distancing from the state chimed perfectly with the concept of subsidiarity outlined in what was then the recent encyclical of Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*. This work really did break new ground. You can see from accounts of the early years of the CW paper and houses that as it was recent and directed very much to the situation of the world Depression (I don't know whether Pius delayed publication as happened with Benedict's *Caritas in Veritate* in 2009; I doubt that it was the sort of thing he did), it generated a great deal of excitement and people like Day and Maurin expected Catholics to take what the pope had written seriously.

As I have said, the personalism of the Catholic Worker movement distances it as much from socialism and other political outlooks that value the state's role as much as from *laissez-faire* capitalism – and indeed from what can be labelled 'liberal Catholic theology.'[12]

[11] Zwick and Zwick, 'Roots of the Catholic Worker movement; Saints and Philosophers who influenced Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin' in Thorn, Runkel and Mountin, op cit.

[12] The most forceful expression of this view is Geoffrey Gneuhs, 'Radical Orthodoxy: Dorothy Day's Challenge to Liberal America', in Thorn, Runkel and Mountin, op.cit., pp. 205ff., who also shows why Day's commitment to traditional Catholic piety is consistent with her whole approach. He writes: 'Her orthodox faith and selfless love remain prophetically radical, radical in the true sense of the word, whose Latin word means "root." With Peter Maurin she went to the roots of Catholic social doctrine and gave a luminous vision of a world lived as the common good. Her lived commitment to life with the poor, the rejects of society, the lonely, and her rejection of an all-powerful state and the liberal culture of convenience remain an eloquent witness to Christ Crucified, Christ Redeemer.'

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Day was a Christian anarchist, steeped in the writings of people like Leo Tolstoy. Although before her conversion she had been imprisoned as a suffragette during the First World War, by the 1930s she would not vote; CW houses would not pay federal taxes.[13] The CW was founded during the great Depression; those whom it supported were victims of a system that brought unemployment, homelessness and poverty to millions. It supported the efforts of unions to help their members, and a number of high profile strikes (including one by Catholic gravediggers in New York, which brought Day into conflict with Cardinal Spellman). These actions often made it unpopular with middle-class American Catholics. This and Day's links with Communists both before and after her conversion to Catholicism, made her an object of surveillance from the FBI and other State agencies. The fact that CWs did not simply support the poor but challenged the system which made them poor, in spite of their close adherence to the teachings of the popes, made them enemies. I was told once that Cardinal Griffin would not allow CW papers to be circulated in the Westminster diocese because he thought Day was a Communist, and the slander persists today.[14]

Linked to this theological commitment, and drawn entirely from early Christian tradition and consistent Catholic teaching until the Reformation, was opposition to usury. Day returned a large cheque to the City of New York because it was an interest payment on the value of some requisitioned property:

> We do not believe in "money lending" at interest. As Catholics we are acquainted with the early teaching of the Church. All the early councils forbade it, declaring it reprehensible to make money by lending it out at interest. Canon law of the Middle Ages forbade it and in various decrees ordered that the profit so obtained was to be restored. In the Christian emphasis on the duty of charity, we are commanded to lend gratuitously, to give freely, even in the case of confiscation, as in our own case-not to resist but to accept cheerfully. We do not believe in the profit system, and so we cannot take profit or interest on our money.[15]

For Day and Maurin charging interest was an inherent and shameless part of a rotten system.

(p. 221). Gneuhs is an artist living in New York who was a Dominican priest and associate editor of the *Catholic Worker* in the years before and after Day's death.

[13] 'We Go on Record', *Catholic Worker* May 1972, in Ellsberg, op.cit., pp. 311ff.; she was in long term dispute with the Internal Revenue Service because of the Federal State's preparations for war.

[14] A recent example of a scurrilous Lefebvrist attack on Day and the Catholic Worker movement would be Carol Byrne, *The Catholic Worker Movement (1933–1980): A Critical Analysis* (Milton Keynes: Anchor House 2010).

[15] 'This Money is Not Ours', *Catholic Worker,* September 1960, in Ellsberg, op.cit., pp. 393ff.

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A big part of the whole venture was the establishment of Catholic Worker farms. Peter Maurin envisaged that these would be what he called 'agronomic universities.'[16] His vision was that the urban unemployed would come to live in self-sufficient farms, alongside students and academics. Many of them failed and were in unsuitable areas (Day points out somewhere that the trouble was that people wanted to sit round a table all day discussing theology rather than working at milking cows or ploughing fields). On ecology Maurin was a early pioneer of responsible and 'Green' agriculture, drawing on French, American, Irish and English sources – CW farms also anticipated modern American critics of industrialised agriculture such as Wendell Berry.

(ii) Pacifism

Again drawing on the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels and the early Fathers, Day and Maurin taught that Christians should not bear arms or fight in wars. This was a much more controversial position in the 1930s within the Catholic Church than it is today – it was only Vatican II that established clearly the right to conscientious objection, although the CWs were clearly aligned with the teachings of the pope during the First World War, Benedict XV (an important influence on the present pope, who took his name) in his uncompromising opposition to that conflict. Indeed, the bishops in Europe who had backed their countries in the war rather than the pope were the forbears of some of those who would be at odds with Day and the CW movement such as Cardinal Francis Spellman, who was the Military Ordinary as well as Archbishop of New York (and one who was at odds with Pope Paul VI over the Vietnam War). The CW lost a lot of support over its neutrality in the Spanish Civil War, and even more when the USA joined the Second World War. Day was adamant; quoting a priest, she wrote:

> We think with Cardinal Faulhaber that Catholic moral theology must in fact begin to speak a new language, and that the last two popes have already pronounced in the way of general sentences of condemnation on modern war should be translated into a systematic terminology of the schools. The simple preacher and pastor can, however, begin by

[16] For an assessment of Maurin's agricultural vision see William J. Collinge, 'Peter Maurin's Ideal of Farming Communes' in Thorn, Runkel and Mountin, op.cit., pp. 385ff. The key influences on Maurin and Day were Peter Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workshops; or, Industry combined with Agriculture and Brain Work with Manual Work,* ed. Cohn Ward (New York: Greenwood 1968, originally published in 1901), Hilaire Belloc, *The Servile State* (3rd ed., London: Constable 1927) and G. K. Chesterton, *The Outline of Sanity* (New York: Methuen 1926).

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> making his own, words of the reigning Holy Father, 'murder', suicide', 'monstrous crime . . ..
>
> [*later in the piece, answering those who accuse pacifists of sentimentality and 'softness'*]
>
> . . . let their noses be mortified by the smells of sewage, decay and rotten flesh. Yes, and the smell of the sweat, blood and tears spoken of so blithely by Mr Churchill, and so widely and bravely quoted by comfortable people . . . . Perhaps we are called sentimental because we speak of love. We say we love our President, our country. We say that we love our enemies too.[17]

Much of Day's pacifist commitment was based on her understanding of the doctrine of the mystical Body of Christ, which was very popular during Day's lifetime. As Professor Bill Cavanaugh has pointed out: 'Most saw the Mystical Body as that which united Christians in spirit above the battle lines which pitted Christians in Europe against one another, Dorothy interpreted the Mystical Body as that which made Christian participation in the conflict simply inconceivable.'[18]

After the war, as for many others, the movement's opposition to nuclear war became the focal point of its stance. In the years after the war Day was frequently imprisoned for refusing to take part in civil defence exercises. The non-violent disobedience that this engendered had some effect by the end of the 1950s, when many of these pointless activities on the part of the state were abandoned. One of the most moving pictures Day gives of prison life comes from the time when she was imprisoned following a picket of an air raid drill in Times Square, New York, in April 1959.[19] Day was frequently imprisoned throughout her life and her sensitivity to other prisoners is central to her love and knowledge of the poor.

The teachings of Blessed John XXIII in his final encyclical, *Pacem in Terris,* and the condemnation of modern warfare in *Gaudium et Spes* were a partial vindication of the CW position. (Day spent time in Rome during the council fasting and praying for a condemnation of war). Although the Church does not follow (yet) an absolute pacifist line, it is clear that teaching against war, at least from the popes, is now far clearer than at any time since the Emperor Constantine. A lot

[17] *Catholic Worker,* February 1942, pp. 263ff. The piece on the war in the previous month's issue is quoted at length in Ashley Beck, *Dorothy Day* (London: CTS 2008), pp. 43–44, as is her striking piece on the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

[18] 'Dorothy Day and the Mystical Body of Christ in the Second World War' in William J. Thorn, Phillip J. Runkel and Susan Mountin (eds.) *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement Centenary Essays* (Marquette 2001), pp. 457ff.

[19] Robert Ellsberg (ed.) *The Duty of Delight: The Diaries of Dorothy Day* (Marquette University Press 2008), pp. 254ff.

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of this is to do with the nature of modern warfare.[20] The present day CWs have continued this witness and are regularly arrested for direct actions, such as trespassing on military bases and sit-ins outside army recruitment centres.

(iii) Catholic devotional life

Day's diaries and other writings show a person in a deep relationship of love with God, nurtured by the sacramental and devotional life of the Catholic Church – daily Mass (either in CW houses if they had a chapel or in local churches), frequent Confession, the rosary, Stations, intensive retreats[21], the influence of monasticism (the best example would be her long friendship [although they never met, I think] with Thomas Merton[22]), fasting and a deep love for and knowledge of the saints (the best example would be her deep love for St Therese of Lisieux, about whom she wrote a book[23]). CW houses and farms were nurtured, particularly in the early years, by the ministry of some very devoted American and Canadian priests; what comes through Day's writings again and again is a profound love for the Church and for its life. This, of course, distanced her from her friends on the political Left who saw the American Church as a reactionary institution. In the ferment of the 1960s this meant that she would not permit criticism of Church teachings or the Church's pastors.[24] While she welcomed many of the liturgical changes after the Council, she was very critical of some of the excesses (famously she once took a coffee cup which a priest had used to celebrate Mass and buried it in the garden). She was also critical of lay Catholics who abandoned traditional teachings about sexual morality, abortion

[20] See, for example, the judgement of Tina Beattie: 'Although the Roman Catholic Church retains the just war theory, it has in practice shifted to a position of virtual pacifism since the 1960s, particularly under the papacy of John Paul II. For the first time since the conversion of Rome, Western nations now go to war without the sanction of their churches' leaders.' (*The New Atheists* [London: Darton, Longman and Todd 2007), p.86.

[21] For the influence of Fr Onesimus Lacoutre SJ and the retreat movement see Zwick and Zwick, op.cit., pp. 235ff., and Brigid O'Shea Merriman OSF, *Searching for Christ The Spirituality of Dorothy Day* (Notre Dame 1994), pp. 131ff.

[22] Zwick and Zwick, op.cit., pp. 42ff., and O'Shea Merriman, op.cit., pp. 73ff. Many of Merton's most important early writings on peace, when he was subjected to censorship from the Cistercian order, were published in the *Catholic Worker.* See Julie Leininger Pycior, 'Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton: Overview of a Work in Progress', in Thorn, Runkel and Mountin, op.cit., pp. 363ff., and Ashley Beck, *Thomas Merton* (London: CTS 2009), pp. 37ff.

[23] *Therese* (Springfield: Templegate 1979). It was originally published in 1960 and extracts are in Ellsberg, *Selected Writings*.

[24] See various essays in Thorn, Runkel and Mountin, op.cit.

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and marriage and was saddened when priests left the active ministry (e.g. Philip Berrigan, brother of Daniel). The CW paper always contained reflections about the Church's liturgical season and the lives of the saints – traditional Catholic piety was a sign of the identity of the paper and of the communities. Interestingly, although this is not really about traditional piety, Day shows in her diaries and elsewhere quite a strong sense of what John Paul II would later call the 'genius of women' – she saw in the often rather chaotic life of CW houses that women were needed to do a lot of the practical jobs that needed doing.

In many ways the place of Catholic devotion in CW communities is still important, but probably less so. In the years since Day's death some communities have partially or completely abandoned a distinctive Catholic identity, and in many that have retained it there are probably fewer practising Catholics than in Day's time (it is analogous to the proportion of Catholic teachers in Catholic schools). But it is clearly still a mark of the movement.[25]

What this means for social teaching today: 'making the encyclicals click'

If you read about the early days of the CW paper and the houses of hospitality, there is a clear air of excitement about what was being done and the body of teachings which undergirded it. Peter Maurin, whose first language was of course French, used to like to coin mnemonic phrases in English to help people understand Christian teaching. One such phrase was 'make the encyclicals click' – and he meant the first great encyclicals on social teaching: *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*. When people discover something about Christ's teaching for the first time, there is an air of excitement. When putting that teaching into practice leads people to do costly and dramatic things, people again take notice. By contrast, at least in this country, the very words 'Catholic Social teaching' often draw only a yawn, even among the committed and the theologically literate. What has gone wrong? Why can't we make the encyclicals click?

I think there are many interrelated reasons. One is that many clergy – even bishops – and laypeople still feel uneasy about the Church pronouncing on issues like economics, unemployment, prisons or the wars in Afghanistan and Libya. In spite of everything they

[25] For a picture of some of the tensions in the movement over its Catholic identity since Day's death see Thorn, Runkel and Mountin, op.cit., especially Ann O'Connor and Peter King, 'What's Catholic about the Catholic Worker Movement? Then and Now', pp. 128ff., and Fred Boehrer, 'Diversity, Plurality and Ambiguity: Anarchism in the Catholic Worker Movement', pp. 95ff.

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are happier with general principles like subsidiarity, even if they don't know what it means. At a time when the heartland of Catholicism in this country has shifted from the inner cities to the suburbs (which is probably also true in the rest of western Europe and the United States), many Catholics really don't want to be accused of getting involved in politics and, as they want to minimise the differences between them and other people, they certainly don't want to be seen as 'left wing' in politically Conservative areas. They know, of course, that others expect Catholics to have distinctive views about abortion, and that our schools mean a lot to us; that's surely enough to make us a bit different – leave it at that.

Another reason for the encyclicals not clicking is that social teaching does require a bit of intellectual effort. Any discipline which seems to centre on papal encyclicals with long Latin titles, many of which are not very readable, is not likely to be taken up widely. Sometimes it also needs some knowledge of subjects like economics, Europe and employment law, things from which many people recoil: sometimes readers recoil because they don't want the encyclicals to challenge the little that they think they know about these things. Even the publication of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* in 2004 hasn't really made the teaching more accessible. The one area of social teaching where it has definitely been possible to engage with people in parishes has been poverty in the developing world, thanks to the material produced by CAFOD and the linking of fundraising to specific issues. The material has been very well produced and it has also been successful in our schools – but of course, CAFOD has its enemies. Another successful area has been the defence of refugees and asylum seekers. In many parishes the way into this issue has been through the charitable instincts and generosity of the Catholic faithful – a simple response to human need in an area challenges what people read in their newspapers. Simply carrying out the 'works of mercy' can win the hearts and minds of at least some of our people.

Overall, I think a big part of the problem is the way that Catholic culture has changed. In both English and American parishes in the 1930s, at any rate in the cities, people's lives were far more centred on the parish than they are now, even in places where Mass attendance is still relatively high. Much of the popular devotional life of parishes, familiar to people like Day and Maurin, has vanished, and with it much of the social life as well. What we have still got are the schools, but even here the sense of distinctiveness and rootedness in the parish is often not what it was. This shift makes it harder to enable people to learn more about any aspect of Christian teaching, let alone one which makes demands or is controversial.

What is needed is the rebuilding of a Catholic 'counter-culture'. I think that the three distinctive and radical characteristics of the

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CW movement which I identified earlier offer some good – and challenging – signposts:

(i) Unconditional love for the poor – works of mercy, not charity

Peter Maurin wanted every parish to have a 'house of hospitality'. I try to encourage my diaconate students, because of their vocation, to take a lead in their parishes in trying to co-ordinate what their communities do in terms of the 'works of mercy'. Sometimes people who run Catholic charities like the SVP in parishes have attitudes which would be fully in accord with the Poor Laws of early Victorian England. Direct and personal love for the poor, striking a contrast with increasingly punitive State policies, should be an essential part of Catholic witness. There are important CW communities in this country, part of whose life you can read about in the latest issue of the London *Catholic Worker*. There are two houses in London and one in Oxford, and a farm in Hertfordshire. Most of those who are given refuge in London are destitute refugees.

Yet we fail as a community to condemn moral evils, because our engagement with social teaching is so superficial. For example, why has there been no Catholic condemnation of the efforts Westminster City Council has made to stop soup runs to the homeless? The Missionaries of Charity, together with groups such as Benedict XVI House linked to St Mary's University College[26] have been involved in this but they are right to be disturbed by the lack of condemnation from the Church.

It is only if this is lived out practically that we will be able to campaign more vigorously for the poor. This will mean allying ourselves more clearly with other groups. So often we seem to be reactive: we end up responding to initiatives from politicians who have their own agenda. Serious engagement with the radical traditions I have outlined together with a clear ecclesiology, will lead us to view the State and its power with more suspicion; but the State's cutbacks in support for the poor, and in other areas such as healthcare, face us with a challenge and an opportunity. Catholic parishes and institutions need to become 'communities of resistance', not only engaging in practical and demanding work, but challenging false ideologies. Part of this, if we are to be fed by the CW tradition, should be a critique of the financial system. Again, the leaders of our community seem to be so at ease when in dialogue with bankers in board rooms or accepting large sums of money from media magnates (I am thinking about the money given for the papal visit by News International).

[26] See 'Works of Mercy', 1 March 2011, http://benedictxvihouse.blogspot.com, accessed 18 August 2011.

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Taking the CW tradition seriously will also lead us to reassess our view of the role of the State at a time when its role in welfare, education, housing, health-care and many other areas its role is being reduced in most of Europe. The personalist tradition found in the CW movement would tell us that we should be relaxed about its reduced role because we should be doing this ourselves anyway.

Usury is an example of a missed opportunity. In his encyclical on social teaching, *Caritas in Veritate,* Pope Benedict XVI made a significant move towards reviving traditional Catholic condemnation of usury when he went out of his way to commend local credit unions, which offer a better path, especially for the poor, than that offered by banks and other financial institutions:

> Both the regulation of the financial sector, so as to safeguard weaker parties and discourage scandalous speculation, and experimentation with new forms of finance, designed to support development projects, are positive experiences that should be further explored and encouraged, highlighting *the responsibility of the investor*. Furthermore, the *experience of micro-finance*, which has its roots in the thinking and activity of the civil humanists – I am thinking especially of the birth of pawn-broking- should be strengthened and fine-tuned. This is all the more necessary in these days when financial difficulties can become severe for many of the more vulnerable sectors of the population, who should be protected from the risk of usury and from despair.'[27]

When I wrote an initial assessment of the encyclical after it first appeared[28] I suggested that the Pope Benedict really means, for English people, credit unions rather than what we call pawn brokers. The Latin, French and Italian versions of the encyclical use the phrase *Montes Pietatis*, which were medieval financial institutions like credit unions. All this is very cautious – why should only the poor be protected from the 'risk of usury'? – but it's a start. Yet in local settings, in the ways in which bishops and local church leaders have tried to present the Pope Benedict's teaching and to react to the financial crisis, there has been an astounding hesitancy, a deep reluctance to condemn greed and avarice. You get the impression that a response from our leaders that had been properly nurtured by the Catholic Worker tradition would not be so cautious. Of course, I am aware that any personalistic approach to this issue raises difficult questions for all of us – for individuals and most of the institutions of the Catholic Church that gain interest on deposit accounts or depend on tax recovered from voluntary gifts. This is another thing Day and the Catholic Worker movement refused to accept, and still do. The

[27] Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 65.

[28] 'More Souped-up Marxism? A summary and initial assessment of Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*', *The Pastoral Review,* vol. 5 issue 5 (September/October 2009).

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current financial situation gives the Church a golden opportunity to revive the traditional condemnation of usury, which is a mark of Muslim teaching about money.

There is also a challenge for those in academic life. Peter Maurin's vision for Catholic Worker farms, or 'agronomic universities' as he wanted to call them, included students working alongside farm workers and the urban poor. He once wrote that 'college professors were too busy teaching subjects to be interested in mastering situations'[29] but felt that both students and their teachers should be involved in the life of the farms – at least we could include Day and the Catholic Worker movement as a topic in our theology courses. In 1997 there was a successful module at Marquette University in Milwaukee (the home of the vast CW archives) entitled 'Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker' which had 35–40 students each semester.[30]

(ii) Pacifism

As we saw earlier, a decisive rejection of war has always made the CW movement unpopular. Politicians of the Right who want to reduce or eliminate the State's role in economic life or public services generally have no intention of reducing a country's armed forces. For the CWs, it is the same coercive state in each case. Anna Rowlands has shown how so-called liberal democratic States are becoming more and more coercive with asylum-seekers which is reflected in the ways that many civil freedoms have been eroded in Britain during the last ten years, illustrated by the way police handled student demonstrations at the end of last year. Much Catholic reflection, particularly from the Radical Orthodoxy tradition, helps us take a more critical and prophetic role towards the growing power of the state, especially towards the State's wish to wage war, and buy and sell weapons.

Even now, when the Church's Magisterium is more anti-war than at any time since the fourth-century, there is a big problem. Just as, nearly a century ago, Pope Benedict XV's efforts to end the First World War were systematically undermined by Europe's bishops (including Cardinal Bourne and the hierarchy in this England[31]) so local Catholic leaders often seem more hesitant than the Holy See to

[29] *Catholic Radicalism: Phrased Essays for the Green Revolution* (New York: Catholic Worker books 1949), p. 18, quoted in Collinge, op.cit., p. 392.

[30] Susan Moutin, 'Contemporary Students and Dorothy Day', in Thorn, Runkel and Mountin, op.cit., pp. 28ff. Students are required to maintain appropriate placements in community projects.

[31] See Ashley Beck, *Benedict XV* (London: CTS 2007), pp. 36ff.

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condemn particular conflicts or call for ceasefires and negotiations. The absolute pacifism of the CW newspapers and houses now meets the very clear teachings of the popes and the Second Vatican Council that the nature of modern warfare means that war is not a fit means for settling disputes. The nature of modern warfare has effectively made the Just War doctrine so restrictive that in nearly every case in the last sixty years it is hard to argue that the criteria for a just war could have been met. Modern warfare has effectively brought the Just War doctrine and historic pacifism to the same place. Consider the issue of nuclear weapons – local Church leaders in England, but not in Scotland, have repeatedly failed to condemn Britain's nuclear 'defence' policy: in a recent issue of *The Tablet*[32] two distinguished members of this association (Fr Fergus Kerr OP and Brian Wicker) pointed out separately how far local bishops have not been in line with Vatican teaching.

(iii) Catholic Devotional life

In his ground-breaking study *Torture and Eucharist,*[33] Professor Bill Cavanaugh writes of the State's 'para-liturgy' shown in Chile under General Pinochet. We can use similar language, in my view, about the ways in which the modern State glorifies itself and glorifies war. The only way for disciples of Jesus Christ to counteract this is by the confident celebration of the liturgy of God's kingdom. In Cavanaugh's work, the Eucharist is at the heart of this; so it was for Dorothy Day. Her diaries show a woman grounded in taking part in the daily celebration of the Mass and the daily reception of Holy Communion. Liturgy mattered enormously to her[34], and so did popular extra-liturgical devotions which were a far greater part of life for lay Catholics in the 1930s than they are now. What can we learn from this?

At present we are in a state of flux and change with regard to the language of worship in the English-speaking world. Without wishing to dip one's toe in the shark-infested waters of debate about this, we can say that part of what is at least *intended* by the changes is a recovery of a sense of reverence and awe in the celebration of Mass, and it is clear from Day's writings that she would have welcomed such an aim. It is now much harder to celebrate Mass with a coffee cup, so disliked by Day, if you have to use the word 'chalice' in the Eucharistic Prayer. Moreover the revival in some places of popular

[32] 15 August 2011.

[33] Oxford: Blackwell 1999.

[34] For the influence on Day of the liturgical movement see Zwick and Zwick, op.cit., pp. 58ff.

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devotions would have pleased her; it is sometimes claimed that their decline together with the more cerebral and 'word-centred' nature of liturgy since Vatican II, has further alienated the Church from poor and working-class people, those to whom Day gave her life. While we should avoid the polarisation which seems to dominate discussion of liturgy, it is also the case that the Mass itself will often be at the heart of other divisions. Last year the Catholic Worker priest in England, Fr Martin Newell CP, was arrested not only for breaking into a military base but for also attempting to celebrate Mass inside the perimeter, as an act of resistance to the culture of death represented by the armed forces of this country. A few months later, right-wing Catholic blogs were gleeful because an extraordinary form Mass (i.e. Latin) was celebrated for Catholic members of the armed forces in the chapel of their base: it was seen to be perfectly natural that those in uniform should appreciate this way of celebrating the Eucharist (although from the photos it didn't look as if the Mass was very well attended), and many conservative devotional and liturgical celebrations all over the world are accompanied by disturbing military imagery.

I want to suggest that serious and reverent celebrations of the sacrifice of the Mass, and devotions such as Benediction, the Rosary, Stations of the Cross, outdoor Processions and so on should be confidently reclaimed by those who believe in putting into practice the option for the poor and the works of mercy, by those who are committed to condemning of the financial system, and by those who are pacifists. Devotion to Our Lady and the Saints is an example of what can be done. The promotion of devotion to Our Lady as Queen of Heaven and of the whole of Creation will strengthen our witness against the over-weening power of the State; and renewed devotion to the saints should strengthen our commitment and witness to the social teaching of the Church. Such devotions may connect us with Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement and their exemplification to Catholic social Teaching in their unconditional love for the poor, commitment to the works of mercy based on a coherent philosophy of personalism, opposition to the financial system (including the practice of usury), pacifism and traditional Catholic devotional life.

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