Opinion
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by NCR Staff

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In a commentary for NCR, Catholic Worker Brian Terrell discusses the zealous champions of Dorothy Day's canonization cause who have, deliberately or not, occasioned the very dismissal she feared and how some who would have argued with and even condemned Day when she was alive now neutralize her with praise. Following are letters to the editor from NCR readers reacting to the commentary. The letters have been edited for length and clarity.

Brian Terrell raises good points about how Dorothy Day's sanctity has been and will be abused. He concludes that he does not support canonization. In contrast, I remember she would claim "all is grace."

If so, then why not support her canonization, despite how it will be abused? It will be an inspiration, too, because, as she recognized, the Spirit is always at work. It is our job to realize that and to discern where the Spirit is leading.

And, yes, she did have her faults. All saints have faults. She quoted a priest, I think it was, who said that if one were to imitate the faults of saints, we would surely end up in hell. And that's why we need honest portrayals of saints. To guide us, inspire us, and to expose human faults for us to avoid.

ANNE KLEJMENT

St. Paul, Minneosta

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Thank you for your article about Dorothy Day. I have come to admire her over several years. I first heard of her on retreat in Washington, Michigan, and read her biography.

When my nephew, at age 33, developed stage four bowel cancer and was predicted not to respond to treatment, I asked two of my sisters to pray for Dorothy's

intercession, which the three of us did. Miraculously he responded excellently and now three or four years later is doing very well and even back to playing rugby!

JENNIFER HODGETTS

Petrolia, Ontario

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The article on Dorothy Day by Brian Terrell was splendid. Even if I'm very glad that her cause is moving forward, I was interested to hear of those who doubted her pacifist witness.

I liked hearing how Dorothy took to prayer her struggle to forgive her enemies in relation to the Vietnam War issue.

My father owns a cottage with my husband and I even though it puts him in great debt. There is a kind of poverty which comes from shared ownership and having your name on the mortgage deed and worry one greatly.

Perhaps we need a new kind of charity to help those that are struggling to own their own homes and who are seeking to abide by the church's social justice principles.

LOUISE JEFFREE

New South Wales, Australia

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I found this article very worthwhile, but in light of the fact that all of Brian Terrell's examples of Dorothy Day being dismissed are of an uncanonized Dorothy Day being dismissed, I don't see how they constitute proof that Day's theology and lifestyle would be more dismissed if she were to be canonized. If anything, I think her teachings would become harder, not easier, to dismiss if she were to be recognized as someone who is definitively in heaven.

I also think that without Dorothy's cause for canonization existing her actions and words would still be perceived as unrealistic by more people than not. Formally canonized or uncanonized, it has always been completely unavoidable that such an extraordinary person as Dorothy Day would be dismissed as a saint.

JEFFREY JONES

Hamburg, New York

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I must respectfully disagree with Brian Terrell's commentary.

Some people work within community for change. Some people stand outside throwing stones at brick and mortar that is dimly heard from within. Dorothy Day does not strike me as someone who had a juvenile understanding of the Catholic faith.

So, Dorothy wanted in life to be seen as human, practical and realistic. She wanted to be taken seriously within the context of conversation with a reporter. I will presume she would like to be taken seriously following her death.

Terrell appears to encourage disdain for Dorothy's cause for canonization. With few exceptions, the fear that some members of the church will rewrite her legacy to suit narrow ideological rationalizations is not obvious. Her identification with the Catholic faith, the lives of saints, and Catholic social teaching is well documented. The U.S. bishops unanimously endorsed her cause for canonization. Pope Francis named her one of four American heroes before the U.S. Congress. Her history and spiritual practices are taught in Catholic university theology departments throughout the world. Her mistakes and human frailty are well documented. Her lifelong engagement with the works of mercy is well documented. Her pacifism is well documented. Her opposition to some thoughts or actions of some bishops or institutional charity is well documented.

Her cause for canonization spotlights the Catholic faith at its best. To this day, the Catholic Worker Movement remains one of a very few secular organizations that has church permission to brand their intentional communities Catholic.

STEPHEN E. DeVOL, Dayton Catholic Worker Movement

Dayton, Ohio

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I was with the New York City Catholic Worker in the 1960s. As a young 23-year-old woman, having "lost my faith" in the Roman Catholic Church, Dorothy Day's words and actions spoke to me (and, I think, many of my generation) of the way the Catholic Church should be.

I am still of that opinion. I view her as a prophet more than a saint, a prophet crying in the wilderness, a wilderness still populated rather substantially by the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy who often live cosseted lives embarrassingly removed from the flock they serve. Maybe this call for canonization will make them look more closely in the mirror and ask probing questions about the impact of Dorothy Day's life work on their own life mission.

NICOLE d'ENTREMONT

Peaks Island, Maine

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