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The Catholic Worker Movement

Victoria Newman

The Catholic Worker movement, founded in 1933, has sprawled from its humble beginnings to become an international network of communities, remaining continually “committed to nonviolence, voluntary poverty, prayer, and hospitality for the homeless, exiled, hungry, and forsaken.”¹ The movement was originally spearheaded by French peasant Peter Maurin and Catholic convert journalist Dorothy Day. Understanding the Catholic Worker as an intentional community movement requires the historical background of its origins (including some biography of its founders), an analysis of the Catholic Worker’s tradition of resistance, and a study of hospitality as it enables other activities of the community. The Catholic Worker is unique from many other intentional communities because of its large scope and long tenure of existence and success. While certainly unique, the Catholic Worker has come to influence other communities that have sprung up in its legacy. This essay attempts to give a brief and insightful look at that legacy and ultimate impact.

The Catholic Worker is involved in the same ministry as many other Christian intentional communities. The work of the Worker is simple: love and serve the poor. Put in a slightly different way, their mission can be understood as efforts to remove systems of oppression in our society and in our world. The goal is not simply to give a poor man a meal to eat, but to question why he was hungry to begin with. Is there some greater force (or forces) at play in the way our world works that keeps him from being able to eat or to feed his family? How do race and class divides help to answer these questions? The Catholic Worker is an intentional community not built on charity alone; it is built around the simple and yet radical claim that the world we live in does not have to be one of inequality and destruction. The movement remained and still remains staunchly pacifist, resisting the war effort in the 1940s and in the early 2000s. The Catholic Worker has also been at the forefront of racial equality issues in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, ruffling the feathers of the status quo along the way. Finally, the Worker is best and most widely known for its position on justice in the labor market, both in the early days of its founding in the depths of the Great Depression and in today’s recent recession and fiscal crisis. Many groups have heard the call of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin and have created communities in the tradition of the Catholic Worker without necessarily being Catholic.

¹ “Celebrating 80 Years: 1933-2013,” *The Catholic Worker Movement*, <http://www.catholicworker.org/index.cfm>.

Despite their work for justice and equality on many fronts, the Catholic Worker was and is doing something even more meaningful and even more powerful than mere lobbying, protest, or litigation. They began, and continue to his day, to welcome those into their houses of hospitality who have no where else to go. They offer a warm meal, a bed, clothing, a shower to those who would have little hope of receiving such anywhere else. Hospitality was paramount to the founders of the Catholic Worker, and it is a legacy that has persisted through the decades. It is a welcome, a message of hope to those who are forsaken and marginalized. Hospitality, for the Catholic Worker and other Christian intentional communities like it, has become a way to live out the Gospel message; it has become a radical witness to the testimony of Jesus, the Savior who taught his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."² Hospitality does more than lay the foundation for justice efforts—hospitality is the justice effort. Hospitality is a means of resistance.

Maurin, Day, and Personalist Politics

To one unfamiliar with the Catholic Worker, Peter Maurin is perhaps the lesser known face, despite the fact that Dorothy Day once remarked, "Peter Maurin is most truly the founder [of the Catholic Worker]. I would never have had an idea in my head about such work if it had not been for him."³ So who was this man, and what exactly was his impact on Dorothy Day and the movement that would become the Catholic Worker? Maurin's own life experiences, first as a peasant farmer in France, then a homesteader in Canada, and finally an odd jobs man in America before founding the Catholic Worker, came to deeply affect facets of the movement, particularly in developing a theology and activism that was intended to serve the poor. Maurin was no stranger to poverty or to work; he was the first of twenty children born to his father, a farmer whose family had been on their land in France for generations. Maurin was raised to be devoutly Catholic and nearly joined a religious order, but instead came to Canada and then to America. He pursued various odd jobs of menial labor with little pay, eventually becoming a vagrant of sorts, a wanderer and a beggar.⁴ He lived on whatever he could find and whatever was given to him, all the while talking with people about his developing philosophies and ideas. Dorothy Day wrote of Maurin that he saw himself as a "troubadour for Christ,"⁵ one who would spread the Gospel best by traveling, singing, and poetry.

² Matt. 25:40, RSV.

³ Dorothy Day, qtd. in William D. Miller, *A Harsh and Dreadful Love: Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement* (New York: Liveright, 1973), 17.

⁴ Miller, *A Harsh and Dreadful Love*, 25-30.

⁵ Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1997), 172.

Maurin showed up at Dorothy Day's home in 1933, after being told about her and her work from some mutual friends. He decided that she was the sort of person he wanted to share ideas with—or perhaps more accurately, he wanted to share his ideas with her.⁶ After many long nights of discussion, Maurin and Day decided to publish a newspaper, what would become *The Catholic Worker*. This was part of Maurin's larger "program," which required a synthesis of "cult, culture, and cultivation," or rather, round-table discussions, houses of hospitality, and "agronomic universities" (farm communities).⁷ After the Catholic Worker gained steam and influence, Maurin's behavior sometimes got him into trouble; he often wore the same clothes for long periods of time without bathing, and once when he arrived at a dinner party, he was mistaken for the meter reader and sent down to the basement instead of welcomed to the table as the guest of honor.⁸ This mistake is illustrative of exactly what Maurin was interested in, that is, the tendency of the average person to send the poor away instead of offering them hospitality. Maurin was heavily influenced by personalist philosophy, which stated that "Christian love should be brought from its position of limbo where human affairs are concerned and infused into the process of history. . . . This redemption began with man, for in the human person was the final, indivisible entity that stood above process."⁹ So when Peter Maurin was invited to this party, it was to share his ideas and intellect—a high honor. Yet when he arrived, he was perceived not to be the guest of honor, but an average worker, a menial labor meter reader—worthless. For Peter Maurin, the Catholic Worker was to be a place where no one was sent to the basement or thought of as less because of their clothes or income.

Personalist philosophy would eventually find itself at the heart of the Catholic Worker, though it was not often articulated as such. Personalism was molded by Maurin and Day to function as both American and Catholic, but it was "originally fashioned in France as a religious but nevertheless politically engaged alternative to both existentialism and Marxism."¹⁰ The personalism of the Catholic Worker has three central tenets for individuals: each must serve those in need directly, each must work to change the systems that have created need, poverty, and injustice, and each must work to create viable alternatives to current systems and conditions.¹¹ It was not always clearly communicated in the early days of the

6 Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 169-170.

7 *Ibid.*, 171.

8 Miller, *A Harsh and Dreadful Love*, 19.

9 *Ibid.*, 5-6.

10 Patrick G. Coy, "An Experiment in Personalist Politics: The Catholic Worker Movement and Nonviolent Action," *Peace & Change* 26 (2001), 83.

11 Coy, "An Experiment in Personalist Politics," 83.

Catholic Worker that the philosophy driving Day and Maurin was personalism, not Communism. The confusion arose out of the resonance between the two schools of thought in terms of questioning the current system of injustice and inequality, but personalism has at its heart the Christian message, a message of forgiveness and reconciliation for all, whereas Communism more heavily relies on conflict (class conflict, of course) in order to gain momentum. A Communist, at least in the eyes of the Catholic Worker, would not be willing to forgive and accept a member of the so-called proletariat because of their alignment with a particular class or group. A personalist, by contrast, must welcome the employer and the unemployed, the CEO and the day-laborer, because personalism is concerned about the welfare of individuals and offers an “unabashed affirmation of the dignity of each and every human being.”¹² That is the central message of the Catholic Worker, and though it does sometimes cross paths with Communism or even capitalism, it remains distinctive.

As for Dorothy Day, her journey to the Catholic Worker is similarly interesting, though she and Maurin are by no means similar. In the Day family, “the name of God was never mentioned. Mother and father never went to church [and] none of us children had been baptized and to speak of the soul was to speak immodestly.”¹³ The family moved several times when Dorothy was a child in order to accommodate her father’s search for work as a newspaper writer, a career that Dorothy Day would also pursue. Day grew up with an understanding of working class inequality and eventually joined a Socialist group in college.¹⁴ She left the university without finishing her degree because she did not find academic pursuits as compelling as “identification with that socially abandoned class, the one she had instinctively known all of her life as first in that community of man for which she longed.”¹⁵ Day pursued a career as a journalist in New York and Chicago, affiliating with radicals and young revolutionaries, though she never officially belonged to any particular group or organization. Eventually, she entered into a common-law relationship with Forster Batchingham, and they had a daughter, Tamar, in 1927.¹⁶ During this period in her life, Day was drawn to Catholicism and began attending Mass and praying the Rosary. She and her daughter were eventually baptized into the Church, marking her separation from Forster, who was suspicious of religion. Day writes that leaving her relationship with For-

12 Ibid.

13 Dorothy Day, *From Union Square to Rome* (New York: Arno Press, 1978), 20.

14 Miller, *A Harsh and Dreadful Love*, 36-37, 40.

15 Ibid., 36.

16 Ibid., 55, 57.

ster was the most difficult part of her conversion.¹⁷ After moving around several more times and pursuing various jobs, Day ended up in New York, where she would meet Maurin and eventually found the Catholic Worker. Their combined life experiences—that of a French vagabond and a journalist more interested in the poor than in a paycheck—would come to create a community movement that not only sympathized with the poor, but stood with them.

Maurin and Day met after Day's conversion to Catholicism, and early on in their friendship, Maurin introduced her to his personalist ideas that revolved around developing an active love for all that would "change institutions so that man might find the freedom necessary to live in the fullness of spirit."¹⁸ It was Maurin who suggested that Day might best engage personalist philosophy through her work as a journalist, and thus *The Catholic Worker* was born. The first issue was sold for a penny a copy on May Day, 1933 in the midst of Communist demonstrations in Union Square. Maurin wanted to call the paper *The Catholic Radical*, but Day, as an ex-Communist, thought that *The Catholic Worker* would resonate better with their audience.¹⁹ The second issue of the paper was largely written by Maurin, and in it he outlined his program for social change—"cult, culture, cultivation"—which included roundtable discussions, houses of hospitality, and "agronomic universities" that would act as Christian utopias in an increasingly urbanized America.²⁰ Day and Maurin joined forces with others who were interested in the cause of the poor and the marginalized, and despite much financial instability and interpersonal conflicts, the Catholic Worker movement gained steam, continually publishing their newspapers and widening their circulation. By 1937, there were twenty-two houses of hospitality, two farms, and thirteen "cells" which acted as meeting places and headquarters for the movement, if not actual living spaces.²¹ Through the decades the movement has grown and now boasts over two hundred houses of hospitality nationwide. *The Catholic Worker* can still be purchased for a penny a copy, a price that the Catholic Worker insists will remain constant so that the paper will be easily accessible to all, a small but powerful testament to the commitment of the Catholic Worker to meet the needs of the poor at their own expense.

17 Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 144-145.

18 Miller, *A Harsh and Dreadful Love*, 64.

19 Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 175.

20 Miller, *A Harsh and Dreadful Love*, 67.

21 *Ibid.*, 114.

The Catholic Worker and the Catholic Church

At the heart of the Catholic Worker Movement is the personalist belief in the dignity and respect of each human person. This pours out of a hope in “the theme of eschatological expectation, which was so powerful in the early days of the Christian community.”²² Personalism’s concern for each and every individual manifests for the Catholic Worker through hospitality efforts, community service, and participating in justice movements, which of course look differently depending on the location and needs of the particular community. Importantly, the Catholic Worker, while independently created, cannot be fully separated from the Church and tradition claimed in its name. There are some more loosely affiliated communities, deemed “Protestant Catholic Worker Houses,” such as the Open Door in Atlanta, Georgia, but the majority of Catholic Worker communities are tied to the Church at large. This makes the Catholic Worker unique among intentional community movements because it is rooted in a religious tradition while also rebelling from social mores and carving out a unique space of an alternative reality. The Catholic Worker is undoubtedly Catholic, but it expresses its faith and ties to the Church in a way that is seen as countercultural and even radical. Moreover, the Catholic Worker is rooted in the Roman Catholic Church, a tradition often criticized for its opulence and unwavering positions on certain issues despite societal changes. Still, both Day and Maurin believed that the mission of the Catholic Worker was not to destroy the Church, but to remind it of its own teachings: love and serve the poor. Peter Maurin believed that their radical witness need not be at odds with the centuries-old institution of the Church, as he wrote in one of his “easy essays”:

If the Catholic Church
is not today the dominant social, dynamic force,
it is because Catholic scholars have failed
to blow the dynamite of the Church.
Catholic scholars have taken the dynamite of the Church,
have wrapped it in nice phraseology,
placed it in an hermetic container
and sat on the lid.
It is about time
to blow the lid off
so that the Catholic Church
may again become the dominant social dynamic force.²³

²² *Ibid.*, 4.

²³ Peter Maurin, qtd. in Miller, *A Harsh and Dreadful Love*, 25.

The intentional communities of the Catholic Worker, Maurin believed, may just be the dynamite to blow the lid off the Catholic Church.

Maurin and Day's personalism did not require them to attack or directly criticize the Church in the same way that personalism would ultimately diverge from Communism—personalism is concerned with individuals, every individual. Its concern is not to frontally attack institutions. Maurin's program of hospitality houses and discussions were not based on destroying capitalism or the organized Church. Both Day and Maurin understood that their movement was about changing the hearts and minds of people, not the laws and doctrines of institutions (though this could certainly happen as a result of changing people). Day believed that as long as people remained "as they are, Peter's program is impossible. But it would become actual, given a people changed in heart and mind, so that they would observe the new commandment of love, or desired to."²⁴ Thus, neither of the founders of the movement ever publicly criticized the Church at large, nor attempted to attack its teachings or practices. That is not to say that they did not seek change—radical change—in the way the Church ministered to the world. For Maurin, personalism as well as Christianity was about reformation from the inside out. The Catholic Worker and its members "are to be announcers of a new social order and not denouncers of the old."²⁵ Personalism did not have to be at odds with the Catholic Church. It could, however, be the dynamite to blow off its lid, as Maurin indicated in his essay. Day and Maurin were, through personalism and loving all in an active and real way, hoping to draw the Church out of its comforts and complacencies and into its own teachings and doctrines. Day in particular saw this contented Catholicism as part of the reason that Communism was gaining hold in some parts of the American labor force. Communism, according to Day, is a heresy and a false doctrine, yet, "there is no false doctrine that does not contain certain elements of truth. I believe it is the failure of Christians which has brought about this heresy and that we will have to give an account for it."²⁶ Day and Maurin were interested in revitalizing the Church, not destroying it, and they were trying to change it one person at a time.

The Roman Catholic Church, more than other Christian denominations, has acts of service (officially known as the Works of Mercy) included into their doctrine as essential to their faith. Still, these demanding and sometimes more difficult acts of service to the poor are often forgotten in a world that is more preoccupied with upward mobility and financial gain. Day, an ex-Communist, recognized

24 Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 171.

25 Peter Maurin, qtd. in Miller, *A Harsh and Dreadful Love*, 7.

26 Day, *From Union Square to Rome*, 147.

that Communists “were saying so much about misery and injustice. Ought not Christians to say more?”²⁷ During the early days of her burgeoning Catholicism, Day was distraught when reading the lives of the saints because although they did much to serve the poor, they did not seem concerned with what was making their work necessary. She wondered, “Where were the saints to try to change the social order, not just to minister to the slaves but to do away with slavery?”²⁸ Day’s concern was similar to the saints—for the individual poor and marginalized people she served over the years—but she saw her own work as aiming to the larger transformation of the Church and society. Even *The Catholic Worker* worked to this end. It “was not a news medium . . . It became a personalist paper, setting forth personalist approaches to those great human problems of the 1930s and the decades following. It was the paper of the labor’s poor in spirit . . . it declared a communion with the heroes and martyrs of radical labor.”²⁹ The *Catholic Worker* was not a Communist organization, it was a personalist one—though at times their goals certainly shared common ground. Because of the nature of the philosophy—caring for people authentically and without directly or primarily dealing with greater institutions—personalism flourished as the driving force behind the *Catholic Worker* and its founders.

In the early days of the Catholic Worker movement, the average Catholic in America was not always willing to accept the movement as part of the Church and its teachings. At this point in American history, on the brink of the Red Scare, most of the general public was wary of Communism or anything that resembled it. Many Catholics saw the Catholic Worker houses of hospitality and could not believe the voluntary poverty of the members was derived from the Christian message. Day acknowledged that “voluntary poverty was only found among the Communists . . . the very word ‘worker’ made people distrust us at first.”³⁰ Many Catholics were “quite willing to give to the poor, but they did not feel called upon to work for the things of this life for others which they themselves esteemed so lightly.”³¹ The average American Catholic was caught up in the status quo, adhering to their sense of American capitalism and enterprise rather than clinging to their faith as the guide for how they should live and treat their fellow man. Many of the Catholic Worker’s teachings—“worker-ownership,” “the right of private property,” and “the need to de-proletarianize the worker” led many American Catholics to conclude that the Workers “were Communists in disguise, wolves in sheep’s clothing,” despite

27 Miller, *A Harsh and Dreadful Love*, 72.

28 Day, *From Union Square to Rome*, 47.

29 Miller, *A Harsh and Dreadful Love*, 76.

30 Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 188.

31 *Ibid.*

the fact that these teachings were also emphasized in papal encyclicals.³² In Day's own life, Communism and Catholicism crossed paths: "the mass of bourgeois smug Christians who denied Christ in His poor made me turn to Communism, and . . . it was the Communists and working with them that made me turn to God."³³ Day also writes that though Catholics believed and adhered to the Incarnation, that Christ came to earth and became man for man's salvation, they did not seem equally interested in the facts of Christ's life on earth—that "He was born in a stable, that He did not come to be a temporal King, that He worked with His hands, spent the first years of His life in exile, and the rest of his early manhood in a crude carpenter shop in Nazareth."³⁴ The Catholic Worker embraced the Church and its teaching more deeply, and in doing so the movement was calling all Catholics to the same daunting task.

"Justice is important, but supper is essential"

One of the key objectives of the Catholic Worker is hospitality; in fact, hospitality is arguably the glue that holds the movement and its goals together. Hospitality can mean many things, but most often it simply refers to welcoming any and all into the home for a meal, for shelter, or even just company. Hospitality functions as a foundation for protest and resistance because it first develops a relationship between those who wish to serve the community and those who know what the needs of the community are. Beyond that, hospitality can function as a form of resistance in and of itself. By welcoming the unemployed, the sick, the disabled, and the otherwise marginalized people of society, the Catholic Worker and other communities that practice such radical hospitality are inherently critiquing a Church and a society that does not give such people a second glance. Dorothy Day refused to determine between the "worthy" and "unworthy" poor, that is, those who were deserving of help and those who were merely freeloaders. Day's belief in the dignity of each person led her to teach the Workers that when problems with those they served arose, they should not be dealt with through an imposed order, but they should instead be suffered in love.³⁵ When Workers from another house wrote to Day about a person who was "poisoning community life" with their behavior, which they believed was the result of mental instability, Day insisted that they continue letting the person live in their community rather than exiling them. She believed that "eccentricity and madness were marks of suffer-

32 Ibid.

33 Miller, *A Harsh and Dreadful Love*, 10.

34 Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 204.

35 Miller, *A Harsh and Dreadful Love*, 110.

ing, and those who bore them should be cherished even more.”³⁶ This level of welcome and hospitality is far beyond what most people—even most Christians—are comfortable or willing to offer, which is precisely how the hospitality of the Catholic Worker functions as an act of resistance.

Hospitality was key in the early days of the Catholic Worker and part of Maurin’s three-tiered program. Maurin opened the first Catholic Worker house of hospitality in Harlem in 1934, a year after the first issue of *The Catholic Worker* was distributed. Maurin believed that hospitality was essential, especially in a place like Harlem; he believed that “the personalist leaven must go where lives had been blighted most by injustice.”³⁷ This first Catholic Worker house did not last long, as the owner of the building felt that the Workers were “too subversive” and refused to let them continually rent the space.³⁸ From this anecdote, it becomes clear that hospitality is not only foundational to resistance—hospitality is resistance. Day relates the telling response of the landlord: “people instinctively protect themselves from being touched too closely by the suffering of others. They turn from it, and they make this a habit.”³⁹ In welcoming any and all into their communities, the Catholic Worker is inherently critiquing a Church and a society that hesitate and ultimately refuse to do the same. Ed Loring of the Open Door writes that “*housing precedes life*,”⁴⁰ and Maurin continued to insist that “we need parish homes as well as parish domes.”⁴¹ Having a place to sleep, eat, and bathe, a place to feel welcomed and wanted—this is essential to any justice efforts because it represents the desired outcome of such efforts. Justice aims for fairness and equality—what is a better representation of equality than a table where all are welcome to share the bread without fear and without shame? This requires that the Church be more than a meeting place on Sunday morning for an hour or two of worship; it requires the Church to become a kitchen, a clinic, a school, a community, and a home.

Following in the steps of the houses of hospitality of the Catholic Worker is the Open Door Community of Atlanta, Georgia. It is in the “Catholic Worker tradition” though the community is almost entirely Protestant; the personalist philosophy of Maurin and Day is able to transcend the boundaries of institutions and denominations. It is known for fighting racism, capital punishment, and the status quo when it comes to the poor in their city. Still, the primary building block in all of this is hospitality and community. It is named the “Open Door” and not the “Equality” or

36 Ibid., 117.

37 Ibid., 80.

38 Dorothy Day, qtd. in *A Harsh and Dreadful Love*, 80.

39 Day, *From Union Square to Rome*, 7.

40 Ed Loring, *I Hear Hope Banging at My Back Door: Writings from Hospitality* (Atlanta: The Open Door Community, 2000), 38.

41 Peter Maurin, qtd. in *A Harsh and Dreadful Love* 98-99.

“Justice” community because none of those things can happen without first opening the door to those shut out by everyone else. As with most Christian intentional communities, the table is surrounded by faces and stories that are not all alike:

We’re a community that is Black and white; we are strong and weak; some of us are highly educated, and some of us are unable to read. We have women and we have men. Sometimes we have children—not all the time. We have a number of us who are aging. And we are young people. We have people whose hope is fierce and feisty and ready.⁴²

Such a diverse group would not have come together unless hospitality had been first offered. For the Catholic Worker and the Open Door, hospitality is central to the Christian message and essential to their community.

Within the realm of hospitality is the sharing of a meal, of bread. This is perhaps the most important Christian element of hospitality offered by the Catholic Worker and the Open Door. Bread is central to the Gospel; Jesus uses physical bread to represent life as well as membership in the Body of Christ.⁴³ A primary way that Jesus interacted with his followers was through the sharing of meal, the breaking of bread.⁴⁴ One of the requests of Jesus to God in the Lord’s Prayer is “Give us this day our daily bread.”⁴⁵ In sharing a meal, those involved are acknowledging their equal need of and their equal fulfillment from the food served. Sharing food sustains life and creates communities; therefore, if any group seeks to build a community and pursue justice, it is a good idea to start at the dinner table. For the Open Door, “every meal we eat is related to the Eucharist, to the eschatological banquet” where there will always be enough for everyone.⁴⁶ Day writes, “Christ is the bread on our altars because bread is the staple of the world, the simplest thing in the world, something of which we eat and never get tired. . . . For the life of the body we need food. For the life of the soul we need food. So the simplest, most loving, most thorough thing Christ could do before He died, was to institute the Blessed Sacrament.”⁴⁷ Regardless of whether a community believes the presence of Christ in the bread is literal or metaphoric, the message is still the same: God is present when we share a meal, and everyone is invited to God’s table. Therefore, those who call themselves followers of God should be ready and willing to send out the invitations to their own tables.

42 Ed Loring, *I Hear Hope Banging at My Back Door: Writings from Hospitality* (Atlanta: The Open Door Community, 2000), 4.

43 John 6:35, RSV.

44 Matt. 15:32-37, Matt. 26:17-29, among others.

45 Matt. 6:11, RSV.

46 Loring, *I Hear Hope Banging at My Back Door*, 6.

47 Day, *From Union Square to Rome*, 163-164.

Despite the eschatological and perhaps romantic visions of table fellowship and hospitality, the lived reality of communities like the Catholic Worker or the Open Door is often fraught with the struggles of everyday life. Financial concerns, disagreements among leaders, and the simple physical fact that there is *not* enough room at the table for everyone, at least not in this life. Sometimes people are turned away from the Open Door; they sleep outside on the porch or at a nearby basketball court when there is no place for them inside the house. As Loring of the Open Door laments:

That is the hardest part of our lives. We can't always say, "Yes." We distinguish, discriminate, and make decisions. We say, "Yes," and we say "No." We say, "Come in," and we say, "Go out." We say, "You are welcome, and we say, "If you don't move and stop what you're doing we'll call the police." It is harsh and dreadful. It is cross and finitude. The decision is filled with forgiveness, grace, and love. We become urgent in our patience. We want justice and we want it now!⁴⁸

Dorothy Day was similarly troubled, nearly eighty years before:

To think that we are forced by our own lack of room, our lack of funds, to perpetuate this shame [of homelessness, unemployment, etc.], is heartbreaking.

"Is this what you meant by houses of hospitality," I asked Peter.

"At least it will arouse the conscience," he said.⁴⁹

Hospitality is taxing, difficult, frustrating, and expensive. Despite the fact that Day, Maurin, and Loring all believe it to be their call as Christians to welcome and feed the marginalized, that does not make funds magically appear or remove all the tension that naturally arises when people live together. In the early days of printing *The Catholic Worker*, Day and Maurin were vocal about the importance of hospitality for the movement, and they were clearly radical. More than once, people would read their papers and show up the next day on their doorstep, expectant. This eventually led Day to be more cautious about what she put in print, aware that they should not write about such radical hospitality "unless we are willing to assume the obligations such writings bring with it."⁵⁰ Hospitality is a difficult calling, but for the Catholic Worker and the Open Door, it is essential to their faith and to their mission.

The Catholic Worker movement has done much to bring social justice issues to light in the Catholic Church and American society. The personalism of Peter

48 Loring, *I Hear Hope Banging at My Back Door*, 8.

49 Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 215-216.

50 *Ibid.*, 260.

Maurin and later of Dorothy Day assured that the movement would not become irrelevant with the rise and fall of Communism or other institutional movements. Personalism, it has been stressed, is concerned with direct, individual, active love, motivated by an eschatological, spiritual urgency. Through personalism, the Catholic Worker spread into many houses of hospitality around the world, all committed to keeping their doors open to any who have need, regardless of the value that society has assigned them. In doing so, they are rejecting the claims of the status quo in the economic and political order. Though they function as a religious group and are affiliated with a larger Church, their actions are inherently critical of that larger Church. The hospitality of the Catholic Worker and the Open Door is meant to be a wakeup call to what they see as a complacent church. Their hospitality is their legacy of resistance, sending the message that an open door and a loaf of bread can be just as political as picketing Wall Street or signing a bill into law.

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