“EVERYTHING THAT RISES MUST CONVERGE:” FULTON SHEEN, DOROTHY DAY, FLANNERY O’CONNOR AND AMERICAN CATHOLIC IDENTITY IN THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The years between the end of the Second World War and the end of the Second Vatican Council represent perhaps the most important period of transformation in the relationship between the Catholic Church and the American public. Catholicism achieved unprecedented popularity and influence in mainstream American culture between 1945 and 1965. During this time, the Catholic Church emerged from immigrant neighborhoods and a cultural ghetto. Catholics were now joining the middle class. Along with the rest of the country, they moved to the suburbs and focused on creating nuclear families.[1] Catholics became better educated as the G.I. Bill allowed more of them to attend college than ever before. The media played a part in America's growing acceptance of Catholicism as well; Hollywood produced films like *Going My Way* and *The Bells of St. Mary's* during this era. Fulton Sheen reigned as one of the brightest television stars of the fifties, and Thomas Merton's *Seven Storey Mountain* topped bestseller lists. In virtually every meaningful way, Catholic popularity and influence in America reached its apex.

The sudden prominence of Catholicism affected individual Catholics in profound and complex ways. In joining the American middle class in the suburbs, Catholics gave up much of what made them unique. The move up socially and economically contributed to

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[1] Mark S. Massa, *Catholics and American Culture: Fulton Sheen, Dorothy Day, and the Notre Dame Football Team* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 83.

the lessening of the "ethnic family system that reinforced Catholic traditions."[2] Likewise, the devotionalism that had characterized American Catholicism gave way to a faith more centered on personal piety. General surveys and specialized studies of the post-war era indicate that despite newfound cultural influence, no single Catholic experience defined the era. Some common traits, however, remained visible.

Surveys concerned with mid-twentieth century Catholicism establish a baseline for the era. Published in 1969, Thomas McAvoy's *A History of the Catholic Church in the United States* was the first major survey of American Catholic history to appear after 1965. McAvoy employed a traditional hierarchical model, focusing almost entirely on the clergy's lives and programs. His work attained an objectivity rarely found in earlier histories. Throughout the book, he criticized the shortcomings he saw in the American Church, including a weak education system, internal struggles among the hierarchy, and a lack of spiritual and intellectual curiosity within the laity. However, McAvoy did see some progress inside the Church that aligned with the common story of post-war Catholicism.[3] He acknowledged the economic boom that benefited Catholics after World War II, aiding in their assimilation into mainstream American society. He also noted the general anti-communism of Catholics and the call for a more intellectual Catholicism made by historian John Tracy Ellis. McAvoy viewed these conditions as leading to the Second Vatican Council, an event with unclear ramifications in 1969, but one for which he had great hope.

Roughly fifteen years later, two significant new surveys appeared with styles drastically different from McAvoy's. The first of these was James Hennesey's *American*

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[2] Christopher O. Lynch, *Selling Catholicism: Bishop Sheen and the Power of Television* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1998), 5.

[3] See last chapter of Thomas T. McAvoy, *A History of the Catholic Church in the United States* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969).

Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States, written in 1981. Hennesey paralleled American Catholic and secular history. Like McAvoy, he used his last chapter to examine twentieth century developments, including the dispersion of the immigrant Church into the suburbs and their subsequent assimilation. Unlike McAvoy, Hennesey focused a great deal on the laity. More importantly, he discussed the experience of non-European Catholics such as blacks, Native Americans, and Hispanics. Hennessey believed that there was no obvious line of development in the twentieth century. Instead, he saw the fragmentation of the immigrant church and "the reality of difference" within the Church as it actually existed in the United States.[4]

The second of these studies was *The American Catholic Experience*, written by Jay P. Dolan in 1985. Dolan took a social-history approach, choosing to "focus…on the people and not just the prelates, on the experience of the religious and not just the development of the institution."[5] Consequently, he viewed the Church as a social institution as much as a religious institution. This social institution revolved around parish life, and Dolan's work benefited from the collection of parish histories compiled by the Cushwa Center for American Catholic Studies at the University of Notre Dame. During the mid-twentieth century, Dolan observed that the devotionalism that defined the Catholic religious ghetto disappeared with the migration of immigrants to suburban parishes. In the 1940s and 1950s, these Catholics began to push reforms that increased lay control over the Church and anticipated the reforms of Vatican II. It is worth noting that Dolan, like Hennesey, discussed the role of non-European Catholics in the American Church. Another important addition was

[4] James J. Hennesey, *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 5.

[5] Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 10.

the mention of lay women, who made their first appearance as major players in American Catholicism in these books.

Two more important surveys with varying approaches appeared yet another fifteen years later: *American Catholic: The Saints and Sinners Who Built America's Most Powerful Church* by Charles R. Morris in 2000 and *Catholicism and American Freedom* by John T. McGreevy in 2003. Superficially, both books represented a return to a "great man" approach to Catholic history.[6] They both remained true to the consensus story of a Catholic migration to the suburbs and integration into the American mainstream. In most other ways, however, they differed from each other and from previous works. Morris's book used colorful figures, such as Cardinal Dennis Dougherty of Philadelphia, to extrapolate conclusions about the larger church. He focused on the mid-twentieth century in the second section of the book, entitled "Triumph." He believed that the Catholic experience was a "peculiarly Irish-American one"[7] and focused a great deal on popular expressions of Catholicism in this era. Of all of the surveys dealing with this era, Morris's was the most unambiguously triumphant about the Catholic ascendancy.

McGreevy instead chose to deal primarily with intellectual elites, though he did move into popular culture from time to time. Even more than a history of people, the book was a history of ideas and traditions, attempting to "explore American ideas about Catholicism along with predispositions (at times blinders) framing the mental landscape of American

[6] This is to say that they focus on the leaders of the Church rather than on the parishioners that make up the Catholic Church. With its emphasis on clergy, hierarchy, and saints, the history of the Catholic Church is uniquely suited for this sort of approach.

[7] Charles R. Morris, *American Catholic: The Saints and Sinners Who Built America's Most Powerful Church* (New York: Times Books, 1997), 109. Morris justifies his emphasis on the Irish by suggesting that the American form of devotional worship developed from the Irish form developed by Bishop Paul Cullen in the mid-nineteenth century.

Catholics."[8] The "American ideas" to which McGreevy refers are generally those of liberal intellectuals. The title of the book itself is a play on and refutation of Paul Blanshard's anti-Catholic best-seller, *American Freedom and Catholic Power*, published in 1949. McGreevy saw the fundamental conflict as being between the communal ethos of Catholicism and liberalism's emphasis on the individual.[9]

The spectrum of ideas and emphases provided by the surveys encouraged other historians of Catholicism to specialize in a variety of areas. Over the last twenty years, a number of histories dealing with different facets of the American Catholic experience of this era have emerged. Indicative of American history in general, these histories often accentuate the importance of cultural and sociological elements. Considering the near-universal agreement on the ascendancy of Catholic culture on the American landscape and the importance of Catholic suburban migration, this seems altogether appropriate.

A number of books concern themselves specifically with popular and artistic culture of the era. The most thorough of these is Mark S. Massa's *Catholics and American Culture.* Like Morris, Massa examined important individuals of the time to make larger points. He devoted each chapter to a different individual that illustrated the willingness of Catholics to transform from an "older, ghetto style of religion to a newer, 'cultural religion' one."[10] Catholics shed their religious distinctiveness and embraced a new suburban identity that allowed them to capture the cultural center stage while achieving only "mixed results from a theological point of view."[11] James T. Fisher's *The Catholic Counterculture in America, 1933-1962* was another broad-ranging examination, discussing such seemingly disparate

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[8] John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), 15.

[9] Ibid., 168.

[10] Massa, 11.

[11] Ibid., 228.

figures as Thomas A. Dooley and Jack Kerouac. He bound them together by suggesting that they engaged in an "indigenously American mode" of Catholic romanticism.[12] Other noteworthy books covered specific topics, such as Arnold Sparr's *To Promote, Defend, and Redeem: The Catholic Literary Revival and the Cultural Transformation of American Catholicism* and Frank Walsh's *Sin and Censorship: The Catholic Church and the Motion Picture Industry*.[13]

Catholic ascendancy in America manifested itself in other arenas as well; Catholic involvement in national politics increased during the fifties and early sixties, culminating in the election of John F. Kennedy to the presidency.[14] The overriding Catholic political issues of the day were education and, more importantly, anti-Communism. While all of surveys dealt with the importance of education to Catholic identity and the divisive issues that it created, the best examination of Catholic education in the post-war era is Philip Gleason's *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century*.[15] In the

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[12] James T. Fisher, *The Catholic Counterculture in America, 1933-1962* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1989). There are, of course, important differences between Dooley and Kerouac. Fisher traces the Catholic romanticism of both to the "personalism" espoused by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. Interestingly, Fisher indicates that the experiences of Dooley and Kerouac had more in common with the average parishioner than did Day's.

[13] See Arnold Sparr, *To Promote, Defend, and Redeem: The Catholic Literary Revival and the Cultural Transformation of American Catholicism, 1920-1960* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990). Sparr believes that the goal of Catholic writers and intellectuals during this era was "to promote the intellectual standing of American Catholicism, to defend the Catholic faith and its adherents from detractors, and to redeem what was seen as a drifting and fragmented secular culture" (pp xi-xii). See Frank Walsh, *Sin and Censorship: The Catholic Church and the Motion Picture Industry* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996). Though Walsh's book decries censorship, it provides a much more evenhanded and complex account of the relationship between the American Catholic Church and Hollywood than does the work of Gregory D. Black. For comparison, see Gregory D. Black, *The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies, 1940-1975.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[14] Catholic Senator Joseph McCarthy was obviously important on the national scene as well. He is not mentioned here because, as Donald F. Crosby makes clear in *God, Church, and Flag: Senator Joseph R. McCarthy and the Catholic Church, 1950-1957* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), his public career was not seen as any sort of validation of Catholicism in the public square.

[15] See Philip Gleason, *Contending with Modernity : Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). Also Peter R. D'Agostino, "The Crisis of Authority in American Catholicism: Urban Schools and Cultural Conflict, the Quest for Common Ground." *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia,* 108 (Fall-Winter, 1997-1998): 87-122.

third part of his book, Gleason examined the related advancement of the Catholic intellectual movement and Catholic education. Where education served to separate Catholics from other Americans, their strident anti-Communism brought them into the mainstream. Though it dealt specifically with Catholic ambivalence toward Senator Joe McCarthy, Donald F. Crosby's *God, Church, and Flag: Senator Joe McCarthy and the Catholic Church* provided a thorough examination of Catholic anti-Communism during the Cold War.[16]

Recent histories highlighting the role of non-European ethnicity and gender in the Catholic experience in the mid-twentieth century have been few but noteworthy. Works by John T. McGreevy and Dorothy Ann Blatnica followed the advice offered by Cyprian Davis in his *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* and examined the black Catholic experience on the parish level.[17] Both works detailed the difficulties facing African Americans in a church steeped in European tradition. The history of women's roles during this era is both sparse and contentious. James Kenneally sees a large disparity between Church teaching and lived experience in America, noting that lay Catholics were often farther from sharing their church's views on women's roles than they were from sharing liberal Protestant views.[18] Leslie Woodcock Tentler's *Catholics and Contraception: An American History* also detailed the gap between Catholic teaching and Catholic practice.[19]

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[16] See Crosby. The central theme of his book was that there was no specific Catholic response to McCarthy and his crusade, either by the church hierarchy or by the laity. Their support of or opposition to McCarthy was a function of their politics rather than their religion. The author even suggests that the great mass of Catholics remained indifferent to McCarthyism, leaving the issue to the Catholic elites who chose sides. For further discussion of Catholic anti-Communism, see Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America, 1950-1985*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

[17] See John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), Dorothy Ann Blatnica, *At the Altar of Their God: African American Catholics in Cleveland, 1922-1961* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1995), and Cyprian Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (New York: Crossroad, 1990).

[18] James J. Kenneally, *The History of American Catholic Women* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 191.

[19] See Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception: An American History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

Most of the essays in *American Catholic Women: A Historical Exploration* dealt with the modernizing effects of American culture on Catholic women in some form.[20] Once again, the assimilation of a previously distinct Catholic culture into a more general American one was apparent.

As several historians, McGreevy, Dolan, and Massa primary among them, note, an intellectual shift accompanied the Catholic cultural sea change of the post-World War II decades. The move from a Catholic ghetto mentality that emphasized devotion to a broad intellectualism reflected the literal move from Catholic neighborhoods to integrated suburbs. Men such as Jesuits John Courtney Murray, John Ford, and Gerald Kelly began moving the Church in new directions while articulating a stance that reflected the Thomistic heritage of Catholicism.[21] In many ways, Catholic intellectuals implemented the changes first proposed by the Americanist bishops of the late nineteenth century.[22]

Besides guiding the direction of the Church, Catholic intellectuals provide both an interesting and manageable way to investigate American Catholic identity at mid-century. There are some drawbacks to this approach: it is by no means a comprehensive approach to examining Catholic identity, and the individuals studied were exceptionally talented and dedicated to their faith. Despite these drawbacks, the individuals in this study offer sound examples trends of Catholic thought. As such, this study will examine three Catholic figures

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[20] See Karen Kennelly, ed., *American Catholic Women: A Historical Exploration* (New York: MacMillan, 1989).

[21] McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom*, Chapter Seven. See also John T. McGreevy, "Thinking on One's Own: Catholicism in the American Intellectual Imagination, 1928-1960." *The Journal of American History*, 84, no. 1 (June, 1997).

[22] During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, some liberal American Catholic bishops began to develop "social liberalism." The "Americanists," as they were called, combined a crusade for social justice, cooperation with non-Catholics in solving social problems, and rapid Americanization of the new immigrants. Though Pope Leo XIII rejected many of the presuppositions of Americanism, social liberalism manifested itself in a number of ways and helped prepare the American soil for the reception of Leo's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. Many of the movement's reforms were formalized during the Second Vatican Council. For more information, see McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom*, 120-123, 127; and Morris, 81-112.

of the era: Bishop Fulton Sheen, Dorothy Day, and Flannery O'Connor. With different origins, influences, and approaches to Catholicism, the three provide a wide range of material for comparing the factors that created American Catholicism between 1945 and 1965.[23]

Fulton Sheen is perhaps the most obvious choice. As a member of the clergy, he was the very model of Catholic orthodoxy. He was the most famous Catholic in America in the 1950s. Already well known as the host of the popular radio program *The Catholic Hour*, Sheen launched a weekly half-hour television program in 1952 called *Life is Worth Living*. For most Americans, he was the voice of Catholic theology. When the Jesuit magazine *America* called him "the greatest evangelizer in the history of the Catholic Church in the United States" in 1979, they may not have been exaggerating.[24] *Life is Worth Living* allowed Sheen to speak to more people each week than Christ had in his lifetime. Adding Sheen's knack for gaining celebrity converts and his position as head of the prestigious Society for the Propagation of the Faithful to his television stardom makes clear that Sheen was the face of American Catholicism.

Despite this fame, little was published on Sheen before the last fifteen years. The two studies that did exist prior to 1990 must be read with some skepticism.[25] As Thomas C. Reeves comments, Sheen's fierce anti-Communism is a major reason for his lack of appeal for many modern intellectuals.[26] The renewed interest in Sheen's career resulted in and is

[23] The public careers of Sheen and Day do not fit neatly into the years between 1945 and 1965. Sheen was well known as a radio personality, lecturer, and professor for twenty-five years before appearing on television. Day and the Catholic Worker movement reached their apex in the late 1930s. Both remained vital in the post-war years, however, and Sheen actually became more popular.

[24] "A Life Worth Living," *America* 22 December 1979: 401. Quoted in Thomas C. Reeves, *America's Bishop: The Life and Times of Fulton J. Sheen* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2001), 4.

[25] D.P. Noonan, a priest who was one of the few people ever fired by Sheen, wrote two very similar biographies of Sheen. For obvious reasons, their objectivity is questionable. For further information, see Ibid., 365.

[26] Ibid., 7.

growing from the Cause for Canonization of Sheen being directed by the Diocese of Peoria, Illinois.[27]

Reeves's *America's Bishop: The Life and Times of Fulton J. Sheen* was the first reliable published biography of the bishop. It covered the entirety of Sheen's life, ranging from Sheen's birth in El Paso, Illinois, in 1895 to his prominence as American Catholicism's most famous prelate at the time of his death in New York 1979. Reeves's most original contribution was the wealth of details about Sheen's personal life.[28] Some of the more important details include discussions of Sheen's persistent opposition to Communism and his devotion to Thomism. As Reeves detailed, Sheen based his opposition to Communism in religion, not economics.[29] Sheen's neo-Thomism and his belief that faith and reason did not necessarily conflict interested Reeves, and he explored the Catholic ghetto mentality that formed Sheen. Reeves admitted the bishop unquestionably had faults – chief among them, vanity – but his sincere attempt to live a holy life allowed him to transcend those faults. Whatever Sheen's deficiencies, Reeves obviously admired Bishop Sheen as an important figure in Catholicism.

Like Reeves, Kathleen L. Riley examined Sheen through a biography that covered the whole of his life. Based on her 1988 dissertation at the University of Notre Dame, Riley revised and published her book after the appearance of Reeves's work. Unlike Reeves, however, Riley had a larger thesis that is stated in the title of her book, *Fulton J. Sheen: An American Catholic Response to the Twentieth Century* (2004). The American Catholicism in

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[27] See http://sheen.catholicexchange.com/index.html for more information on the Cause for Canonization of Archbishop Sheen.

[28] Written at the end of his life after being incapacitated by a stroke and unfinished before his death, Sheen's autobiography, *Treasure in Clay*, is particularly unsatisfactory in providing any insight into the man.

[29] Reeves, 190. As will be discussed later, his opposition to Communism lay primarily in the fact that he, like Flannery O'Connor, saw Communism as a secular religion of the state that denied the inherent worth of the individual.

which Sheen was brought up "was characterized by two main currents of thought: the Scholastic revival, which heralded the Thomistic synthesis as the official philosophy of the Catholic Church; and a growing commitment to social justice and reform."[30] Riley traced Sheen's anti-Communism to both of these influences, especially focusing on the importance of Aquinas to Sheen and American Catholicism in general.[31]

Another approach to studying Sheen is to examine the rhetoric of *Life is Worth Living*. This method is the one generally taken by the field of mass communications and most often focuses on Sheen's anti-Communism. Christopher Owen Lynch's work stands as the best example of this approach.[32] Lynch stated that his book "places the bishop in the context of a wider culture."[33] Lynch accounted for Sheen's popularity in several ways: Sheen appealed to a broad audience; his message coincided with Catholic assimilation; and Americans used religion to alleviate their fears in early years of the Cold War. In short, Lynch believed Sheen was the right man at the right time. Lynch saw Sheen as a pop culture icon or, as the title indicates, a pitchman for an ecumenical type of religion. While placing Sheen in a larger cultural context, Lynch did not present Sheen in the context of his earlier theological work. Lynch highlighted Sheen's media savvy at the expense of his importance as an intellectual and priest.

Dorothy Day is almost as obvious a choice as Sheen for examining American Catholic identity at mid century. She has been called "the most significant, interesting, and influential person in the history of American Catholicism," and historians suggest that she

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[30] Kathleen L. Riley, *Fulton J. Sheen: An American Catholic Response to the Twentieth Century* (Staten Island, NY: St. Paul's/Alba House, 2004), 1. The main impetus for these trends was the emphasis placed on them by the pope of Sheen's youth, Leo XIII.

[31] Ibid., 131.

[32] Christopher Owen Lynch, *Selling Catholicism: Bishop Sheen and the Power of Television* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1998).

[33] Lynch, *Selling Catholicism*, 7.

influenced the social justice views of an entire generation of Catholics.[34] She was almost as famous as Sheen during the apex of their careers, and she is better remembered now than the bishop. Day represents the flip side of Catholic identity. Where Sheen was a public intellectual, Day was action personified. Sheen taught the Catholic understanding of social justice; Day lived it.

Compared to Sheen, far more has been written about Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement.[35] Part of the reason for Day's appeal to intellectuals may be her status as a radical. Sheen was a soothing television figure aimed at the masses. Day, on the other hand, was an outspoken leader of an international Catholic movement that challenged the social and political establishment.

Although it is almost twenty-five years old, William D. Miller's *Dorothy Day: A Biography* remains the definitive account of Day's life and work. Miller presented an authoritative portrait of Day's radical and bohemian tastes prior to her conversion – including her affiliation with Communism.[36] In the earliest chapters, he described her attraction to radicalism and her troubled personal life. He moved from there into the central events of her public life: conversion to Catholicism and meeting Peter Maurin, who inspired her Catholic radicalism. As Miller came to the Day's activities in the 1960s, he cataloged the beginning of her decline, including her illness, irreverent volunteers, and a crazed antiwar movement.[37]

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[34] Morris, 141.

[35] In addition to being central to Paul Elie *The Life You Save May Be Your Own: An American Pilgrimage* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003), Massa's *Catholics and American Culture*, Fisher's *The Catholic Counterculture in America, 1933-1962*, see Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness: The Autobiography of Dorothy Day* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1952), Robert Coles, *Dorothy Day: A Radical Devotion* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1987), Mell Piehl, *Breaking Bread: The Catholic Worker and the Origin of Catholic Radicalism in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), and Nancy L. Roberts, *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984).

[36] William D. Miller, *Dorothy Day: A Biography* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 200.

[37] Ibid., 490-91.

Whatever stumbling blocks she faced later in her career, Miller emphasized that Day's passion made her transcendent, and "[h]er passion was God."[38]

In his book *Love is the Measure: A Biography of Dorothy Day*, Jim Forest, a former Catholic Worker, documented how the movement implemented its fusion of radical Catholic social thought in the poorest areas of American life. Forest admitted Day's ideas often "were as second-hand as her clothing,"[39] but argued that her commitment to a life of prayerful activism rather than pious sermons served suffering Americans in a practical, tangible way. Forest worked largely with Day's autobiographical writings and scholarly works recently published at the time. The influence of Miller's biography especially showed in the earlier chapters of *Love is the Measure*. The biographies diverged a great deal after 1960, when Forest began his acquaintance with Day. Unlike Miller, Forest examined Day's successes during the decade. Forest acknowledged Day's weaknesses but stresses the importance of Day and her Catholic Worker movement. Ultimately, he praises the movement and its dedication to action.

Despite the attention accorded her, Day did not believe that she, individually, was particularly important.[40] Instead, the movement she founded, the Catholic Worker movement, was the primary issue. Here also, Miller's work is outstanding. In his book, *A Harsh and Dreadful Love: Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement*, Miller analyzed how the movement blended the gospels, the writings of the early Church, the

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[38] Ibid., x.

[39] James H. Forest, *Love is the Measure: A Biography of Dorothy Day* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 207.

[40] It should be mentioned that Sheen offered the same protest regarding his individual insignificance. Given his lifelong problem with vanity, however, one could reasonably question the sincerity of Sheen's protest.

teachings of modern popes, and assorted ideas from Christian novelists and philosophers.[41] Consequently, the movement suggested a radical Catholic alternative to the oppressions of both capitalism and socialism. According to Miller, the Catholic Worker movement was perfectionist and pacifist, the first truly radical Catholic movement in United States history.[42] Naturally, he focused on the *Catholic Worker*, the newspaper and most visible product of the movement. The paper was the Catholic response to the Communist *Daily Worker*, and Day aimed it at the lower classes and radicals, charging only a penny or giving it away free.[43]

Flannery O'Connor may be the outlier in this study. She does not so much provide a middle way combining Sheen's intellectualism and Day's activism as she does a third way. Her private approach to Catholicism provided a counterpoint to the public Catholicism that characterized Sheen's and Day's careers and much of American Catholicism in the post-war era. Unlike Sheen and Day, O'Connor did not live in direct service of God. Instead, she offered up her vocation, her writing, as her way of praising God. In some ways, she was a stand in for millions of Catholic not called to the religious life or the extraordinary.

Though several literary analyses of her work have been produced, surprisingly little literature exists on O'Connor as a historical figure. After the publication of the *The Habit of Being* in 1979, the collection of Flannery O'Connor's letters edited by Sally Fitzgerald, no full-length biography materialized until more than twenty years later.[44] This lack of attention, however, would have suited O'Connor; she described herself by saying, "I am not

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[41] William D. Miller, *A Harsh and Dreadful Love: Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement* (New York: Liveright, 1973), 10.

[42] Ibid., 15.

[43] Ibid., 254.

[44] In addition to these biographies, see also Paul Elie, *The Life You Save May Be Your Own*. In this fascinating book, Elie interweaves O'Connor's life with three other Catholic writers of her generation – Walker Percy, Dorothy Day, and Thomas Merton.

a mystic, and I do not lead a holy life….I'm only a storyteller."[45] While O'Connor's stories may provide her legacy, it is worth examining the impact of her battle with lupus, her upbringing in the largely Fundamentalist Protestant South, and her gender on those stories, and by extension, her experience of American Catholicism.

In her study of O'Connor, Jean Cash examined some of these issues while leaving others unresolved. Cash dealt with the issues of O'Connor's racial views, her decision to never marry, and her relationship with her mother. Cash traced O'Connor's individualism and social awkwardness to a childhood dominated by her mother after the early death of her father.[46] Both the social conservatism of her childhood and the Civil Rights movement in the South influenced her views on race.[47] In dealing with O'Connor's illness, Cash concluded that O'Connor took a Catholic approach in seeing the value of suffering, accepting the hardships that it entailed. O'Connor settled at *Andulasia*, her mother's farm, to pursue her writing.[48] Despite her thorough treatment of these topics, Cash downplayed the tensions and nuances of the interplay between O'Connor's Catholicism and her Southern heritage. She also largely ignored O'Connor's anti-Communism. Interestingly, O'Connor opposed Communism because "Communism is a religion of the state, committed to the extinction of the Church" and "condemn[ed] communism because it is a false religion, not because of the form of government it is."[49] This was the same objection to Communism held by Fulton

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[45] Flannery O'Connor, *Flannery O'Connor: Spiritual Writings,* ed. Robert Ellsberg (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 15.

[46] Jean Cash, *Flannery O'Connor: A Life* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2002), 143.

[47] Ibid., 149-155.

[48] Ibid., 311.

[49] Flannery O'Connor, *The Habit of Being,* ed. Sally Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1978), 347.

Sheen. These drawbacks coincided with Cash's understanding that "[w]hat matters most in the life of Flannery O'Connor is her enduring fiction."[50]

Ralph Wood's book, *Flannery O'Connor and the Christ-Haunted South* provided some of the insight into O'Connor's faith and Southern heritage which Cash's biography lacks. Wood's work was primarily a literary analysis. As such, it often served as the complement to Cash's study, filling in the gaps of the interplay between the Christ-haunted, non-Catholic South, which offered the nation "its greatest religious hope" and O'Connor's Catholic faith.[51] Wood promised to "demonstrate the immense social and religious relevance of Flannery O'Connor's work,"[52] and he argued that the central themes to "O'Connor's stories are stark and often grotesque because they cast doubt on the consensus assumptions of the age" based on a self-sufficient individualism.[53] Her emphasis on the Eucharist and sacramental Christianity caused her to be critical of secularism, lukewarm Christians, and the "pious pap" espoused by some members of the clergy – including Sheen.[54] As an intellectual and student of theology, she detested anti-intellectual, "Instant Answers" Christianity.

In using Sheen, Day, and O'Connor to study American Catholic identity, this study hopes to answer a number of questions: To what extent are they orthodox? What makes them distinct from each other? What holds them together? To what extent and how are they representative of Catholic identity?

In order to answer these questions, this study will compare each of the approaches taken to Catholicism by Sheen, Day, and O'Connor. All of the chapters will include an

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[50] Cash, 134.

[51] Ralph C. Wood, *Flannery O'Connor and the Christ-Haunted South* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2004), 123.

[52] Ibid., 2.

[53] Ibid., 11.

[54] Ibid., 29.

introduction followed by a brief biographical sketch. The study will then examine the influences and circumstances that shaped the overriding themes of each person's public work: anti-Communism for Sheen, personalism for Day, and Christian realism for O'Connor. Special attention will be paid to these themes and how they affected each person's vocation. As a means of demonstrating the importance of these themes to each individual's work, the study will compare them to others in their respective professional milieu. Sheen will be compared to other members of the American clergy, Day will be compared to other American social and religious reformers, and O'Connor will be compared to other Southern writers. Each chapter will build on the previous one, demonstrating the differences and similarities of the approaches taken by each one of these Catholics to their faith.

This study will demonstrate that there were substantial differences in the approaches of Sheen, Day, and O'Connor. These different approaches exemplify the fact that there was not a single American Catholic experience between 1945 and 1965. Among the three figures mentioned, obvious differences emerge. Sheen may be seen as the public face of Catholicism, appealing to the broadest audience through television. Though shaped by the ghetto mentality of early-twentieth-century Catholicism, in many ways, he lived the American dream. The result was that he became a thoroughgoing American patriot and delivered teachings designed to appeal to an ecumenical audience and make Catholicism more palatable to a largely Protestant country. On the surface, Day could not have seemed more different from Sheen. Where Sheen's message seemed designed to comfort Americans, Day attempted to provoke. Unlike Sheen and O'Connor, she was a convert. Her earliest influences were radical, and she used peaceful radical tactics throughout her career. While

she was a prolific writer, she readily admitted that she was not a great thinker. Instead, Day was action personified. Far from Sheen's and Day's public Catholicism, O'Connor relied on personal interpretation and maintained a private life. Her audience was miniscule relative to Sheen's and Day's during the era, and she appealed to a more elite, and often secular, audience. Rather than offering herself up as an example of Christian living, she used her writing to express her faith. Clearly, each had different takes on the role of their Catholic faith in their lives and on the issues of the day.

It is important to emphasize, however, that the orthodoxy of American Church was a largely coherent one. On a parish level, orthodoxy manifested itself in building campaigns for churches and schools and an emphasis on devotion to saints. Until the advent of the Second Vatican Council, the papacy of Pope Leo XIII largely defined the American intellectual orthodoxy to which Sheen, Day, and O'Connor subscribed. His papacy had two main thrusts: a reassertion of the primacy thirteenth-century Dominican St. Thomas Aquinas' philosophy and an emphasis on social justice in the face of the problems caused by industrialization and urbanization.[55]

Thomism essentially defined orthodox Catholic thought during this era. Leo's *Aeterni Patris* (1879) officially sanctioned and promulgated neo-Thomism, but did not reach America with any significance outside of the Catholic University of America until Pope Pius X's rejection of modernism in 1907. American neo-Thomism continued the optimism of the Americanist movement of the previous decade by criticizing the age for "its skepticism, irrationalism, disillusionment, individualistic capitalism, and totalitarian

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[55] Riley, 1.

socialism."[56] Instead, the movement reasserted the capacity of reason to comprehend reality, the transcendental moral order of the universe, and the certainty of faith.[57] Pope Pius XII's *Humani Generis* (1950) continued papal endorsement of Thomism, calling it the "most authoritative expression of Catholic thought and a safe intellectual route to orthodoxy."[58] Gradually neo-Thomism began to dominate Catholic seminaries, colleges, and universities, until, by the 1950s, over half the philosophers in these institutions identified themselves as Thomists.[59] As one would expect of Catholic philosophy, neo-Thomism thrived in Europe as well, particularly in France. Etienne Gilson and Jacques Maritain headed the movement there. As this study will demonstrate, Maritain influenced American Catholic intellectuals a great deal.

Leo's *Rerum Novarum* employed a Thomistic framework to deal with the social problems of the day. This represented a turning point in American Catholic thinking on problems of the industrial order; before the encyclical was published, Catholic thinkers had no consistent or systematic structure with which to deal with these problems.[60] Leo's Catholic solution to the problem "tried to steer a path between the Scylla of excessive individualism (capitalism) and the Charybdis of excessive conformity (socialism)."[61] Socialism was the more dangerous problem for Leo because it magnified the role of the state in industrial life and provided no place for religion or the rights of private property. Capitalism on the other hand, rejected moral and political intervention in industry. While

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[56] Patrick W. Carey, ed., *American Catholic Religious Thought: The Shaping of a Theological and Social Tradition* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 47-48.

[57] McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom*, 198-201.

[58] Pope Pius XII, *Humani Generis*, 1950. Available from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_12081950_humani-generis_en.html, accessed 10 April 2006.

[59] Carey, 49.

[60] Ibid., 47.

[61] Ibid., 42.

it emphasized the rights of private property, it did not understand that property belonged first to God and existed for the benefit of all humans.[62] In essence, Leo's difficulty lay in the fact that economics had no inherent morality; it was the role of the Church to try to provide principles. The two principles he stressed came out of Thomistic natural law: the inviolability of private property and the principle of subsidiarity. Pope Pius XI seized on the idea of subsidarity in his 1931 encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno*. Using this principle, Pius emphasized that communities, especially Catholic communities, rather than the state should be the primary source social reform and support. Msgr. John Ryan, credited by some as the architect of the New Deal, and Peter Maurin, Dorothy Day's spiritual mentor, were particularly notable among those who subscribed to this idea.[63]

Sheen, Day, and O'Connor respected the authority and teachings of the Church, especially the neo-Thomist movement and recent papal encyclicals regarding social justice. They also shared fundamental Catholic assumptions. All believed in the Fall, the Incarnation, and Salvation. Salvation was particularly important; for each it was key aspect of the relationship between God and man. All shared the predominant Catholic political view of the time, anti-Communism.

For her last collection of stories, O'Connor borrowed French Jesuit theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's phrase, "everything that rises must converge."[64] Teilhard believed all humans were evolving toward God, and he used the phrase as a way of stating that if something rises or goes toward the good, it also goes toward unity. The phrase fits Sheen, Day and O'Connor nicely. Despite their different influences and

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[62] McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom*, 131.

[63] Carey, 43.

[64] Flannery O'Connor, *Everything that Rises Must Converge* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965), x.

approaches, all were thoroughly orthodox Catholics, and could not imagine themselves functioning outside of the church. Their understandings and experience of American Catholicism were distinct; they were also distinctly Catholic.

CHAPTER II

FULTON SHEEN: CATHOLIC BISHOP

"God love you."[65]
-Fulton Sheen at the end of each episode of *Life is Worth Living*

On the evening of February 12, 1952, Roman Catholic Bishop Fulton J. Sheen walked onto the stage of Manhattan's Adelphi Theater to begin a program that included no singing, dancing, or guests. Entitled *Life is Worth Living*, the show was experimental even by the adventurous standards of the era. The program consisted of a series of twenty-eight lectures covering a variety of topics, ranging from motherhood to war to the monotony of everyday life. Even the appearance of the program itself was unconventional. Sheen "wore a black cassock with purple piping; from his shoulders billowed a purple cape and on his chest gleamed a gold cross,"[66] while the stage was designed to look like the study of a rectory. The only props on the stage were a statue of the Madonna, later dubbed "Our Lady of Television," and a blackboard erased by Sheen's "little angel, Skippy."[67]

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[65] "Life is Worth Living?" *Life is Worth Living: First Series*, by Fulton J. Sheen, 30 min., 1952, videocassette.

[66] "Microphone Missionary," *Time*, 14 April 1952, 72.

[67] Mark S. Massa, *Catholics and American Culture: Fulton Sheen, Dorothy Day, and the Notre Dame Football Team* (New York : Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 82. Sheen's "little angel" deserves special mention in any discussion of *Life is Worth Living* as it was one of the most popular features on the show. The angel was actually a stagehand who erased Sheen's drawings from the chalkboard. The chalkboard was on a swivel, and when the camera was not focused on the board, the stagehand would rotate the board and erase it, causing it to appear to have been magically cleared. Sheen turned this into a running gag, mentioning that his angel used "Halo" shampoo and belonged to the "local

Despite expectations of failure, *Life is Worth Living* was an immediate success, and Bishop Sheen became one of television's first superstars.[68] His popularity eventually peaked at thirty million viewers during the 1955 season.[69] Throughout the 1950s, Americans regularly listed him as one of the most admired men in the country.[70] Critics recognized the quality of the program; Sheen won an Emmy for "Outstanding Television Personality" in 1952, and *Look* magazine named *Life is Worth Living* as "Best Religious Program" three times.[71]

That the show was popular is obvious. Explaining its broad appeal is more complicated, especially considering that the program was popular not only among Catholics but also among viewers of other faiths. According to one survey, Sheen's audience was 75.5 percent Catholic, 13.4 percent Protestant, 7.9 percent mixed religious background, and 2.2 percent Jewish.[72]

How could Sheen attract so many people of different beliefs? While several factors contributed to his success,[73] the primary reason was Sheen's message, and the

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20 of the Cherubim." In informal interviews with original viewers of the program, the angel was one of the first things mentioned.

[68] Executives from NBC and CBS rejected the show, believing that no one would watch a program using the philosophy of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas to address the issues of the day. Though the DuMont network aired the series, it did so only as a public service, burying the show in an "obituary spot" opposite Milton Berle and Frank Sinatra. Within one season, Sheen knocked Sinatra off the air and significantly dented Berle's television ratings. For more information on Sheen's television success, see James C. G. Conniff, *The Bishop Sheen Story* (Greenwich, CT : Fawcett Publications, 1953), 11.

[69] Kathleen L. Riley, *Bishop Fulton J. Sheen: An American Catholic Response to the Twentieth Century* (Staten Island, NY : Alba House, 2004), 224. This surge followed Sheen's move from DuMont to ABC before the 1955 season due to financial considerations.

[70] *Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City), 28 December 1956.

[71] Christopher O. Lynch, *Selling Catholicism: Bishop Sheen and the Power of Television* (Lexington, KY : University of Kentucky Press, 1998), 7.

[72] Ibid., 8.

[73] Sheen himself was instrumental to the program's success. He was an outstanding orator, having honed his speaking skills from the pulpit, on the radio, and in the classroom. Sheen also used comedy, lightening lectures on heavy subjects with corny jokes and anecdotes and often making references to his angelic helper. The humor had both the effect of connecting Sheen to his audience and bringing his message to their level. It is also important to note that *Life is Worth Living* appeared during a time of reviving religious fervor in the United States.

message to which he returned most often was anti-Communism.[74] Over the course of 127 episodes, Sheen discussed Communism 32 times.[75] Curiously, the anti-Communism that made Sheen so popular with a broad spectrum of Americans had its roots in Catholic orthodoxy. He based his opposition to Communism in the natural law of St. Thomas Aquinas's Scholastic philosophy and the Catholic Church's teachings on social justice. Sheen supplemented his orthodoxy with patriotism; Marxism's challenge to American democracy only strengthened Sheen's hatred of Communism.

Though anti-Communism itself was obviously a popular subject in Cold War America, it was not the sole source of Sheen's popularity. Instead, it allowed him to discuss more general topics. He united orthodox Catholicism with American culture against a mutual enemy. Marxism's denial of the inherent rights of man permitted Sheen to deal with the personal piety and importance of the individual that was fundamental to the American mindset. By pitting Communism as the enemy of western thought, culture, and capitalism, Sheen tied Americans to the larger Judeo-Christian tradition. These views gave him the authority to speak on other social issues, such as racism and sexuality, that were of concern to the nation during the 1950s. Thus, Fulton Sheen's orthodox Catholic opposition to Communism encompassed universal messages that made him the national face and philosopher of Catholicism.

Born in 1895 to a farming family in El Paso, Illinois, Fulton Sheen in many ways had the ideal American childhood. His father was a moderately successful farmer, his

[74] This emphasis was nothing new to Sheen; he opposed Soviet Communism almost immediately following the Bolshevik Revolution. In the years before he appeared on *Life is Worth Living*, the public knew Sheen as the "prophet and philosopher" of American Catholic anti-Communism.

[75] Mary Jude Yablonsky, "A Rhetorical Analysis of Selected Television Speeches of Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen on Communism – 1952-1956" (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1974), 34-36.

mother was popular in the community, and all the Sheen children were intelligent. Sheen's parents emphasized hard work and education as the means for their children to achieve success.[76] They also stressed the importance of their Catholic faith. As a result, Sheen went to St. Mary's parochial school while growing up, and the family attended church and prayed the Rosary together on a regular basis. The most scandalous aspect of Sheen's childhood was the fact that he had a Protestant half-sister by his father's first marriage.[77]

Sheen's schooling continued his idyllic childhood. Though named Peter by his parents, Sheen took the name "Fulton" from his grandfather when he started school.[78] Attending the Spalding Institute for high school, Sheen excelled in the classroom and was popular with other students. Understanding that he would never be an athlete, he focused on becoming an expert debater. He continued debate into his time at St. Viator College in Bourbonnais, Illinois. Sheen later recalled that being lambasted by his coach before a competition with Notre Dame ultimately set him on the path that would result in him being such an effective speaker.[79] Intense preparation for each competition, of course, helped as well.

From Sheen's earliest years, his family believed that he would become a priest.[80] After graduating from St. Viator, he went to St. Paul Seminary. The bishop of his

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[76] Thomas C. Reeves, *America's Bishop* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2001), 13.

[77] Ibid., 11. See also Susan Jacoby, *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004), 277. Using Reeves' biography as reference, Jacoby makes the case that Sheen's sister's upbringing as a Protestant was a closely guarded family secret. The reality is the Sheen family lost custody of the sister early in Fulton's life. Sheen would not have said much, if anything, about her later because she was never part of his life.

[78] The reasons for this are somewhat unclear. Apparently, Peter was regularly referred to as "Fulton's boy," and the name Fulton stuck. See Fulton J. Sheen, *Treasure in Clay: The Autobiography of Fulton J. Sheen* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 20.

[79] "Microphone Missionary," 73-74.

[80] Reeves, 15.

diocese in Peoria later sent Sheen to the Catholic University of America to earn a doctorate in philosophy as well. He was ordained in 1919 and received two degrees from Catholic University the next year. Sheen then studied at the prestigious Louvain University in Belgium. There he earned a Ph.D. in philosophy with the highest distinction and was invited to try to obtain another graduate degree, the *agrégé en Philosophie*.[81] He was the first American ever to receive such an offer. Sheen earned the honor in 1925, receiving champagne at his congratulatory dinner.[82]

With his education and interests, Sheen was never meant to be a pastor. Though he had brief stints as a parish priest in London and Peoria, Sheen was rarely tied to a parish or even a diocese. Instead, he became an instructor at Catholic University in 1926. He taught philosophy and theology until 1950, proving to be a popular professor whose lectures often drew standing-room only audiences.[83] Even here, however, Sheen's interests were primarily extra-curricular. As a professor, he wrote two scholarly books, *God and Intelligence in Modern Philosophy* and *Religion Without God*.[84] After this, he primarily published a number of books and articles aimed at the general public.[85] The writings provided him with his first experience with national fame and praise. This resulted in him being asked to speak on "The Catholic Hour," a nationally broadcast

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[81] The various biographies of Fulton Sheen have misrepresented the *agrégé* degree. Virtually all of them refer to it as a "sort of super doctorate." In reality, it is a graduate degree that emphasizes teaching over research, which made it a natural fit for Sheen. At the time, it was considered nearly on par with a doctorate; philosophers such as Jean Paul Sartre only obtained an *agrégé* degree. It has since regressed in prestige and generally considered inferior to a doctorate. See Massa, 246; D.P. Noonan, *The Passion of Fulton Sheen* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1972), 12; Reeves, 50, 53; and Riley, 127.

[82] Reeves, 50. Receiving champagne at the dinner indicated that Sheen had achieved the *agrégé* with the highest distinction. Those who passed with the lowest distinction received water; those who were slightly better received beer.

[83] Ibid., 72-74.

[84] Massa, 83. See Fulton J. Sheen, *God and Intelligence in Modern Philosophy: A Critical Study in the Light of the Philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Longmans Green, 1925) and Fulton J. Sheen, *Religion Without God* (New York: Longmans Green, 1928).

[85] Ibid.

radio program in 1928. He quickly became the program's most popular speaker, with increased numbers of letters and financial donations pouring into the show whenever Sheen spoke.[86] Consequently, he offered reflections on "The Catholic Hour" during the Lenten season and Holy Week for more than twenty years.

Sheen's radio appearances made him popular throughout the United States. He was in demand as a preacher, retreat leader, and teacher.[87] Francis Cardinal Spellman of New York, arguably the most important figure in the American Catholic Church during this era, invited Sheen to preach annually at St. Patrick's Cathedral. Like seemingly all of his public endeavors, these homilies added to his fame as he packed the cathedral and received positive coverage from the press.[88]

Sheen and Spellman initially got along very well, and Sheen's career in the clergy progressed. In 1948, Spellman invited Sheen to join him on a world-wide tour. Sheen assumed the preaching duties for the trip. Two years later Spellman had Sheen named to head the American branch of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, the Church's principal source of missionary funds. This appointment resulted in Sheen being consecrated a bishop in 1951. Sheen's abilities as an apologist and speaker allowed him to be an outstanding fund-raiser as well. He continued to produce written works at a high rate during this time, and he did not slow his rate of speaking engagements.

Yet another source of Sheen's fame was his ability to win high-profile converts. Notable among these converts were writer Clare Boothe Luce (wife of *Time* magazine publisher Henry Luce), car manufacturer Henry Ford II, and ex-Communist Louis

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[86] Charles R. Morris, *American Catholic: The Saints and Sinners Who Built America's Most Powerful Church* (New York: Times Books, 1997), 163.
[87] Reeves, 81.
[88] Ibid.

Budenz. In his biography of Sheen, historian Thomas Reeves suggests that thousands of Americans joined the Catholic Church because of Sheen's efforts, but the bishop claimed that he never kept count.[89]

In 1951 came the opportunity that would represent the highlight of Sheen's fame and influence. When the Archdiocese of New York decided to enter the world of television, Sheen was the natural choice to appear on screen. Sheen's talks on *Life is Worth Living*, as the new television show was named, were masterful. As with his days debating, Sheen spent a great deal of time refining his presentation. He worked on them an average of thirty-five hours a week, delivering them in Italian and French to local nuns clarify his thoughts.[90] Sheen's humor, charm, intelligence, and acting skill radiated throughout the *Life is Worth Living*, and millions tuned in to hear his seemingly non-denominational answers to life's problems.

Despite high ratings, an "intramural spat" with Cardinal Spellman cut short Sheen's time on *Life is Worth Living*. During the production of the show, Sheen and Spellman argued over the dispersal of funds from the Society for the Propagation of the Faithful.[91] The fight led to a private audience before Pius XII, and the pontiff sided with Sheen. In retaliation, Spellman ended Sheen's television series, cancelled his appearances at St. Patrick's, and drove him from the Archdiocese.[92] Many observers saw Sheen's appointment as the Bishop of Rochester in 1966 as a sort of exile that was part of Spellman's retribution.

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[89] Ibid., 6.
[90] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 67.
[91] Morris, 226-227.
[92] Ibid. According to Morris, Spellman wanted to raid the Society's funds.

Though it appears that Sheen was in the right in his argument with Spellman, the feud spoke to a larger problem with Sheen. Vanity had sparked the dispute as much genuine disagreement; both men could be *prima donnas*.[93] Pride was a problem for Sheen, and he knew it. As both priest and bishop, Sheen lived at prime addresses in Washington and New York, dressed well, and drove expensive cars. As a performer, he enjoyed the positive publicity he received from the media and adoration of his fans.[94] This pride also may have led him to invent a second doctorate for himself early in his career at Catholic University.[95]

Sheen had been an active participant in the Second Vatican Council and wholeheartedly endorsed its reforms. As Bishop of Rochester, he wanted to make his diocese the bridge between the old and new Catholicism. He enacted sweeping reforms and again garnered positive press.[96] What he did not acquire was the support of the priests or lay people in his diocese. Despite his skills as an intellectual, orator, and fund-raiser, Sheen had almost no training as a pastor or administrator. He alienated many Catholics in Rochester, most notably over his proposal to sell St. Bridget's Church and School for urban renewal.[97] With his tenure in Rochester largely a failure, Sheen resigned in 1969 and returned to New York.

Living in a relatively small apartment in New York, Sheen continued to write and speak during the last decade of his life. He did this despite battling serious heart disease.

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[93] Reeves, 290.
[94] Ibid., 149-150.
[95] Ibid., 42. Reeves alleges that Sheen made up a fake degree for himself while at Catholic University in order to advance his career.
[96] Riley, 278.
[97] Reeves, 317-321. Sheen agreed to sell St. Bridget to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) without consulting its priest or parishioners. The parish was a small, 114-year-old parish in Rochester that served primarily minority families. Sheen had intended to sell the church's land to HUD in order to provide housing for the same minorities.

Over last forty years of his life, all of his television fees and most of his book royalties went to the Society for the Propagation of the Faithful. By his own count, Sheen estimated that he gave $10 million of his own money to the organization.[98] The capstone of Sheen's life came in October, 1978, when Pope John Paul II embraced him in the sanctuary of St. Patrick's Cathedral. The Pope assured Sheen that "that he had been a loyal son of the Church."[99] Sheen died just over a year later on December 9, in his chapel before the Blessed Sacrament.

As he burned many of his personal documents, Sheen made it somewhat difficult to comment definitively on his influences.[100] Despite this, in examining both his writing and the era in which he lived, it is possible to determine likely sources of the major influence on Sheen. As a Catholic seminarian and scholar in the first half of the twentieth century, he studied the works of St. Thomas Aquinas at great length. He clearly understood recent papal encyclicals regarding social justice, paying special attention to the Church's opposition to Communism and various forms of liberal secularism. In addition to both these influences, which would have shaped the views of most if not all members of the American clergy, Sheen held a strong Americanist streak. It is not clear whether fellow Midwesterner Bishop John Ireland influenced Sheen in this area, or whether Sheen merely shared the view with Ireland. Msgr. John Ryan undoubtedly did influence Sheen in attempting to reconcile Catholic and American social

[98] Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 125.
[99] Ibid., 354-355.
[100] Reeves, 399. Reeves offers no reason for this other than to hypothesize that Sheen may have valued his privacy.

reforms. Whatever his source of inspiration, Sheen sought to unite Catholic orthodoxy and American patriotism.[101]

In his 1879 encyclical, *Aeterni Patris*, Pope Leo XIII advocated the return to Thomistic philosophy to combat the problems associated with Kantian and Hegelian Idealism, British Empiricism, current Rationalism, Skepticism, and Liberalism.[102] Leo applied a Scholastic approach to contemporary problems in his subsequent encyclicals, and later popes, notably Pius XI, reiterated the need for a Christian philosophy based on Thomistic principles.[103] Consequently, when the School of Philosophy was established at the Catholic University of America in 1895, it focused on Scholasticism, and its faculty quickly became leaders of the American Thomistic revival. Both at St. Paul Seminary and at Catholic University, Fulton Sheen studied Thomistic thought.[104]

Thomism shaped Sheen's world view in a variety of ways. Because of it, Sheen held traditional Catholic views on continuity and medieval customs while still trusting the power of reason. He essentially managed to be both tradition-minded and yet forward-looking. The result was that he fit aspects of both American political parties, but could not be confined to either. Sheen always saw religion, not politics, as the answer to modern problems.[105] Sheen viewed Thomism as the means to construct an "objective rational system" in order to save spiritual, intellectual, and human values "in the face of contemporary aspirations and perplexities."[106] Thomistic thought provided both Sheen

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[101] Fulton J. Sheen, *Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938), xiii.

[102] "Neo-Thomism," *BELIEVE Religious Information Source*, Available from http://mb-soft.com/believe/txo/neothomi.htm, accessed 1 April 2006.

[103] Patrick W. Carey, ed., *American Catholic Religious Thought: The Shaping of a Theological and Social Tradition* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 48.

[104] Massa, 97.

[105] Fulton J. Sheen, *Life is Worth Living: First Series* (New York : McGraw-Hill, 1953), 70.

[106] Sheen, *God and Intelligence*, x.

and the Catholic Church with a system that offered certainty and optimism in a world increasingly "inclined to materialism, immorality, cynicism, and despair."[107] Critics of Sheen's dismissed his talks on *Life is Worth Living* as "fluff."[108] In examining Sheen's Thomistic training, however, it becomes clear that his hopeful message that life's problems could be solved by turning to God and natural law had its roots in Thomism.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the Thomistic view of the relationship between the world and its Creator to Sheen. Nothing mattered to him more than salvation.[109] This salvation was found in God, whose existence Thomists like Sheen believed they could prove by way of cosmological argument. They argued that human beings existed but did not need to exist. Because humans existed without being inherently necessary, something had to cause them to exist. Because it is a logical absurdity for anything to cause itself, Thomists stated, there must be an external cause of being. This external cause was an original uncaused cause of all being: God. The result of understanding God as uncaused was that He was unlimited as well. Thus God contained all perfections infinitely; he was omnipresent, omniscient, and all-loving.[110] Here again one sees Sheen's message: if God was all-loving, He was capable of loving each individual, granting each person individual worth. In this relationship lay the crux of Sheen's teaching on a number of topics, including his opposition to Communism, as it denied the existence of God and innate human worth, and his ability to bridge the gap between Catholicism and American individualism.[111]

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[107] Ibid.

[108] "Bishop Cloys as Critic," *Christian Century* 73, 5 December 1956: 1413.

[109] Fulton J. Sheen, *Peace of Soul* (Garden City, NY: Garden City Books, 1951), 1.

[110] Vernon Bourke, "Thomas Aquinas, St.," Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol. 8 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. & Free Press, 1967), 108.

[111] Fulton J. Sheen, *Life is Worth Living: Fourth Series* (New York : McGraw-Hill, 1956), 272.

Thomism informed the major papal encyclicals regarding social justice as well. *Rerum Novarum*, by Leo XIII (1891), and *Quadragesimo Anno*, by Pius XI (1931) both demonstrated concern with the treatment of workers, often victims of unbridled capitalism. Both encyclicals preached a Christian humanism decrying the insufficiencies of capitalism. In doing this, the Church clarified its teachings concerning employers' responsibilities, workers' rights, and the related duties of the state. Leo XIII wrote that workers had a right to fair wages and that they could form Catholic unions whose existence should be protected by governments, while Pius XI expounded on the idea of subsidiarity.[112] Both documents also warned against the evils inherent in socialism and in the Marxist doctrine of class struggle.

The Catholic Church's anti-Communist stance was part of the larger struggle against liberal secularism as described in the papal encyclicals *Nostis et Nobiscum* (1848), *Quanta Cura* (1864), and *Diuturnum Illud* (1881).[113] In addition to affirming the Church's support for the solidarity of workers, *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno* opposed Marxism. Though initially considered part of liberal secularism, Communism seemed to be the most dangerous strain. Pius XI's encyclical, *Divini Redemptoris*, reflected this idea. Written while the Catholic Church was supporting General Francisco Franco in the Spanish Civil War in 1937, this encyclical explained Catholic opposition to Marxism. The Church's primary objection lay in Communism's militant atheism, which denied the individual's "God-granted rights." By focusing on materialism, the

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[112] Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, 1931. Available from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno_en.html, accessed 12 March 2006.

[113] Donald F. Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*: *Senator Joseph R. McCarthy and the Catholic Church, 1950-1957* (Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 4. See also http://www.vatican.va/offices/index.htm for a listing of all papal encyclicals in English.

philosophy reduced humans to "mere cog-wheel[s]," ignoring any sort of inherent human dignity.[114]

Sheen ingested both aspects of the encyclicals. While at St. Paul Seminary, he spent a great deal of time studying Leo's encyclical.[115] His 1938 book, *Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity*, demonstrated his understanding of *Rerum Novarum*, *Quadregesimo Anno* and *Divini Redemptoris*; over half the footnotes in the first five chapters of the book reference these encyclicals. As a result, he supported the rights of workers, especially the right to form unions.[116] Likewise, he opposed the materialist, post-Christian tendencies in American capitalism.[117] His opposition to Communism, of course, helped make him famous.

Given the uneasy relationship between the Catholic Church and American culture at the time, it is interesting that patriotism would be such a strong influence on Sheen. Part of the reason for this may be practical rather than philosophical. Sheen grew up in a relatively prosperous family, achieved virtually all of his worldly ambitions, and lived a comfortable and generally popular life as an adult. The American system largely worked for him, and he approved of it. His emphasis on faith in God fit the national spirit of faith and divine right.

This reconciliation between Catholicism and America was a strengthening idea during Sheen's lifetime. As historian Dave O'Brien suggests, the most difficult aspect of the Church's separation from the American mainstream was attempting to "maintain

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[114] Riley, *Bishop Fulton J. Sheen*, 131.
[115] Reeves, 31.
[116] Sheen, *Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity*, 63.
[117] Ibid., 22.

identity without isolation and achieve relevance without absorption."[118] Despite attempts by the Irish, most notably St. Paul Bishop John Ireland, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to "Americanize" the Catholic Church, the Roman, ultramontanist[119] view favored by the French hierarchy dominated. The return to Old World pomp and circumstance further marginalized the Church from the American mainstream.[120] Sheen managed to straddle both lines: he had some Americanist tendencies, including belief in democracy and separation of church and state, but there is no doubt that he deferred to Rome above all. Part of the reason for this was his belief in the primacy of religion over state.

Despite these tensions, Sheen found a way to reconcile American patriotism and Thomistic Catholicism. Part of the reason for this is that many Progressive economic reforms that occurred during Sheen's education in the 1910s and 1920s coincided with Catholic reforms. Like Msgr. John A. Ryan, he saw this "social Catholicism" as an amalgamation of sound Catholic and American ideals.[121] Ryan and Sheen differed with regard to the way these reforms should be achieved. Ryan went the political route, providing the broad framework for the program of social legislation adopted as the "New Deal." Sheen, however, preferred to stick to individual reform accomplished through religion.[122] If enough people had a conversion of heart toward God, natural law would eventually solve the country's problems.

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[118] David O'Brien, *The Renewal of American Catholicism* (New York : Paulist Press, 1972), 60.

[119] "Ultramontanist" refers to a view that strongly advocates papal supremacy. It is used primarily in dealing with the French, specifically the French hierarchy of the Catholic Church.

[120] See Jay P. Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension* (New York : Oxford University Press, 2002), 47-70. See also Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* (Garden City, NY : Doubleday, 1955; revised edition, Garden City, NY : Anchor Books, 1960), 143 (page citations are to the revised edition).

[121] Reeves, 88.

[122] Sheen, *Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity*, 111.

In this combination of influences lay the means for an ecumenical American audience to accept Fulton Sheen's Catholic message. Though his philosophy was thoroughly Catholic, he was easily able to reconcile his religious values with the civic values of the United States. Sheen believed that democracy was founded on the principle of the "sovereign worth of a person." This, in turn, was based upon a postulate of Aquinas and Christianity as a whole that every man has an immortal soul.[123] Because of this fundamental assumption, Sheen argued democracy was the only viable government in which the rights of the individual granted by God could be fully realized. This was language that Americans could understand, and it played to the American belief that they had received a driving mission to light the world with democracy. "If our rights came from the state, the state could take them away," Sheen argued.[124] He compared to the supremacy of the state in the Soviet Union where "the person exist[ed] for the state."[125] The idea of the rights of the masses of individuals was abhorrent to Sheen. If, as Aquinas suggested, rights were derived from having a soul, it made no sense that rights could be derived from the masses; the masses had no soul.

Sheen strengthened the connection between Thomistic natural law and American democracy by tying American political documents and figures to religion. He explicitly linked the origins of American political power to God saying, "According to our Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, the source of our rights is God."[126] Sheen placed the first amendment in a religious context as well:

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[123] Sheen, *First Series*, 67.
[124] Ibid., 212.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid., 211.

> Consider next the freedom of religion and the right to adore God according to the dictates of conscience. Amendment I of our Bill of Rights states that 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.' Let it be stated clearly and absolutely that we are proud of that amendment; we want it to stay in our Constitution. I know of no one who is working for any established church that would contravene Amendment I of our Constitution.[127]

In addition to elevating political documents, Sheen granted a sort of secular – and ironic – sainthood to founding fathers such as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. Sheen also mentioned the most beloved figure in American history, Abraham Lincoln, quite often, devoting an entire episode during the last season to him. In an episode from the first season, Sheen treated the Gettysburg Address as a nationalist prayer, emphasizing the importance of people in democracy. Again, he used symbols familiar to all Americans to describe the natural law of Catholicism.

Sheen's frequent references to Lincoln resonated on another level; he often echoed Lincoln's warning that self-destruction was the only way the United States could be destroyed. According to Sheen, the proper way to look upon Communism was to "see it as the judgment of God" for moral decay with the United States.[128] This message resounded with the public in the morality-obsessed environment of the 1950s. "If we wish to keep our rights, we must also keep our God!" warned Sheen.[129]

To Sheen, peace was "the tranquility of order,"[130] and inseparable from justice. Because neither of these was a possibility with Marxism, Sheen argued that the United States "must never compromise or deal with Communism. It is wicked and must be

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[127] Ibid., 216.
[128] Ibid., 264.
[129] Ibid., 220.
[130] "The Russian Lullaby of Coexistence," *Life is Worth Living: Third Series*, by Fulton J. Sheen, 30 min., 1955, videocassette.

destroyed."[131] Basing his opposition in Catholic social justice teachings appealed to liberal Catholics; Sheen's depth of opposition to Communism endeared him to conservative Catholics and other political conservatives.

While using an American rhetoric, Sheen always remained true to Catholic ideology. In keeping with the teachings of *Rerum Novarum*, he believed that both Communism and unbridled capitalism were harmful.[132] While he never totally ignored them, Sheen toned down his critiques of capitalism in *Life is Worth Living* compared to his books and his *Catholic Hour* radio addresses.[133] Unlike many other notable anti-Communists, such as Senator Joseph McCarthy and Francis Cardinal Spellman, he did not engage in personal attacks.[134] Sheen explained that his opposition to Leninism was philosophical, not political.[135] These differences had little or no effect on Sheen's popularity with Americans of all faiths.

Another way in which Sheen adapted his Catholic message for all Americans was by emphasizing personal piety. Personal piety and a personal relationship with God were key components of American Catholicism in the wake of the Thomistic revival.[136] Sheen first appealed to these individualistic tendencies in his book *Peace of Soul*.[137] When he talked about the importance of the individual within the social order and with rights derived from God, Protestant-influenced ears were able to hear a Catholic bishop talking

[131] Ibid.
[132] Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 20.
[133] Sheen wrote books and pamphlets criticizing Communism, most notably *The Cross and the Crisis* (1938) and *Communism and the Conscience of the West* (1948).
[134] Peter W. Williams, "Fulton J. Sheen," *Twentieth-Century Shapers of American Popular Religion*, ed. Charles H. Lippy (New York : Greenwood Press, 1989), 390.
[135] Yablonsky, "A Rhetorical Analysis," 58.
[136] Dolan, *In Search of American Catholicism*, 25.
[137] Sheen wrote *Peace of Soul* both to provide a Catholic response to the "peace of mind" genre of religious books and to clarify his position on psychoanalysis. For further discussion of the book, see Riley, *Bishop Fulton J. Sheen*, 198-204.

about individualism. As sociologist Will Herberg noted, the American way of life was "individualistic, dynamic, and pragmatic;" this was exactly the sort of audience that wanted to emphasize individual worth.[138]

Sheen believed that the cause of worldly problems, especially war, was the internal problems of men, that is to say sin. In an early show, he stated, "War is actually a projection of our own wickedness; our forgetfulness of God has more to do with war than is generally believed."[139] Though he believed war was a punishment from God, it was not the result of a vindictive God. It was, instead, the consequence of violating natural law in much the same way that hitting the ground was the result of jumping out of a window. The true result was that "[i]n disobeying God's moral law, we do not destroy it – we only destroy ourselves."[140] Sheen eventually expanded the idea to suggest that "[t]he true battle against Communism begins in the heart of every single American…We need not fear Communism as much as we need fear being Godless"[141] and predicting that "[p]eace will only come with another spirit, which is the spirit of the love of God and the love of man that seized the hearts of men."[142]

It is easy to see the allure of Sheen's Thomistic message of personal morality in Cold War culture. The message gave Americans some sense of power over the larger world and appealed to the national ideal of individualism. While it did put the onus of war on their souls, it also provided them with the power to change the world. By turning their souls to God, they could effect positive change; they could help win the Cold War.

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[138] Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*, 79
[139] Sheen, *First Series*, 14.
[140] Ibid., 16.
[141] Ibid., 70.
[142] Ibid., 158

Considering the religious mood of the country in the 1950s, this was an action many, if not most, Americans were willing to take.

Sheen also used personal responsibility to explain why people would subscribe to Communism at all. Sheen described two kinds of freedom available to humans: freedom *of* something and freedom *to do* something. He believed that both freedoms were required to have true freedom, which meant the freedom to do whatever was right. If only the freedom to do something was allowed, Sheen believed that the result was Communism:

> If all things are allowable, then man becomes a slave to his own freedom. After a while people tire of their freedom, because freedom rightfully implies responsibility. Then comes the reaction. Chaos becomes so general that fatigued minds look for someone to whom they can surrender their freedom and therefore their responsibility. This is Communism…[143]

Where religious faith created personal responsibility, Sheen argued that Marxism destroyed it. Again, the message was acceptable to a wide variety of Americans. By accepting religion, which they wanted to do, they accepted personal responsibility and autonomy.

Perhaps as a Catholic, and definitely as an American, Sheen's strongest objection to the Soviet philosophy was its denial of the rights of the individual. Here he echoed the Thomistic teachings found in the encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*. Sheen understood Communism to mean that everything, including culture, philosophy, and art, was based on economic means of production. Taking this to its logical end, in Leninism, men were "made for production; his origin is economic, and so is his destiny."[144] Consequently, morality and natural law were impossible in Communism. If

[143] Fulton J. Sheen, *Life is Worth Living: Second Series* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1954), 105.
[144] Sheen, *First Series*, 62.

there was no morality, it was impossible for a human to have inherent rights. A person only had worth as a member of a class, not as an individual. Sheen, like Pius XI in *Divini Redemptoris*, vehemently opposed this idea.

The language of the individual and his personal relationship with God was familiar to anyone of the western, Judeo-Christian tradition. Even though Sheen presented a Catholic idea, it sounded reasonable to most anyone watching. Sheen was careful not to appeal to Church authority. He spoke directly from the writings of Thomas Aquinas and papal encyclicals, but rarely did he explicitly mention the source of his teaching; instead, he presented them as American and, more generally, western Judeo-Christian ideas. When he did mention figures related to Catholic orthodoxy, he described them as historical figures, not authorities.[145]

Sheen succeeded at transcending denominational lines by tying America to the larger western tradition, which was largely shaped by Catholicism. He argued that if Americans fully understood their Judeo-Christian heritage, they could handle any challenges presented to them. Thus, he was able to cast traditional Catholic thought and values as the answer to the questions troubling Americans without overtly mentioning Catholicism.

Sheen's approach was not merely a matter of packaging; he thought of himself as a western philosopher more than as a proselytizer. He denied that his program was religious in nature.[146] Instead, his lectures were a kind of Christian humanism designed to suit people of all faiths and those who claimed none. His talked started "with reason,

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[145] Ibid., 127. Sheen mentions St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure, St. Francis of Assisi, and St. Dominic as a way of creating an historical, not religious, context.

[146] Riley, *Bishop Fulton J. Sheen*, 223.

firmly discouraging all mysticism or merely emotional belief."[147] When he quoted authority figures, they were generally philosophers and writers, not theologians. Though he occasionally mentioned St. Augustine and St. Paul, Sheen was far more likely to mention Socrates or Sartre.

In many episodes, Sheen contrasted Communism with not just American politics but rather the entirety of western philosophy. Where western philosophy had its basis in the guiding principle of natural law, Communists grounded their reality in economics. Sheen was thus able to dismiss Communist claims of superiority by stating, "If economics has no principles above it, then it is impossible to decide whether the economic system of Communism is better than the economic system of the Western world."[148] Sheen reiterated the Catholic Church's belief in the fundamental right to own property as stated in *Rerum Novarum* while defending western privatization. He argued that the right to personal property was derived through natural law, stating that "Property involves responsibility and the surrender of responsibility is the surrender of freedom. Keep our souls free on the inside by obeying God's law; keep our souls free on the outside by a wide diffusion of property, and we will preserve both our peace and our prosperity."[149]

On the other hand, Sheen did not believe western society to be entirely blameless in the conflict with the Soviets. Instead, he believed that the creation of Communism was entirely the result of the perversion of and flight from the Judeo-Christian tradition. In Marxism, he saw an atheistic mirror of the Christian faith:

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[147] "Microphone Missionary," 77.
[148] Fulton J. Sheen, *Thinking Life Through* (New York : McGraw-Hill, 1955), 36.
[149] Ibid., 44.

> It too has a Bible, which is "Das Kapital" of Karl Marx; it has its original sin, which is capitalism; it has its Messianic hope, which is the classless society and the godless race; it has its laws of sacrifice, which is class struggle; and it has its priesthood, which is the high commissariat. It is like Christianity in all things save one; it is inspired not by the spirit of Christ but by the spirit of the serpent…the Mystical Body of the Anti-Christ.[150]

Throughout the series, Sheen continuously mentioned that Marx himself was a westerner. Sheen described Marx's philosophy as a synthesis of the dialectics of Hegel, the materialism of Feuerbach, the economics from England, and the social theory of Proudhon. As a philosophy prioritizing economics, "Communism [was] strong only when it borrow[ed] some of the moral indignation that has been inherited from the Hebraic-Christian traditions."[151]

The failings and evils of the western world allowed Communism to be appealing. After its creation, Communism was able to thrive because of the western world's attempt "to preserve the fruits of Christianity without the roots."[152] Sheen despised the relativist and pragmatist ideas of the western world that set "the individual up as the measure of all things."[153] With morality being determined by the individual, it was impossible to determine whether anything was true, which had a paralyzing effect. Consequently, Sheen thought the West had the truth but was too apathetic and divided to act on it, while Communists, who hated or denied the truth, had tremendous zeal for their beliefs.

Communism, then, was the result of the West's errors with regard to its relationship with God. As a result, a return to God was the most effective weapon with

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[150] Fulton J. Sheen, "The Mystical Body, or The Church and Communism," printed copy of Sheen's lecture found at Sheen Archives, Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester. Rochester, New York; quoted in Riley, *Bishop Fulton J. Sheen*, 138-139.

[151] Sheen, *First Series*, 66.

[152] Ibid., 69.

[153] Sheen, *Thinking Life Through*, 113.

which to fight Communism, and the best way to return to God was through Christianity, specifically Catholicism. Catholicism could provide the leadership to navigate the chaotic modern world and combat Marxism. Sheen understood that this message was too narrow for his television audience and broadened it accordingly, stating that despite differences in religious belief, "Jews, Protestants, and Catholics should unite against a common foe…. We may not be able to meet in the same pew – would to God we did – but we can meet on our *knees*."[154] It was message designed to unite and empower his audience through an appeal to their shared Judeo-Christian heritage.

While Americans fundamentally believed they were living according to Judeo-Christian tenents, a number of questions plagued them at the beginning of the Cold War era.[155] After emerging from World War II as one of the two most powerful countries in the world, Americans wondered what their role in the world was. At the same time, race and other issues challenged unity at home. Though he never discussed relations between blacks and whites on *Life is Worth Living*, Sheen supported civil rights. He preached to largely black congregations in the South and spoke out against the Ku Klux Klan.[156] During his time as bishop of Rochester, Sheen supported the small non-white community of Catholics in his diocese. This actually played a part in the controversy over selling St. Bridget parish; the land was to be used for apartments that would primarily house minorities.[157] With regard to issues of sexuality, Sheen was almost as quiet, limiting his talks to marriage and motherhood. As *Life is Worth Living* completed its run well in

[154] "Microphone Missionary," 73.
[155] Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*, 73.
[156] Reeves, 4-5, 327.
[157] Ibid., 317-321.

advance of the sexual revolution and Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae*, this is understandable.[158] Sheen took a traditional approach, stressing the spiritual over the physical, accentuating the similarities between marriage and the Trinity, and calling motherhood a woman's greatest calling.[159] When Paul did issue *Humanae Vitae*, Sheen wholeheartedly supported the encyclical.[160]

In examining Sheen's public career, the importance of him being a priest should not be underestimated. To Catholics, his status as a member of the clergy demanded immediate respect. In retrospect, his dress on *Life Is Worth Living* seems calculated to impress; even Protestants recognized that his cassock and cape conveyed some sort of authority. On a personal level, Sheen took his vocation seriously, stating that he was a "minister and ambassador of Christ" obligated to serve Catholics and the general public.[161] If Sheen saw himself as, above all, a priest, it is useful to compare him to other notable members of the American Catholic clergy of the mid-twentieth century in order to gain some idea of just how orthodox he and his message of anti-Communism truly were.

In terms of being a "media priest," Detroit cleric Charles E. Coughlin presents the best analogue to Sheen. While both men began their media careers on the radio in the late twenties, Coughlin became the Catholic voice of the Great Depression.[162] Coughlin

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[158] Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, 1968. Available from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae_en.html, accessed 4 April 2006.

[159] Fulton J. Sheen, *Three to Get Married* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1951), 60; Sheen, *Fourth Series*, 185.

[160] Reeves, 323.

[161] Fulton J. Sheen, *The Priest is Not His Own* (McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1963), 7. Even the title of the book emphasizes Sheen's sense of obligation as a priest to Christ and the Church.

[162] John T. McGreevy, Catholicism and American Freedom: A History (New York : W.W. Norton, 2003), 175.

initially appeared on a Detroit radio station to decry a Ku Klux Klan attack on his parish, the Shrine of the Little Flower, and to solicit donations for the parish.[163] His sermons proved popular, and in 1930, CBS picked up Coughlin for nationwide distribution. At the height of the Depression, Coughlin altered his message from traditional Catholic sermons to one that attacked banks and big business. Naturally, CBS dropped Coughlin within a year. Coughlin responded by forming his own radio network, and, by 1932, he had the largest radio audience in the country.[164] Coughlin initially supported the New Deal as a solid plan to deal with the Depression that implemented part of the reforms of *Rerum Novarum*. He grew disillusioned with the plan, however, and created his own political party in 1936 to oppose Franklin Roosevelt for the presidency. During this time, Coughlin became increasingly anti-Semitic, going so far as to offer glowing assessments of Hitler and Mussolini and have portions of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* read on air.[165] Coughlin lost influence with the public in the latter half of the 1930s, and new Detroit Bishop Edward Mooney forced him off the air in 1942.

Certainly, both men were effective in their use of the media to spread their message that the Catholic Church was the only institution standing between civilization and chaos.[166] Both were arguably the most influential Catholic clerics during their respective heydays. For Coughlin, this meant that Roosevelt's administration courted him as an ally, at least until his public split with the Democratic party. Sheen was so popular in the 1950s that a member of the Vatican once referred to him as "our right arm

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[163] Massa, 100.
[164] James J. Hennessey, *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1981), 260-261.
[165] Morris, 148-149.
[166] Reeves, 83.

in the U.S."[167] The size of their audience reflected this influence. As Charles Morris notes in his book, *American Catholic*, "Coughlin commanded up to twice the number of listeners as…[the 1990s radio host] Rush Limbaugh, in a country half the size, without portable radios."[168] Sheen, at his peak, had one of the most popular programs on television, with millions tuning in each Tuesday night. Both were outstanding fundraisers, with millions of dollars pouring in for Coughlin's Shrine of the Little Flower and Sheen's Society for the Propagation of the Faithful.

However, the message that the two spread could not have been more different. Coughlin was resolutely political and partisan. Initially falling slightly left of center in American politics, at least with regard to economics, Coughlin moved to the political right throughout the thirties.[169] He, like most of the American Catholic hierarchy, openly supported Franco's Fascists forces in Spain.[170] Coughlin spewed venom on his radio program, causing his ministry to be defined by what he opposed rather than what he supported. Consequently, Catholic thinkers like John A. Ryan and Jacques Maritain condemned him as a fascist.[171] This hatred, especially his virulent anti-Semitism, has caused one historian to label him the "father of hate radio."[172] Sheen, on the other hand, remained as apolitical and impartial as possible. He focused instead on religious answers to American problems. Consequently, he avoided aligning himself with the New Deal, of

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[167] Massa, 97.

[168] Morris, 147.

[169] See Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, & the Great Depression* (New York: Knopf, 1982).

[170] Reeves, 106-107.

[171] McGreevy, 175, 203.

[172] See Donald Warren, *Radio Priest: Charles Coughlin, The Father of Hate Radio* (New York: Free Press, 1996). Though Warren never explicitly explains it, one assumes the pun in the title was intentional.

which he was wary in his early career, and with Joseph McCarthy during the 1950s.[173] While opposing the Loyalists in the Spanish Civil War, he also refused to support Franco on religious grounds.[174] Throughout his career, Sheen emphasized that an acceptance of God's love and God's natural law were the answers to the problems plaguing America.

In addition to being the popular radio host of *The Catholic Hour*, Fulton Sheen had been one of the theological stars of the American Catholic Church in the twenties and thirties. By the time he became a television star, Jesuit John Courtney Murray had become the leading Catholic theologian in the United States. Murray joined the Society of Jesus in 1920. Ordained a priest in 1933, he received his doctorate in theology from the Gregorian University in Rome in 1937. Afterwards, Murray worked as a professor of theology until his death at the Jesuit seminary in Woodstock, Maryland.

The prevailing theme of Murray's theological work was the compatibility of American democracy and Roman Catholicism. According to him, freedom's catalyst in the West was the church's claim of independence from the state.[175] As Murray stated, "The American thesis is that government is not juridically omnicompetent. Its powers are limited, and one of the principles of limitation is the distinction between state and church, in their purposes, methods, and manner of organization."[176] Murray's public theology troubled his superiors, who restricted his freedom to write and lecture throughout the 1950s.[177] His fortunes changed, however, after Cardinal Spellman invited him to the

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[173] Reeves, 89; Massa 99.
[174] Reeves, 106.
[175] Massa, 143.
[176] John Courtney Murray, S.J., "Civil Unity and Religious Integrity: The Articles of Peace," in *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960), 67.
[177] McGreevy, 246.

Second Vatican Council. Here Murray largely wrote the council's statement on religious liberty, *Dignitatis Humanae*.[178]

Sheen had a great deal in common with Murray. Both shared a background in Scholasticism. They shared Americanist impulses; neither had any doubt of the compatibility between Thomistic natural law and the American form of government. Both firmly argued that religion should have a place in the public square and that there were some issues that could be dealt with more effectively by religion than by politics. Although both believed that Catholicism played a crucial role in salvation, they embraced ecumenical relationships with other faiths to some extent. Both favored the changes implemented in Vatican II. On a superficial level, both avoided parish life and rather enjoyed being well-respected clerics and living comfortable lives.

Even among these clerics, Sheen stood out as the most orthodox. Unlike the others, he avoided politics in large part. His solutions to the problem of Communism were always based in Thomism rather than capitalism. That aspects of capitalism and Scholasticism overlapped simply helped the public accept him. For Sheen, the struggle against Communism was part of the larger struggle toward salvation that characterized everything he did. His teaching at Catholic University, his famous conversions, and his public talks all expressed a desire to take a Thomistic approach in bringing people to God. "Unless souls are saved," Sheen said, "nothing is saved."[179] This devotion to religion and God over politics and other concerns made him perhaps more Roman than the others.

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[178] Morris, 239.
[179] Sheen, *Peace of Soul*, 1.

Sheen presented his particular version of anti-Communism in terms of a struggle between competing philosophies of life: the Judeo-Christian American philosophy and the atheistic Soviet philosophy. This was certainly a reflection of Sheen's Thomistic perspective, but by framing this perspective in anti-Communism, his social philosophy appealed to the larger American society. In Sheen's postwar understanding of national unity, religious differences were not as important as the common moral virtue. It was a message designed to appeal to not just a Catholic audience, but an American audience and, more generally, the western, Judeo-Christian tradition. Sheen spoke the language of Americans. He appealed to their sense of nationalism and divine mission, things he deeply believed in. He continually stressed the common challenges that Americans faced and the shared purposes that united the nation. He made constant use of the Constitution and other political documents to evoke the cultural unity and divine sense of purpose that lay at the center of American life. More importantly, in a world where external forces threatened to overpower the individual, Sheen employed Thomism to emphasize the worth of each person and the ability of each to affect the world. Sheen became the public face and intellectual of Catholicism because of America's acceptance of his Catholic message.

CHAPTER III

DOROTHY DAY: CATHOLIC RADICAL

"Don't call me a saint – I don't want to be dismissed that easily."[180]
-Dorothy Day to a journalist

Fulton Sheen may have been the public face of Catholicism in the 1950s, but historian David O'Brien has called Dorothy Day "the most significant, interesting, and influential person in the history of American Catholicism."[181] While he may be exaggerating, Day's impact is undeniably important. In 1939, at the height of the Catholic Worker movement's influence, thirty-three Catholic Worker "hospitality houses" operated nationally, and the movement's newspaper, *The Catholic Worker*, had a circulation of 190,000.[182] Sheen's television audience dwarfed these numbers, but Day's writing enjoyed a national audience. Beyond this, Day inspired a generation of clerical and lay activists, creating what James T. Fisher calls the "Catholic counterculture."[183]

There were, of course, many differences between Sheen and Day. Sheen was a priest, and Day was a layperson. Though his audience numbered in the millions, Sheen rarely interacted with this audience on a personal level. Instead, he lived the comfortable life of a celebrity, rarely immersing himself in parish or diocesan life. Day, on the other

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[180] Jim Forest, "Dorothy Day – A Saint for Our Age?" Presented at the Dorothy Day Centenary Conference, Marquette University, 10 October 1997; available from http://www.catholicworker.com/cwo002.htm, accessed 12 March 2006.

[181] Charles R. Morris, *American Catholic: The Saints and Sinners Who Built America's Most Powerful Church* (New York: Times Books, 1997), 141.

[182] Ibid., 143.

[183] See James T. Fisher, *The Catholic Counterculture in America, 1933-1962* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

hand, lived an impoverished life among those she served. Though no one has questioned Sheen's honest devotion to the Church, no one has ever questioned his vanity either. Day, conversely, quoted *The Brothers Karamazev* in saying, "I am lower than all men."[184] Sheen was a "cradle Catholic" brought up to love the Church since birth; Day struggled with faith, finally converting to Catholicism in her early thirties.

The biggest difference between them was found in their public approach to the practice of their Catholic vocations. Where Sheen was the comforting television presence, a regular visitor in the homes of millions, Day protested the treatment of the working class and poor and argued in favor of pacifism, with the genuine credentials of a radical. Before her religious conversion, Day studied the anarchist Emma Goldman, protested for suffrage, worked for socialists newspapers like *The Masses* and *The Call*, celebrated the Bolshevik Revolution at Madison Square Garden, interviewed Leon Trotsky, and belonged to the Industrial Workers of the World. Certainly Sheen was never arrested once, let alone multiple times as Day was. Despite her radicalism, Day's "comrades said she would never be a good Communist because she was too religious – a character out of Dostoevsky, a woman haunted by God."[185] After her conversion, Day applied the same activist tactics she had used as a socialist to espouse Catholic teaching.

Sheen and Day appeared to have had drastic differences in their practices of Catholicism. Yet, despite appearances, Day and Sheen were closely related in philosophy. Both reformers held traditional admiration for the lives of the saints. In addition, the papal encyclicals of Pope Leo XIII and Pius XI influenced the social and

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[184] Dorothy Day, "Why Do the Members of Christ Tear One Another?" *The Catholic Worker*, February 1942, 7.

[185] Paul Elie, *The Life You Save May Be Your Own: An American Pilgrimage* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003), 17. It is worth noting that Fulton Sheen was a fan of Dostoevsky, quoting the author as an indication of the spirituality of the Russian people.

political thought of both. Perhaps most importantly, both based their worldview on the belief that each individual had inherent worth granted by God. How then, could Dorothy Day be considered so radical and, at the same time, hold views so close to Fulton Sheen, the very model of mainstream Catholicism? The answer is that though politically radical, Day was extremely orthodox in her understanding of Catholicism.

Upheaval characterized Day's early life. Dorothy Day was born in Brooklyn on November 8, 1897 to an Episcopalian family. The Days moved to San Francisco in 1903. After surviving the San Francisco earthquake in 1906, the Day family moved again; this time into a tenement flat in Chicago's poor South Side. When her father, John Day, became sports editor of *The Inter Ocean*, a Chicago newspaper, the Day family moved to the more comfortable North Side.

Day's radicalism began early in life. Upton Sinclair's novel, *The Jungle*, inspired her to take long walks in Chicago's South Side, visiting the working class neighborhoods. "Here," she said, "was enough beauty to satisfy me."[186] Though she won a scholarship to the University of Illinois in 1914, Day showed little interest in academic study or campus life. Instead, she focused on reading radical socialist literature. After dropping out of college in 1916, Day followed her father to New York, where she found work first as a reporter, and eventually as an editor for various socialist publications.[187]

Journalism allowed Day to move in radical socialist circles, but she wanted to be more a participant than an observer. In November 1917, Day went to prison for the first

[186] Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1952; reprint, San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1980), 37 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

[187] These publications included the socialist newspaper, *The Call*, *The Masses*, a magazine that opposed American involvement in the World War I, and *The Liberator*. See Day, *The Long Loneliness,* 53-67.

of many times, this time for protesting in favor of suffrage rights in front of the White House. While incarcerated, the women participated in a hunger strike. A presidential order eventually freed them. After returning to New York, Day signed up for a nurse's training program in Brooklyn. Back in New York in 1924, she became an important figure in the "drama of Village life."[188] She devoted herself to journalism examining workers and the poor. She also bought a beach cottage on Staten Island with the money from the sale of movie rights for her novel, *The Eleventh Virgin*.[189]

Day's religious convictions developed more slowly than did her radicalism. Her attendance at an Episcopal church as a child meant little to her. She noted in her biography that her earliest experiences with Catholicism came through her family's maid and by watching a friend's mother pray.[190] In New York, she would sometimes visit St. Joseph Catholic Church on Sixth Avenue late at night. While working in Chicago in 1922, she roomed with three devout young Catholic women. It was clear to her that "worship, adoration, thanksgiving, [and] supplication ... were the noblest acts of which we are capable in this life."[191] She later attended evening Benediction services while living near St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans. Day knew little about Catholic theology during this time, but the devotional and spiritual discipline of Catholics impressed her.[192]

In 1925, Day began a four-year common-law marriage with Forster Batterham, an English botanist she had met through friends in Manhattan. Batterham, an anarchist, opposed marriage and religion. Day and Batterham quarreled over both issues. Day's pregnancy in 1926 proved a turning point for her in a variety of ways. She had had an

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[188] Ibid., 118.
[189] William D. Miller, *Dorothy Day: A Biography* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 169.
[190] Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 19, 23.
[191] Ibid., 106.
[192] Ibid., 84.

earlier abortion and believed that it had left her barren.[193] When Tamar Teresa Day was born on March 3, 1927, Dorothy believed it was a miracle. Consequently, she wanted her daughter to be baptized in the Catholic Church. This led to a permanent break with Batterham. Day felt compelled to join her daughter and entered the Church on December 28, 1927.

Day's faith lay fallow over the next four years. She was largely isolated in her faith and frustrated in trying to find a venue through which she could integrate her faith with her activism. In the winter of 1932, Day traveled to Washington, D.C., to report for the Catholic magazines *Commonweal* and *America* on the Hunger March. Day did not join in the march because Communists had organized it. The march had been held on December 8, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and Day prayed for direction at the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception: "I offered up a special prayer, a prayer which came with tears and anguish, that some way would open up for me to use what talents I possessed for my fellow workers, for the poor."[194]

Back in her apartment in New York the next day, Day received what appeared to be the answer to her prayer.[195] There she met Peter Maurin, a former Christian Brother now working as a handyman. Maurin had left France for Canada in 1908 and later made his way to the United States. During his years of wandering, Maurin had come to a Franciscan attitude, embracing poverty as a vocation. He offered Day a three-part plan that married her faith to her radicalism. [196]

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[193] Miller, 181.

[194] Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 166.

[195] Miller, 227.

[196] For the first formal declaration of this plan, see Dorothy Day, "The Mission of the Catholic Worker," *The Catholic Worker*, May 1933, 1.

The first part was to publish a newspaper that would teach Catholic social thought and promote pacifism. Being a journalist, Day loved the idea and found that the Paulist Press would print 2,500 copies of an eight-page tabloid paper for $57. Scraping together personal and donated money to cover the fee, Day handed out the first copies of *The Catholic Worker* on May Day, 1933, in Union Square. The paper was a success, and by December, 100,000 copies were being printed each month. *The Catholic Worker* supported labor unions and challenged the urbanization and industrialism that degraded workers, reiterating the Catholic Church's social teaching since the papacy of Leo XIII.[197]

The second part of Maurin's plan was the implementation of "hospitality houses." Maurin's essays in *The Catholic Worker* quoted Christ's teachings in Matthew 25 and called for renewal of the Christian practice of hospitality to those who were homeless.[198] Day's apartment served as the first hospitality house. By winter, the Catholic Worker movement rented an apartment for each sex, followed by a house in Greenwich Village. In 1936, the community moved into two buildings in Chinatown. The Catholic Worker houses were unique in that they permitted no proselytizing. A crucifix on the wall was the only evidence of Catholicism.[199]

The final part of Maurin's plan involved creating farming communes as a cure for urbanization and industrialization. The Catholic Worker movement rented a house with a garden on Staten Island in 1935. After this start came farms in Easton, Pennsylvania, Newburgh, New York, and a larger farm on Staten Island. This part of Maurin's plan

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[197] Dorothy Day, "Articles on Distributism – 2," *The Catholic Worker*, July-August, 1948, 4, 6.
[198] Matt 25:32-40.
[199] James J. Hennesey, *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1981), 258.

was least successful, with few of the farms lasting very long. Eventually, Day believed that the movement should not focus so much on founding agricultural communities as rural houses of hospitality.[200]

The Catholic Worker movement reached its highpoint in the 1930s when it became a national movement. By 1936 there were thirty-three Catholic Worker houses spread across the country.[201] The houses were a loose franchise united in devotion to the principles espoused by Day and the Catholic Worker movement: communal living, charity, and pacifism. In addition to caring for the poor and embracing poverty as a means of spiritual illumination, the workers at these houses protested the exploitation of workers.

Even as the movement hit its peak, it experienced problems. Because the hospitality houses served everyone, some objected that "drunkards and good-for-nothings" were served more than the "deserving poor."[202] A far larger source of controversy for Day and the Catholic Worker movement lay in its commitment to pacifism. Day believed the nonviolent way of life was the heart of the gospels. *The Catholic Worker* published its first expression of pacifism in 1935.[203] This posed no problem at first, but the newspaper was virtually alone among Catholic publications in refusing to side with Franco's Nationalists in the Spanish Civil War in 1936. Following America's entrance to World War II, Day announced that the paper would maintain its

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[200] Jim Forest, "A Biography of Dorothy Day," available from http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/ddbiographytext.cfm?Number=72, accessed 11 March 2006.

[201] Morris, 212-213.

[202] Forest, "A Biography of Dorothy Day."

[203] Dorothy Day, "Wealth, the Humanity of Christ, Class War," *The Catholic Worker*, June 1935, 4.

pacifist stand, saying, "Our manifesto is the Sermon on the Mount."[204] This stance resulted in a split within the movement; *The Catholic Worker* lost two-thirds of its readers, and fifteen houses of hospitality closed.

The Catholic Worker movement began public protests in favor of pacifism during the Cold War. During the late 1950s, the New York Catholic Worker community, which included about twenty-three people, refused to participate in the state's annual civil defense drill. To Day, the drill represented the promotion of nuclear war as survivable and winnable and the justification of spending billions on the military. Day also described the protests as an act of penance for the American destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki with atomic weapons.[205] Day, arrested five times, spent a total of forty days in prison between 1955 and 1959 for these protests. She protested in 1960 and 1961, but authorities purposely did not arrest her.[206]

Concern with the Church's response to war led Day to Rome during the Second Vatican Council. In 1963, Day was one of fifty "Mothers for Peace" who went to Rome to thank Pope John XXIII for his encyclical *Pacem in Terris*. Close to death, the pontiff could not meet them privately, but at one of his last public audiences blessed the pilgrims, asking them to continue their labors. In 1965, Day returned to Rome to take part in a fast expressing "our prayer and our hope" that the Council would issue "a clear statement, 'Put away thy sword.'"[207] She felt rewarded in December when the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World was approved by the bishops. The

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[204] Dorothy Day, "Our Country Passes from Undeclared War to Declared War; We Continue Our Christian Pacifist Stand," *The Catholic Worker*, January 1942, 1.

[205] Dorothy Day, "On Pilgrimage - July/August 1957," *The Catholic Worker*, July-August 1957, 1.

[206] Mark S. Massa, *Catholics and American Culture: Fulton Sheen, Dorothy Day, and the Notre Dame Football Team* (New York : The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 116.

[207] Dorothy Day, "On Pilgrimage - September 1964," *The Catholic Worker*, September 1964, 8.

Council's proclamation described “a crime against God and humanity” as any act of war “directed to the indiscriminate destruction of whole cities or vast areas with their inhabitants.”[208]

Day’s relevance and that of the Catholic Worker movement declined in the latter half of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s for many reasons: various illnesses which Day developed in her later life, impertinent volunteers, and an antiwar movement that moved from peaceful protest to outright antagonism.[209] Despite the decline, Day’s passion for her work did not wane, and she continued to write, to speak, and to lead until her death on December 29, 1980.

In examining Day’s Catholic formation and influences, it is interesting to note that she came to the Church not because of an admiration for its theology, but because of the devotion of its members. Day makes clear in her autobiography, *The Long Loneliness*, that she longed for the spiritual discipline and faith found among the immigrants and working class she saw during her early years as a socialist radical:

> Many a morning after sitting all night in taverns or coming from balls at Webster Hall, I went to an early morning Mass at St. Joseph’s Church on Sixth Avenue and knelt in the back of the church, not knowing what was going on at the altar, but warmed and comforted by the lights and silence, the kneeling people and the atmosphere of worship. People have so great a need to reverence, to worship, to adore….[210]

As a young socialist, she maintained Marx’s belief that religion was the opiate of the masses, but it was a drug that she could not abandon. Because Catholic and liberal

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[208] Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, available from http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html, accessed 17 March 2006.

[209] Miller, 490-91.

[210] Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 84

social reform often coincided at the time, Day regularly found herself working and living with Catholics. While in the nursing program in 1918, for example, she attended weekly Mass with "Miss Adams," a co-worker. Again, she stated that she was "performing an act of worship. [She] felt that it was necessary for man to worship, that he was most truly himself when engaged in that act."[211] During this time, Day plainly appreciated the Catholic Church's ritualism and sense of community rather than its theology.

Even after Day joined the Church in 1927, her faith lacked complexity or direction. Day described the nun who guided her through catechetical preparation to join the Church as a "spiritual bully" who scolded her for being ignorant of Catholic teachings.[212] The sacraments were still largely abstractions to her, and she wrote that she "had no particular joy in partaking…Baptism, Penance, and Holy Eucharist. [She] proceeded about [her] active participation in them grimly…with no consolation whatsoever."[213] Joining the Catholic Church also cut Day off from many of her former radical associates. Often socialists and Communists, they could not understand why Day had embraced religion, especially in the form of the Catholic Church, a foremost enemy of socialism.[214] Over the next four years, Day searched for meaning in her faith, writing for Catholic magazines and traveling.[215] She found her answer in the form of Peter Maurin.

Before appearing on Dorothy Day's doorstep on December 9, 1932, Peter Maurin had led a rather unique life. Maurin was born into a peasant family in southern France, in

[211] Ibid., 93.
[212] Ibid., 140.
[213] Ibid., 148.
[214] Miller, 200.
[215] Ibid., 200-226.

1877. At sixteen, he entered the order of the Christian Brothers but obligatory military service interrupted his monastic life six years later. He returned briefly to the monastery but left for good in 1902, when the French government closed many religious schools. Maurin became active in Le Sillon, a Catholic lay movement that advocated Christian democracy and supported cooperatives and unions. He later grew disillusioned with the movement and emigrated to Canada in 1909.[216] Maurin took whatever odd jobs were available and was arrested at various times for vagrancy. Whenever possible, he visited New York City, reading at the public library or preaching on the streets. When George Shuster, the editor of *Commonweal*, gave him Day's address, Maurin was "supporting himself as a handyman at a Catholic boys' camp in upstate New York, receiving meals, use of the chaplain's library, and living space in the barn."[217]

There is some debate as to Maurin's actual contribution to the Catholic Worker movement. Day credited him with much of the success of the movement, though Charles Morris states that Maurin's "practical contributions were negligible."[218] He is variously represented as a visionary and as being addled. The truth, Massa concluded, lies somewhere in the middle. Maurin based his "Easy Essays," writings that occupied a prominent spot in *The Catholic Worker*, on the "Easy Conversations" written by St. Philip Neri.[219] While they offered a passionate view of the Catholic Church, they were not particularly sophisticated in their theology:

> If the Catholic Church
> is not today the dominant social, dynamic force
> it is because Catholic scholars have failed

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[216] Jim Forest, "Peter Maurin, Co-Founder of the Catholic Worker Movement," available from http://www.catholicworker.org/roundtable/pmbiography.cfm, accessed 16 March 2006.
[217] Ibid.
[218] Morris, 143.
[219] Massa, 107.

to blow the dynamite of the Church.
…
It is about time
to blow the lid off
so that the Catholic Church
may again become the dominant social dynamic force.[220]

Whatever his limitations, Maurin was no doubt crucial to the movement because of his relationship with Day. By Day's own account, Maurin gave clarity and purpose to her life.[221] Though it took her strength to implement the plan, it was he who came up with the three-part plan of the Catholic Worker movement and convinced her to begin work without worrying about the means by which it could be accomplished. For his part, Maurin saw Day as "a new St. Catherine of Siena" who could "move mountains, and have influence on governments, temporal and spiritual."[222] Day and Maurin seemed made for each other.

Maurin was also vital to Day and the movement as her teacher. Maurin taught Day to look at history in a way that focused on the lives of the saints, especially St. Francis of Assisi. Appealing to Day's concern for the poor and the working class, he introduced her to the papal encyclicals of Leo XII and Pius XI regarding social justice. Perhaps most importantly, Maurin taught Day the "personalism" advocated by Jacques Maritain, a leader of the neo-Thomist movement. The crux of all of his tutelage was that personal sanctity and community mattered above all else in any program of social change.[223]

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[220] Peter Maurin, "Blowing the Dynamite," *Easy Essays* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977), 3.

[221] Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 169.

[222] Forest, "Peter Maurin, Co-Founder of the Catholic Worker Movement."

[223] Miller, 236.

Maurin held Francis of Assissi as the model personalist, and one cannot overstate the importance of St. Francis to Maurin. During his years of wandering, Maurin had developed a Franciscan attitude, embracing poverty, charity, and celibacy. This simplified lifestyle, he believed, made it "easier for men to be good."[224] "[Maurin] was always getting back to Saint Francis of Assisi, who was most truly the 'gentle personalist,'" wrote Day, "In his poverty, rich; in renouncing all, possessing all; generous, giving out of the fullness of his heart, sowing generously and reaping generously, humble and asking when in need, possessing freedom and all joy."[225]

Maurin passed his reverence for Francis on to Day and the Catholic Worker movement. In describing the philosophy that guided the houses of hospitality, Day mentioned Francis as being influential.[226] The Catholic Worker houses were devoted to the Franciscan principles of charity and humility, and the workers were expected live an impoverished life as well, often making it difficult to tell the workers from the occupants of the houses.[227] Day justified the embrace of poverty by saying that "the whole world loves [Francis] for his joyous acceptance of voluntary poverty."[228] In emulation of her patron saint, Day believed that she must be charitable and impoverished in order to have any authority to teach this way of life to others. Thus, Francis affected both Day's life and mission.

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[224] Peter Maurin, "Easy Essay: Guild System - 1200 A.D," *The Catholic Worker*, November, 1939.
[225] Dorothy Day, "Peter the Materialist," *The Catholic Worker*, September 1945, 6.
[226] Robert Coles, *Dorothy Day: A Radical Devotion* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1987), 128.
[227] Morris, 143.
[228] Dorothy Day, "Fall Appeal - October 1965," *The Catholic Worker*, October 1965, 2.

Perhaps the most vivid way in which Francis affected Day was in his commitment to pacifism.[229] Quoting a 1905 pamphlet entitled "St. Francis and You," Day wrote:

> St. Francis laid the foundation of a new social order of things within the church. This was his special work, and the work of his order – to induce Christian society to live by Christian principles; to be Christians in very deed as well as by profession. St. Francis by laying upon his Tertiaries the precept never to bear arms except in defense of the Church, struck a fatal blow at the entire (feudal) system.[230]

Impressed by the fact that Francis had made the refusal to bear arms a condition of membership in his Third Order, Day made pacifism a key component of the Catholic Worker movement.[231] Like Francis, she saw pacifism as a fundamental Christian principle. It was, for Day, a logical extension of the Christian principle of protecting the poor.

This opposition to violence often put Day and the movement at odds with the larger Church and Americans in general. Day was strongly anti-Fascist and anti-Communist, seeing the crimes of both more clearly and sooner than most people.[232] When virtually the entire American Church supported Franco in the Spanish Civil War, Day refused to take sides, writing: "If 2,000 [Catholic Clergy] have suffered martyrdom in Spain, is that suffering atoned for by the death of the 90,000 in the Civil War? Would not those martyrs themselves have cried out against the shedding of more blood?"[233] She

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[229] Francis of Assisi remains one of the greatest Catholic examples of peace. "The Peace Prayer of St. Francis" is perhaps the most famous prayer associated with him, and the Shrine of St Francis of Assisi is a world-famous center of inter-religious dialogue and Christian pacifism.

[230] Dorothy Day, "The Example of St. Francis of Assisi: Why Write about Strife and Violence?" *The Catholic Worker*, June, 1934, 1.

[231] Francis devised his Third Order, as it is now called, of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance, which he intended as a sort of middle state between the world and the cloister for those who could not enter either the First Order of Friars Minor or the Second Order of Poor Ladies. That Francis prescribed particular duties for these tertiaries is beyond question. They were not to carry arms, or take oaths, or engage in lawsuits, etc. See *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1913 ed., s.v. "Rule of St.Francis," available from http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06208a.htm, accessed 14 March 2006, for more information.

[232] Morris, 144.

[233] Ibid.

split the Catholic Worker movement by opposing America's entrance into World War II, causing circulation of *The Catholic Worker* to freefall. In response to the dropping of atomic weapons, she wrote, "We have created destruction….our Lord Himself has already pronounced judgment on the atomic bomb. When James and John (John the beloved) wished to call down fire from heaven on their enemies, Jesus said: 'You know not of what spirit you are. The Son of Man came not to destroy souls but to save.'"[234] And, as mentioned earlier, she was arrested multiple times for refusing to participate in civil defense drills, "an act of public penance for having been the first people in the world to drop the atomic bomb and to make the hydrogen bomb."[235] Just as Francis was not disheartened when he was thrown out into the snow for his views, Day would not waver on her pacifist views despite the problems it caused for the movement.

In addition to St. Francis, Day had an interest in the lives and philosophies of other saints as well. Perhaps the most unlikely influence on Day was "the Little Way" of St. Therese of Lisieux.[236] St. Therese and Day could not appear to be more different; one was a cloistered nun and the symbol of saccharine piety, and the other was the most visible Catholic radical in America. Day initially had her doubts about Therese as well, wondering "[w]hat kind of a saint was this who felt that she had to practice heroic charity in eating what was put in front of her…."[237] After years of serving meals, making beds, cleaning, and performing other ordinary services in the Catholic Worker houses, Day

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[234] Dorothy Day, "We Go on Record: the CW Response to Hiroshima," *The Catholic Worker*, September 1945, 1.

[235] Dorothy Day, "Where Are the Poor? They Are in Prison Too" *Catholic Worker*, July-August, 1955, 1.

[236] St. Therese of Lisieux grew up in a pious, middle-class, 19th century French family, entered a cloistered convent at the age of 15, and died at the age of 24. She left behind an account of her life and a collection of letters that have since become influential as the "Little Way."

[237] Dorothy Day, *Therese* (Notre Dame, IN: Fides Publishers Association, 1960), viii.

began to see the value of St. Therese's mystical "Little Way" of piety.[238] This philosophy focused on everyday, mundane acts of selflessness and charity as the truest path to holiness over and against "heroic" corporate activity. The Little Way was an "active love," and, as Day wrote of Therese, "In these days of fear and trembling of what man has wrought on earth in destructiveness and hate, Therese is the saint we need."[239]

Where it had taken a while for Day to warm up to St. Therese, she immediately appreciated St. Teresa of Avila. Day first read about Teresa in William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience* before her conversion. James' emphasis on the correlation between prayer and personal life and action in the saint's life drew Day to Teresa.[240] Day, for her part, was so taken with St. Teresa that she named her daughter Tamar Teresa.[241] Day concentrated on Teresa's teachings regarding the fruits of prayer, not on the saint's visions and experiences.[242] Central to Teresa's writings was the idea that everyone is connected to God through prayer. Likewise, God's mercy reached out to every soul, though this connection could take a long time to complete. As a convert and a person who desired to live a saintly life, Day found Teresa's teachings on the individual relationship with God appealing. In these teachings, Day found a universal call to holiness that included lay people as well as priests and religious.[243]

Beyond using the saints as models for Catholic living, Maurin introduced Day to the social teachings of papal encyclicals. Beginning with Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum*

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[238] Day became so enamored of St. Therese that she wrote a biography of the saint that was published in 1960.
[239] Day, *Therese*, p. xii.
[240] Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 142.
[241] Ibid., 141.
[242] Miller, 204.
[243] Ibid., 273.

Novarum, these encyclicals focused on issues concerning the poor and working class. Stating bluntly her position on the importance of the encyclicals, Day wrote, "We all ought to…do all we possibly can to change the world in the direction our Lord pointed to and the direction of our popes in their labor encyclicals."[244] The encyclicals formed a crucial part of the philosophy of the movement, and Day often quoted them in the *Catholic Worker*, most notably publishing the entire text of *Quadragesimo Anno*, Pius XI's social justice encyclical written to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, in the fourth issue.[245]

Written in 1891, *Rerum Novarum* represented Catholic social thought concerning the plight of workers in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. In it, Leo called for the protection of the weak and the poor through the pursuit of justice. At the same time, he rejected socialism and class struggle as legitimate principles of change. Clearly, Leo's statement that "[i]n protecting the rights of private individuals, however, special consideration must be given to the weak and the poor" resonated with Day.[246] Indeed, this was another call to the charity advocated by Francis. It also echoed Aquinas' belief in the God-given value of man, calling it "shameful and inhuman, however, to use men as things for gain and to put no more value on them than what they are worth in muscle and energy."[247] This belief in the inherent value of man was the foundation for Day's "personalism."

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[244] Dorothy Day, "Days With an End," *The Catholic Worker*, April 1934, 3-4.

[245] Dorothy Day, *The Catholic Worker*, August 1933, 4.

[246] Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, 1891. Available from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum_en.html, accessed 12 March 2006.

[247] Ibid.

Though *Rerum Novarum* introduced the idea of subsidiarity, Pope Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno* expanded the idea into the form that Day accepted. This encyclical reaffirmed the need for a social order arbitrated by justice. Pius XI also wrote the encyclical because of the worldwide depression combined with the concentration of wealth and power that had developed in the socio-economic realm.[248] The encyclical called for the reestablishment of a social order based on the principle of subsidiarity, meaning that services such as charity should be provided at the most reasonable local level. Pius wrote that "[I]t is an injustice, a grave evil and a disturbance of right order for a larger and higher organization to arrogate to itself functions which can be performed efficiently by smaller and lower bodies. . . . Of its very nature the true aim of all social activity should be to help individual members of the social body, but never to destroy or absorb them."[249] Closely related to the Day's personalism, the principle of subsidiarity emphasizes individual free will and the primacy of the human being.

An encyclical written later in her career filled Day with joy. Written in 1963, Pope John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris* covered the entire spectrum of relations between the individual and the community and between nations. The underlying thread of all of these relations was that peace, based on mutual trust, could be lasting only if founded on a genuine respect for and adherence to the law of God.[250] John maintained the earlier popes' stance that "[t]he common good is chiefly guaranteed when personal rights and

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[248] Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, 1931. Available from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno_en.html, accessed 12 March 2006.

[249] Ibid.

[250] Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 1965. Available from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem_en.html, accessed 12 March 2006.

duties are maintained."[251] However, in contrast to these earlier popes, he modified the idea of "just-wars," which judged wars according to why and how they were fought. Among nuclear powers, John argued, there could be no just wars. Instead, the leaders of nations should recognize that peace was "a requirement of love."[252] In many ways, this encyclical represented every principle to which Day and the Catholic Worker movement had devoted themselves.

It is worth noting that while Day's adherence to these papal encyclicals made her appear too liberal to many, her observance of them also caused her to appear conservative on issues of sexuality. John T. McGreevy noted that Day "mocked reformers convinced that contraception would solve 'all the troubles of the world.'"[253] Instead, she encouraged Catholics to find love in submission to God and family. This was simply a part of the idea of subsidiarity. Though all individuals have inherent worth, they derive their identity from a web of social relationships. Family was the most fundamental of these relationships and the first level at which needs should cared for.[254] Again, Day practiced what she preached, following Francis' example and remained chaste after the birth of her daughter and submitted to her family – that family being the movement and those it served.

All of these influences – the charity and poverty of St. Francis, the "Little Way" of St. Therese, the prayer and call to lead a holy life of St. Teresa, and the social justice advocated by the papal encyclicals – combined with the teachings of neo-Thomist

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[251] Ibid.
[252] Ibid.
[253] John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York : W.W. Norton, 2003), 154.
[254] Morris, 151.

philosopher Jacques Maritain to create Day's understanding of "personalism." Essentially, the personalism of Maritain emphasized that change in society must begin with change in individuals.[255] As argued by St. Thomas Aquinas, each human being was endowed by God with dignity, grace, and purpose. This had the dual effect of bestowing worth on each individual and making each individual responsible for the welfare of others. As James T. Fisher noted, "[t]he goal of all communities was to ensure that this 'spark of the divine' residing in women and men could be ignited, enabling them to enter into a more intimate and personal relationship with God their creator."[256] Maritain, like many neo-Thomists, viewed the church as the visible sign of Christ's Mystical Body. In the Mystical Body of Christ, Maritain explained, all people were bound spiritually together so that an injury to one was an injury to all. Consequently, each individual was personally responsible for the welfare of others. This was the crux of the Catholic Worker movement and, Day and Maurin believed, Catholicism itself: "The Catholic Worker believes in the gentle personalism of traditional Catholicism."[257]

For Day, personalism was the most active form of personal responsibility. "If anyone comes to you hungry, you don't say to him, 'Be thou *filled*. Go be warm.' You go ahead and see to it that he does get what he needs. You're supposed to immediately reply to the need of that person."[258] Subscribing to personalism affected Day in two ways. First, she sought a society in which every individual was "able to live as a person,

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[255] Mark Zwick and Louise Zwick, *The Catholic Worker Movement: Intellectual and Spiritual Origins* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 76.

[256] James T. Fisher, *Communion of Immigrants: A History of Catholics in America* (New York : Oxford University Press, 2002), 111.

[257] Maurin, "What the Catholic Worker Believes," *Easy Essays*, 4.

[258] Dorothy Day, *New Heaven/New Earth*, interview of Dorothy Day by Herbert Jessep, 60 mins., WCUB-TV, 1974, videocassette; quoted in Nancy L. Roberts, *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984), 8.

that is, to exercise a maximum of initiative, responsibility, and spiritual life."[259] Second, she strove individually to exercise initiative, responsibility, and spirituality in her own life. She used the *Catholic Worker* to teach personalism, and she used her life to model that philosophy. She preached charitable work, and also practiced it. She sought justice for the poor, and in so doing became poor herself. In effect, it seemed Day had created in the houses of hospitality the Christian world which she sought, a place where sanctity and community were a way of life. Thus, the lives of Francis, Therese, and Teresa all shaped the personalist philosophy which governed both how she lived her own life and how she envisioned the world she was trying to shape.

Likewise, the papal encyclicals', especially *Quadragesimo Anno*'s, emphasis on performing charity on the local level affected the direction in which Day carried movement. She rejected the idea that the state should be responsible for everything, arguing that individuals avoided personal responsibility by referring the poor to "this agency or that," to the point that "so many charities…become referral agencies…and nothing is accomplished."[260] Because of this, the Catholic Worker movement disavowed church and state "welfare" schemes. Day's personalism was at odds with most forms of collectivism, which she believed glorified the group as "a sort of higher-order individual."[261] Because Day stressed personal accountability before state responsibility, the movement never sought incorporation as a nonprofit entity or tax-exempt status.[262]

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[259] Dorothy Day, "Peter's Program," *The Catholic Worker*, May 1955, 2.
[260] Roberts, 8.
[261] Dorothy Day, "Personalism – The One-Man Revolution," *The Catholic Worker*, February 1956, 1.
[262] Miller, 397.

The movement also declined state assistance on the grounds that "they who pay the piper call the tune."[263]

In arguing that personalism is crucial to Day's radicalism, it is instructive to compare her to other reformers. Jane Addams, the preeminent female reformer of the generation before Day, offers an obvious comparison. In 1889, Addams, along with Ellen Gates Starr, founded Hull House in Chicago. Hull House served as a place to house the poor and later as a center for social reform activities.[264] This, of course, mirrored the hospitality houses and round tables of intellectuals and workers advocated by Day. Both women were active reformers throughout their careers. Both participated in the suffrage movement. More importantly, they were pacifists.[265] For Addams, this resulted in sharing the 1931 Nobel Peace Prize with Nicholas Murray Butler. Both women lost followers by criticizing American involvement in popular wars: World War I for Addams and World War II for Day.

Despite these similarities, philosophy separated Addams and Day. Progressivism and pragmatism guided Addams while personalism guided Day. Adams held a "Darwinian belief that society could evolve to a more equitable and just system."[266] She claimed in her book, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, that civilization was progressing toward a higher form of living together. Believing that society had moved from individual life to family life, Addams advocated taking the next step to community-based

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[263] Dorothy Day, "On Pilgrimage - November 1956," *The Catholic Worker*, November 1956, 6.

[264] *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, 6th ed., s.v. "Addams, Jane," available from http://www.bartleby.com/65/ad/Addams-J.html, accessed 21 March 2006.

[265] Ibid.

[266] Marilyn Fischer, *Jane Addams's Writings on Peace* (Bristol: Thoemmes Continuum, 2003) xiii. For further information on Jane Addams, see Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Jane Addams and the Dream of American Democracy: A Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2002) and Allen Freeman Davis, *American Heroine: The Life and Legend of Jane Addams* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

ethics.[267] Philosophically, Day opposed this on two counts. First, she advocated a return to what she believed were traditional Catholic and Biblical values. Second, she opposed collectivism, preferring personalism's emphasis on the individual. As a pragmatist, Addams rejected absolutes and abstractions. She "entered all discussions about peace with the understanding that her ideas could change…through dialogue and experience."[268] She believed that the sort of entrenched beliefs in "infallible truths" that characterized Catholicism would lead to violence. Day, on other hand, saw faith in God and an understanding that He had imbued all humans with dignity and worth as the only source of lasting peace. Though the practical applications and results were in many ways similar, Addams and Day operated in two very different philosophical frameworks.

While the public similarities between Day and Addams dissipate under close examination, another hero of Catholic radicals, Thomas Merton, grows closer to Day under scrutiny. It is difficult to think of a lifestyle more removed from Day's radicalism than Merton's life as a Trappist Monk. Day certainly felt this way initially; after she read Merton's *The Seven Storey Mountain*, she complained that he "plunged himself so deeply in religion that his view of the world and its problems is superficial and scornful."[269] Despite this rough start, they became friends, with Merton crediting Day for his conversion to Catholicism.[270] Likewise, Day noted that Merton's books were the most popular among members of the Catholic Worker.[271]

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[267] Ibid., xiv.

[268] Ibid., xv.

[269] Elie, 298. For more information on Thomas Merton see Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984) and Monica Furlong, *Merton: A Biography* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980).

[270] Roberts, 4.

[271] Elie, 300.

Merton and Day represented two approaches to the personalist ideal. Though relatively isolated at the Abbey of Gethsemani, Merton appreciated Day's activism, noting that it was vital for the individual to do *something*.[272] Like Day, he placed the individual and his or her personal relationships, both with other individuals and with God, at the center of theology. Both also embraced poverty, with Merton taking a vow of poverty as a Trappist monk and Day immersing herself in urban poverty. Part of their reason for choosing poverty was that for both, faith was a matter of letting go of all worldly concerns until only God was left, rather than holding on to God in the face of the secular. They actually envied each other a bit. Merton admired the real world poverty that Day lived, while Day saw the ugliness of poverty and how hard it really was for those who experienced it. Conversely, Day longed for the spiritual discipline available to Merton at the abbey, while Merton chafed at the constraints.[273] Moving beyond poverty, they were alike in that they both saw Christian society as the cure for modern ailments. Pacifism was part of this cure. Day and Merton based their pacifism in Scripture, and were dismayed by the official stance of American Catholic bishops regarding war.[274] Likewise, Merton shared Day's commitment to civil rights due to personalism.[275]

Having then examined the life of Dorothy Day, it is obvious that many of the initial distinctions between her and Sheen remain: priest and layperson, television celebrity and urban radical, cradle Catholic and convert. The two even differed on the way in which they perceived the role of the Catholic Church in America. Sheen chose to

[272] Ibid., 301
[273] Ibid., 318
[274] Ibid., 330.
[275] Ibid., 359.

work within the mainstream, tying Catholicism's emphasis on natural law to American democracy. He essentially believed that Catholics should be in America, for America, and of America. Day, on other hand, used Catholic theology as a challenge to American materialism and militarism. Perhaps as Mark Massa suggested, this stance actually made her more American than the patriot Sheen, as she was a part of the long American tradition of outsider dissent.[276] Regardless, both felt that the Catholic Church was crucial to American life on a social level, and on a personal level, Catholicism shaped and inspired both their political beliefs and actions. Despite whatever practical differences they may have had, Sheen and Day shared a reverence for Catholic orthodoxy that outweighed external concerns. Both venerated the saints as examples for Christian living. Papal encyclicals, especially *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*, were crucial in their understanding of the world around them. Admittedly, each emphasized different aspects of the encyclicals, but there can be no denying the respect both held for the documents. Most importantly, both acknowledged the inherent, God-given value of the individual. For Sheen, this manifested itself in anti-Communism; for Day, it took the form of pacifism and care for the poor.

Beyond these shared influences, the public nature of Day's and Sheen's faith ties them together. Both devoted themselves to public ministry, as they felt the Church called them to it. Faith led them to the public square and caused them to comment on political issues. While both spoke out, Day was much more a public activist than a public intellectual like Sheen. Because of the public nature of their ministry, it is true of both that their lives were their messages. Perhaps this is the reason that both have had causes for canonization opened for them.

[276] Massa, 118.

CHAPTER IV

FLANNERY O'CONNOR: CATHOLIC REALIST

"Well, if it's a symbol, to hell with it."[277]
-Flannery O'Connor on the Eucharist

At first glance, Flannery O'Connor appears out of place in a study that includes Fulton Sheen and Dorothy Day. Sheen was the public face of the Catholic Church in America in the post-war era, and Day remained the most visible Catholic activist in American history. Both were known to millions in their time, and both have had causes for canonization advanced by their admirers. O'Connor, on the other hand, was a writer who rarely left her home in Milledgeville, Georgia, after developing lupus. As she told Elizabeth Hester in 1955: "I am not a mystic and I do not live a holy life."[278] Her literary output was relatively small, consisting of two novels and thirty-two short stories. Where Sheen and Day reached out to the masses who were often Christian, O'Connor's audience was a comparatively elite, educated group "that believed God is dead. At least the ones [she was] conscious of."[279] Nevertheless, O'Connor exerted considerable influence;

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[277] Flannery O'Connor, *The Habit of Being*, ed. Sally Fitzgerald with an introduction by Sally Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1979), 125. O'Connor made the statement in response to Mary McCarthy's statement that the Eucharist was "a pretty good" symbol.
[278] Ibid., 92.
[279] Ibid.

critics have regularly suggested that she was perhaps the most influential American Catholic artist of the twentieth century.[280]

Indeed, while similar to Sheen and Day in some ways, O'Connor really does present a contrast to their "public" Catholicism. She was a devout, orthodox Catholic, as evidenced in her writing. O'Connor herself said as much when she stated, "If I were not a Catholic, I would have no reason to write."[281] As an orthodox Catholic, Thomism, both from Thomas Aquinas and as filtered through the neo-Thomist movement of the twentieth century, affected her perceptions of personal piety and writing. Yet, though the major themes remain the same, slight differences in experience and influences make a great deal of difference between O'Connor and the public duo of Sheen and Day. Her physical illness limited her in ways that others did not have to consider. Likewise, her life in the "Christ-haunted South" altered her perspective on Catholicism. It is O'Connor who is perhaps the most distinctly American of the three as the unique brand of evangelical Christianity found in the South obviously influenced her.

The most obvious and important difference between O'Connor and the other two is the difference in the way they present Catholic theology. Sheen and Day's lives offer a most direct form of teaching – Sheen as a priest, and Day devoting herself to the social gospel. Where they offered a public affirmation of Catholicism, O'Connor's theology was much more a private interpretation. Though she lived a pious life, her means of evangelization was external: stories. She described herself as 'only a storyteller,"[282] yet

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[280] Alexander B. Benjamin, review of *Flannery O'Connor: A Life*, by Jean W. Cash, *Modern Age* 46 (Fall 2004): 370; Farrell O'Gorman, "The Angelic Artist in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor and Walker Percy," *Renascence* 53 (Fall 200): 61; Benjamin Schwarz, review of *The Life You Save May Be Your Own: An American Pilgrimage*, by Paul Elie, *Atlantic Monthly* 292 (December 2003), 108.

[281] Ralph C. Wood, *Flannery O'Connor and the Christ-Haunted South* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eedmans Publishing Company, 2004), 27.

[282] O'Connor, *Habit of Being*, 94.

she used her stories to impart fundamental Catholic thought. As Leonard Mayhew wrote, "She compared her approach to reality and fiction to what the medieval doctors called the anagogical[283] sense of scripture, the real and intended significance embedded beneath the literal and empirical sense."[284] O'Connor's stories present a Christian realist view of creation stripped to its barest essentials: good and evil really exist and can be experienced through the physical world. The fundamental struggle of existence, then, is a moral struggle toward salvation, and the historical mission of the Catholic Church is to provide a means to salvation.

Compared to the public lives of Sheen and Day, O'Connor's life was relatively simple. Mary Flannery O'Connor was born on March 25, 1925, in Savannah, Georgia, to Edward Francis and Regina O'Connor. Both belonged to prominent Catholic families, and they had Mary Flannery baptized at St. John the Baptist Cathedral.[285] Living across Lafayette Square from the cathedral, she attended the school attached to St. John the Baptist, St. Vincent's Grammar School, until she was eleven, when her mother transferred her to St. Joseph of Corondelet. Economic difficulties during the Depression forced the O'Connors to leave Savannah.[286] Edward worked in Atlanta during the week; Regina and Mary Flannery moved to Milledgeville where Regina's family, the Clines, resided.

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[283] *The American Heritage Dictionary* (2000), s.v. "anagogical." Available from http://www.bartleby.com/61/68/A0276800.html, accessed 15 April, 2006. The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines the word as "a mystical interpretation of a word, passage, or text, especially scriptural exegesis that detects allusions to heaven or the afterlife."

[284] Leonard Mayhew, "Flannery O'Connor: 1925-1964," in *Commonweal Confronts the Century: Liberal Convictions, Catholic Tradition*, ed. Patrick Jordan and Paul Baumann (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 399. Originally published in *Commonweal*, 21 August 1964.

[285] Jean W. Cash, *Flannery O'Connor: A Life* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2002), 4-8.

[286] Ibid., 25.

The move from Savannah proved critical for the youngest O'Connor. For the first time in her life, she enrolled in public school, attending Peabody High School from 1938 to 1942. While Catholic education had some influence on O'Connor, personal interest and devotion more so than compulsion propelled her to study Catholic theology.[287] After graduating high school, she studied at Georgia State College for Women (now Georgia College and State University), earning a B.A. in Social Science in 1945. During her secondary and undergraduate education, students admired O'Connor more for her cartoons in school newspapers and annuals than for her "bizarre" stories.[288] In 1945 she earned a scholarship to study in Paul Engle's graduate writing program at Iowa State University. She later stated that she "didn't really learn to write until [she] went to Graduate School and then [she] began to read and write at the same time."[289] The program exposed her to the works of Joyce, Elliot, and Faulkner, and she appreciated their ability to use fiction to examine faith and capture complex states of mind.[290] As a sign of her growing maturity, she dropped "Mary" from her name during her time in Ames.[291]

Even more important to O'Connor than changes in education and location was the illness and death of her father.[292] Edward O'Connor was diagnosed with lupus erythematosus, an autoimmune disease, in 1937. He died on February 1, 1941 at the age of forty-five; Flannery was fifteen. The immediate impact drew Flannery and her mother

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[287] Richard Giannone, introduction to *Spiritual Writings* by Flannery O'Connor, ed. Robert Ellsberg (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 21.
[288] Cash, 69-76.
[289] O'Connor, *Habit of Being,* 98.
[290] Ibid.
[291] Cash, 80.
[292] Giannone, 20.

even closer to each other.[293] The protracted illness especially influenced O'Connor's writing. Even before her own struggle with lupus, the existence of suffering was a theme in her writing.[294]

O'Connor met with moderate success in her early career. *Accent* published "The Geranium," the title story of her M.A. thesis in 1946. The early chapters of O'Connor's first novel, *Wise Blood*, won the 1947 Iowa Fiction Award for a first novel, but the book's unusual story of a self-blinding Southern prophet and his battle against faith put off Rinehart, the publisher who funded the prize.[295] After graduating from Iowa State in 1947, she spent parts of 1948 and 1949 at Yaddo, an artists' colony in Saratoga Springs, New York. There she met Robert Lowell, who introduced her to Robert Giroux, her first editor, and Sally and Robert Fitzgerald, who became close friends.[296] In 1948 Elizabeth McKee became O'Connor's agent and quickly placed her story "The Captive" in *Mademoiselle*.[297] O'Connor temporarily left Yaddo after a disagreement between the foundation that funded the colony and the colony's residents. After this she lived briefly in New York City.[298] She later moved to the Fitzgeralds' home in Ridgefield, Connecticut for a year.

The decisive moment of O'Connor's life occurred in 1950; at the age of twenty-five she developed the same form of lupus that killed her father. It forced her to move back to Milledgeville, where she would live with and be cared for by her mother for the rest of her life. There she finished *Wise Blood* after five years of work. Harcourt, Brace

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[293] Cash, 29.
[294] Martha Stephens, *The Question of Flannery O'Connor* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 88-89.
[295] O'Connor, *Habit of Being,* 9.
[296] Ibid., 11-12.
[297] Ibid., 7.
[298] Ibid., 11-12.

published the book in 1952 to critical bemusement.[299] However, the book did win O'Connor a devout following from a small, elite group of writers, including Evelyn Waugh.[300] O'Connor began work on her second novel, *The Violent Bear It Away*, in the same year. Limited by lupus, O'Connor rarely traveled in her later life, making short trips related to her writing as well as a longer trip to Europe during which she visited Lourdes and Rome. Writing remained her primary connection to the outside world. O'Connor, an avid letter writer, maintained friendships with writers such as Katherine Anne Porter and Maryat Lee through the postal service.[301] She also wrote a number of essays and reviewed books for *The Georgia Bulletin*, the diocesan paper for the Catholic archdiocese of Atlanta.

O'Connor's health declined in the early 1960s, but her writing output and acclaim did not. She finished *The Violent Bear it Away* in 1960. The book received a great deal of praise, though O'Connor protested that critics misunderstood a story she had intended as "a very minor hymn to the Eucharist."[302] Her short stories garnered admiration as well, and she was named an honorary Doctor of Letters by St. Mary's College in 1962. Meanwhile, she began to suffer from bone disintegration as a result of her steroid treatment for lupus and had to be hospitalized. At the end of 1963 she developed anemia from a fibroid tumor, and surgery to remove it reactivated her lupus. She ultimately died from a kidney infection on August 3, 1964 at the age of thirty-nine. A second collection of her short stories, *Everything that Rises Must Converge*, appeared shortly after her

[299] Robert J. McGill, "Flannery O'Connor," *The Literary Encyclopedia*, Available from http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=3373, accessed 23 January 2006.

[300] Ibid.

[301] See O'Connor, *Habit of Being*, 608 and 612 for a full listing of O'Connor's letters to each woman.

[302] Ibid., 507.

death, and three of its stories – "Greenleaf," "Everything That Rises Must Converge," and "Revelation" – won the O. Henry Award for Short Fiction.

In her essay, "The Catholic Novelist in the South," O'Connor wrote that "the two circumstances that have given character to [her] own writing have been those of being Southern and being Catholic."[303] In hindsight, an observer could add illness to these circumstances. Certainly, all of these were crucial to her development as a writer and as an individual. Two of these experiences, illness and living in the South, were physical realities for O'Connor, and both influenced her understanding of Catholicism. On the other hand, the Catholic view that reality was mediated by the physical world rather than directly experienced dominated O'Connor's understanding of the other two realties, her writing, and the world at large.[304]

In viewing O'Connor's influences, it is obvious that the sudden blow of lupus altered the course of her life and shaped her writing. A comparable misfortune appears in every one of her novels and short stories, whether it is the murder of a grandmother in "A Good Man is Hard to Find" or the physical humiliation and harm of self-righteous bigot Mrs. Turpin in "Revelation."[305] It is always a physical blow that causes the setback, sending the recipient on a new course that takes into account a conscious relationship with God. O'Connor's very Catholic view of suffering as a potential source of grace informs this pattern.[306]

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[303] Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*, ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1969), 196.

[304] Giannone, 24.

[305] See Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man is Hard to Find," 137-153, and "Revelation," 633-654, in *Flannery O'Connor: Collected Works* (New York: The Library of America, 1988).

[306] Miles Orvell, *Flannery O'Connor: An Introduction* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 1991), 20-29.

Certainly, O'Connor's own life reflected this trend. Lupus struck her just as she was beginning her career. Though she obviously identified with the South, Georgia was not where she wanted to be. In a letter to Elizabeth McKee, she mentioned that despite being "nearly dead with lupus," she "had to be roped and tied and resigned the way that is necessary to be resigned to death" before returning to her mother's care.[307] She was not entirely resigned, however; she fought to control the disease through newly discovered cortisone treatments. While she could usually only write for two hours a day, she painstakingly devoted her energies to writing.[308]

Though O'Connor's correspondence rarely commented on her illness or the extent of her pain, some letters reveal a profound belief in the value of suffering. The most powerful of these statements is found in another letter to Elizabeth Hester in June 1956:

> I have never been anywhere but sick. In a sense sickness is a place more instructive than a long trip to Europe, and it's always a place where there's no company, where nobody can follow. Sickness before death is a very appropriate thing and I think those who don't have it miss one of God's mercies.[309]

For O'Connor illness enabled her to grow spiritually and as a writer. Despite being the central physical reality of her life, and one that isolated her, O'Connor believed lupus provided her with a means to understand "God's mercies" more fully. She even thought that the frustrating isolation was valuable; as she mentioned to Cecil Dawkins, she thought "the best of [her] writing [was] done down here."[310] In the way that her

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[307] O'Connor, *Habit of Being*, 42.
[308] McGill.
[309] O'Connor, *Habit of Being*, 163.
[310] Ibid., 230.

suffering isolated her from those around her, she found that the “passive diminishments” caused by lupus could be channeled spiritually into creative energy.[311]

Ironically, an actual “long trip to Europe” on account of her illness further demonstrates the way in which Catholicism affected her ideas on the relation between suffering and the grace of God. Despite her reservations, O’Connor consented to visiting Lourdes with her mother and aunt.[312] At the grotto, famed for its reportedly healing waters, O’Connor allowed herself to be immersed in the water. The pilgrimage continued to Rome, where she received a blessing from Pius XII before returning to Georgia. Afterward, O’Connor believed for a few months that her bones were regaining density. She wrote Maryat Lee that she could “walk around the room and for short spaces without the crutches. If it continues to improve, I may be off them in a year or so. Maybe this is Lourdes. Anyway, it’s something to be thankful to the same Source for.”[313] In this statement, O’Connor clearly allowed for the miraculous and believed that God could give physical help.

By linking sickness and death with providence, O’Connor echoed the answer to the sixth question of the Baltimore Catechism by suggested that the body was made for God and that His compassion could be relied upon.[314] St. Teresa of Avila’s teaching on suffering may have influenced O’Connor in this belief.[315] Likewise, O’Connor’s belief that suffering was meaningful with regard to salvation was echoed in John Paul II’s 1984

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[311] Ibid., 509. O’Connor took this term from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

[312] Cash, 274-275.

[313] O’Connor, *Habit of Being*, 293.

[314] J. A. O'Brien, *Understanding the Catholic Faith: An Official Edition of the Revised Baltimore Catechism, No. 3* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1955), 2.

[315] O’Connor mentions being familiar with Teresa of Avila in *Habit of Being*, 113, 166, and 189. The Austrian province of the Teresian Carmelites have posted a biography of her at http://www.karmel.at/eng/teresa.htm, accessed 8 March 2006. This biography mentions the value of suffering to Teresa.

apostolic letter, *Salvifici Doloris*. In it, John Paul stated that suffering is not only "inseparable from man's earthly existence,"[316] but it is somehow "essential to the nature of man" and "belongs to man's transcendence."[317] Thus, in the Catholic view, suffering is a meeting place between man and the Church so that the act of suffering "becomes the way for the Church."[318]

Like illness, O'Connor's Southern heritage affected both her personal life and her writing. With the exception of brief stays in Iowa, New York, and Connecticut, O'Connor lived in Georgia, and lupus limited her later travels. Southern life obviously influenced O'Connor's ambivalent views on race, class, and sex. Most critics agree that O'Connor was not overtly racist, but she was certainly not outspoken in favor of civil rights. She did write approvingly of Martin Luther King and the Berrigan brothers, Catholic priests who supported the Civil Rights movement. [319] She was concerned by the drift from spiritual religious experiences to the emotional experiences caused by the ascendancy of Catholics to the middle class.[320] With regard to sex, she rejected the Southern belle ideal. It seems most likely that O'Connor ignored her sexuality because of lupus and her devotion to writing.[321] Of greater importance was O'Connor's experience as a "Catholic writer in the Protestant South."[322]

O'Connor was, as Mayhew called her, a thoroughly "Bible Belt Catholic."[323] Undoubtedly, the "resistance to change, colorful dialect, and apocalyptic religion" of the

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[316] John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1984).
[317] Ibid.
[318] Ibid.
[319] See Cash, 149-155; Wood, 93-121.
[320] Giannone, 17.
[321] Cash, 134-143.
[322] This is the title of an essay in O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners*, 191-209.
[323] Mayhew, 400.

South appear throughout her fiction.[324] Though she had hoped to move away from the South before lupus forced her back, O'Connor no doubt saw her Southern heritage as a boon to her writing. She accepted the description of herself as a Southern writer, perhaps more so than as a Catholic writer, because she felt that Southerners understood the importance of narrative.[325] That is to say, she felt the Catholic novelist in the South had the advantage of becoming a storyteller in a society that still taught through stories rather than abstractions. The most crucial stories came from the "enduring presence of the Bible" on which the fundamentalist Christians of the South insisted.[326] O'Connor believed that it was a "deficiency" that some Catholics, on the other hand, did not see Christianity biblically. The result, she claimed, was that "our literature [would] always be going downhill and ourselves behind it."[327] In her view, a biblical revival would be good for Catholic literature not because truth would be systematically handed down in life-changing concepts, but because "to be great storytellers, we need something to measure ourselves against, and this is what we conspicuously lack in this age."[328] The Bible consists in large part not of abstract theology, but stories that impart fundamental truths to the reader. This is especially true of the Old Testament, and O'Connor expressed sympathy for the concrete view of right and wrong and punishment and reward found in this "half" of the Bible. She often compared her characters, "the crazy backwater prophets" like Tarwater and Hazel Motes" to Old Testament prophets railing against sin.[329]

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[324] Ibid., 399.

[325] O'Connor, "Catholic Writer in the Protestant South," 199.

[326] Christina Bieber Lake, *The Incarnational Art of Flannery O'Connor* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2005), 30.

[327] O'Connor, "Catholic Novelist in the South," in *Flannery O'Connor: Collected Works*, 858.

[328] Ibid.

[329] O'Connor, "Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South," 201.

O'Connor credited Protestant fundamentalists for the weight given to biblical stories in the South. Contrary to religious conventions, O'Connor recognized evangelicals as allies rather than antagonists. As she told Dr. T. R. Spivey, "The fact is…that fundamentalist Protestants, as far as doctrine goes, are closer to their traditional enemy, the Church of Rome, than they are to the advanced elements in Protestantism."[330] To O'Connor, the anti-modernist disposition of the South could help the Catholic novelist to be both a better novelist and better Catholic because since the Reformation:

> "the Church [had] over-emphasized the abstract and consequently impoverished our imagination and our capacity for prophetic insight. The circumstance of being a Southerner, of living in a non-Catholic but religiously inclined society, furnishes the Catholic novelist with some very fine antidotes to his own worst tendencies."[331]

Thus, by living in the South and tempering her Catholicism in the fire of evangelical Christianity, O'Connor benefited from the best of both traditions. Consequently her style of storytelling made profoundly clear the real existence of the struggle between good and evil in the human soul.

The third influence on O'Connor's writing and life was Catholicism, and it was far more vital in shaping her experiences than either illness or living in the South. Unlike Sheen and Day, O'Connor practiced a pious, ordinary form of religion. Nevertheless she remained strongly committed to a deep understanding of Catholic theology. O'Connor rejected the "sugary slice of inspirational pie" served up by religious thinkers like Norman Vincent Peale in favor of the often difficult theological tradition of the Catholic

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[330] O'Connor, *Habit of Being*, 341.
[331] O'Connor, "Catholic Writer in the South," 859.

Church.[332] In her view, religious belief should bring people closer to God, not merely make them feel good about themselves. "To discover the Church," O'Connor once said, "you have to set out by yourself."[333] Catholic theologians offered the truth of what the Church represented in principle, if not always practice. As with most students of Catholicism, Thomas Aquinas was crucial to her understanding of the world. Though mindful of traditional theology, O'Connor also studied twentieth-century Catholic thought. As her non-fiction writings indicate, the work of Jacques Maritain and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin greatly intrigued her and enhanced her understanding of contemporary trends in Roman Catholicism. She regularly recommended their works to friends troubled by spiritual doubt, and their writing helped O'Connor herself to remain connected to twentieth-century Catholic thought while isolated in Milledgeville.

Foremost among Catholic theologians, Thomas Aquinas provided the foundation for Catholic thought, including the Christian realism embraced by O'Connor. She read him regularly before going to bed, and referenced him far more in her letters than any other saint.[334] It is clear from her writing that O'Connor adored him:

> In any case, I feel I can personally guarantee that St. Thomas loved God because for the life of me I cannot help loving St. Thomas. His brothers didn't want him to waste himself being a Dominican and so locked him up in a tower and introduced a prostitute into his apartment; her he ran out with a red-hot poker. It would be fashionable today to be in sympathy with the woman, but I am in sympathy with St. Thomas.[335]

It seems unsurprising that she would identify with Aquinas's contemplative theology more than Augustine's lived theology. Afflicted with lupus and functioning as a writer, she was more likely to consider and write about the physical manifestations of her

[332] Giannone, 17.
[333] O'Connor, *Habit of Being,* 231.
[334] O'Connor, *Habit of Being,* 613
[335] Ibid., 94.

characters' spiritual struggles than to experience these struggles herself.[336] Consequently, Aquinas influenced her ideas on what was reasonable and realistic in life and in art. In many ways, O'Connor adopted Aquinas's "temperamental tendency to seek a middle way" in religious issues.[337] Both faith and reason were required of Catholics. God's wrath was moderated by His mercy. Beyond this, her personal piety and the nature of her work as a Christian artist reflected a Thomistic understanding of the Christian life. Thomism filtered directly into her writing, as she insisted on the "possibility of literal, allegorical, and anagogical levels of meaning in a text," keeping with the hermeneutic theory of Aquinas.[338]

Just as Aquinas inspired O'Connor, so did the neo-Thomist movement of the twentieth century. She obviously identified with the tradition of the Thomists and neo-Thomists when she spoke about her vocation as a Catholic writer. French philosopher Jacques Maritain was particularly notable within the neo-Thomist movement, and his book, *Art and Scholasticism*, shaped O'Connor's understanding of Aquinas in ways instrumental to her development.[339]

Maritain's emphasis on art as a virtue of the practical intellect particularly impressed O'Connor. He argued "the beautiful is essentially delightful. This is why…the soul experiences a diminished form [of ecstasy] when it is seized by the beauty of the work of art, and the fullness when it is absorbed, like the dew, by the beauty of

[336] Ibid., 125. O'Connor complained to Elizabeth Hester that someone had not identified her with Aquinas. She goes on to mention that she did not quote Augustine.

[337] Vernon Bourke, "Thomas Aquinas, St.," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol. 8* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. & Free Press, 1967), 105.

[338] McGill.

[339] See O'Connor, *Habit of Being*, 600. O'Connor regularly quoted from *Art and Scholasticism* and recommends it to acquaintances.

God."[340] Thus, his emphasis shifted away from the artist and toward the work of art, a shift that suited O'Connor. She was, after all, "only a storyteller." Despite this, Maritain argues that an artist does not need to be holy to serve God most fully, but only to be a good artist: "the artist …works for beauty, on the path which leads upright souls to God and manifests to them the invisible things by the visible."[341] In Maritain's view, the artistic calling was no less a vocation than Sheen's priesthood or Day's activism. O'Connor would paraphrase those ideas as they applied to the rest of her life:

> The novel is an art form and when you use it for anything other than art, you pervert it. I didn't make this up. I got it from St. Thomas (via Maritain) who allows that art is wholly concerned with the good of that which is made; it has no utilitarian end. If you do manage to use it successfully for social, religious, or other purposes, it is because you make it art first…[342]

Maritain's chapter on "Christian Art" also influenced O'Connor. In this chapter, Maritain stated that subject matter does not create Christian Art. Instead, Christian art was simply art made by a Christian believer.[343] To Maritain, the artist's faith shaped the artistic vision without necessarily being overt. For O'Connor, this was an epiphany.[344] Maritain's theories allowed her to write about those people she felt compelled to write about – Evangelical Protestants and atheists who were religiously different from her. Even with these differences, the characters could function in truly Catholic art.

Later in O'Connor's career, she became familiar with the work of "progressive" theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.[345] She liked his writing immediately, commenting

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[340] Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1930), 26-27
[341] Ibid., 37.
[342] O'Connor, *Habit of Being*, 157.
[343] Maritain, 53.
[344] Lake, 157.
[345] See Elie, 321. Elie provides the following description of Teilhard: "Jesuit priest, chaplain in the Great War, paleontologist in China investigating the origins of the species, author of speculo-mystical

to Thomas Stritch, "[Teilhard] was alive to everything there is to be alive to and in the right ways."[346] O'Connor said this despite freely admitting that she did not always understand his writing; *The Phenomenon of Man*, Teilhard's account of evolution, was hard for her, but "stimulating to the imagination."[347] His book, *The Divine Milieu*, was easier for her and influenced her more. Teilhard's belief that the world could be transformed through worldly activity, which Catholics were taught to shun, stayed with her.[348] Here was a theologian whose world view was shaped more by the personal experience emphasized by Augustine than by the systematic theology of Thomas.

Teilhard's writing reaffirmed some of O'Connor's fundamental beliefs while challenging others. His profound influence on O'Connor is evident in her later writing. His work gave her "a new perspective on the grotesque."[349] Having absorbed his idea that human life was "something under construction," she believed even more strongly that the grotesque was not evil but a means of redemption through God's grace.[350] Teihlard's teaching on suffering struck O'Connor as well, confirming her belief in the value of illness. His writing provided her with the term "passive diminishments" to describe her lupus and comforted her by suggesting that those who suffered "in a Christian spirit contribute to the great work of redemption 'like soldiers who fall during the assault which leads to peace.'"[351] At the same time, Teilhard challenged other aspects of O'Connor's faith. Where she had generally suspected progress as the enemy of Christian faith, Teilhard argued all creation, especially the Church, participated in

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works kept unpublished because they seemed to challenge the Catholic teaching that God created the world out of nothing in six days."

[346] O'Connor, *Habit of Being*, 449

[347] Ibid., 388.

[348] Elie, 322.

[349] O'Connor, 437.

[350] Lake, 235.

[351] Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu* (New York: Harper), 64.

progress that would be completed in the second coming of Christ.[352] For a believer who was completely certain of the rightness of the Church's principles, this was a difficult proposition. Still, the message seemed to resonate with her as she took the title of her last collections of stories, "Everything that Rises Must Converge," from Teilhard.

For all her admiration of Teilhard, O'Connor strongly diverged from his writing in one area. Teihard believed "each man's existence can properly be divided into two parts – what he does and what he undergoes…the active and the passive."[353] While both Teilhard and O'Connor acknowledged a reality beyond physical immediacy, they differed with regard to its impact on humans. Teilhard stated that the reality of God's existence "in no way disturb[ed] the harmony of our human attitude;" O'Connor emphatically disagreed.[354] As Miles Orvell noted, the disruption caused by the presence of the divine and the resulting drama of the will drove O'Connor's fiction while Teilhard "fix[ed] his sight on a higher reality."[355]

It is clear then that all of these influences – sickness, Southern identity, and Catholicism – intertwined to create O'Connor's identity as a writer and as an individual: Christian realist. She believed that lupus had real spiritual value beyond the physical suffering and isolation it created. Her Southern heritage exposed her to evangelical Christians so immersed in their faith that it became as much a reality as to them as air. O'Connor's faith in the teachings of the Catholic Church caused her to reject any modern ideas on the subjectivity of the spiritual. Though she never explicitly offered any sort of

[352] Elie, 322.
[353] Teilhard, 47.
[354] Ibid.
[355] Orvell, *Flannery O'Connor*, 68.

explanation for the development of her Christian realist views, she was familiar with the work of Maritain, and it seems reasonable to suppose he was a source.[356] Ultimately, these influences combined in O'Connor to create a mindset in which "belief in Christ" was literally a "matter of life and death" that opposed those "who would prefer to think it a matter of no great consequence."[357]

To define O'Connor as a Christian realist requires some understanding of the term. Theologian Richard McBrien describes Christian realism as seeing "the world mediated by meaning, rather than a world of immediate experience alone (naïve realism, empiricism) or ideas alone (idealism)."[358] In other words, the world is neither purely objective material nor subjective reality. Instead, the divine is available through "the renewing power of ordinary things in life."[359] Thus, for Catholics, a sacrament like the Eucharist provides a mediated but completely real experience of God. This is an objective, true reality whether or not a particular individual believes it. According to Langdon Gilkey, "the Catholic principle of symbol or sacamentality may provide the best entrance into a new synthesis of the Christian tradition with the vitalities of contemporary existence."[360] It was here that O'Connor resided, using fiction to offer Christian realism to "an unbelieving age."

O'Connor viewed God as a mystery, and Christian realism, which maintained the mysterious presence of God in the tangible world, provided her with the means to

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[356] O'Connor, *Habit of Being*, 609.

[357] Flannery O'Connor, Author's Note to *Wise Blood* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1952; second edition, New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Cudahy, 1962).

[358] Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 1185.

[359] Ibid., 1177.

[360] Langdon Gilkey, *Catholicism Confronts Modernity: A Protestant View* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 18; quoted in McBrien, 1183.

unravel, or at least acknowledge, this reality.[361] For her, faith provided the means to see the way in which the sacramental affects the material world. The reality of the Incarnation in Christ, for example, was "the ultimate reality" and allowed people to see "Christ in one another."[362] Speaking of the Incarnation, O'Connor said, "if [Jesus] was not God, He was no realist, only a liar, and the crucifixion an act of injustice."[363] The Eucharist was central to Catholics because it was a re-presentation rather than a representation of the Incarnation. Expanding on the importance of the reality of the Incarnation, O'Connor believed that "laws of flesh" allowed the individual to gain knowledge of "what God is."[364] Thus, the physical reality of her sickness allowed her to know God more fully.

O'Connor presented the fullest expression of her belief in Christian realism near the end of her life in the essay, "Catholic Novelists and Their Readers:"

> The universe of the Catholic fiction writer is one that is founded on the theological truths of the Faith, but particularly on three of them which are basic – the Fall, the Redemption, and the Judgment. These are doctrines that the modern secular world does not believe in. It does not believe in sin, or in the value that suffering can have, or in eternal responsibility, and since we live in a world that since the sixteenth century has been increasingly dominated by secular thought, the Catholic author often finds himself writing in and for a world that is unprepared and unwilling to see the meaning of life as he sees it. This means frequently he may resort to violent literary means to get his vision across to a hostile audience, and the images and actions he creates may seem distorted and exaggerated to the Catholic mind.[365]

In the first half of the statement, O'Connor offered her thoughts on the existence of evil and its relation to the modern world and God. Hers was a hard outlook that tied

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[361] O'Connor, *Spiritual Writings*, 49.
[362] Giannone, 36.
[363] O'Connor, *Habit of Being*, 92.
[364] Giannone, 36.
[365] Flannery O'Connor, "Catholic Novelists and Their Readers," in *Mystery and Manners*, 185.

her to the epistemology of Aquinas by emphasizing the role of the imagination in creating a view of the true nature of the world.[366] As such, the real nature of the Fall resulted in earthly evil. Though O'Connor believed the modern mind had rationalized away evil, she knew it to be a very real part of the world. O'Connor wrote that she had "a strong sense of the devil" and detected Satan and "many rough beasts now slouching toward Bethlehem."[367] On the other hand, evil allowed for the possibility of something quite beautiful in O'Connor's mind. The moral vision of Christian realism demands a great deal from its followers but understands the failings resulting from Original Sin and has confidence in the power of God's grace to save. Consequently, for a Christian realist, the existence of evil and a benevolent God necessitated the possibility of redemption. The freedom humans enjoyed to choose between good and evil and their constant struggle toward redemption represent the dominant themes of O'Connor's writing in every format and, indeed, her life.[368] She summed up this point of view in a 1961 letter to John Hawkes saying, "for me the meaning of life is centered in our Redemption by Christ and what is seen in the world is in its relation to that."[369]

The second half of O'Connor's statement explains the nature of her fiction writing, the most important aspect of her life. Where the modern intellect argued that the individual created his or her own reality, O'Connor believed that it was the domain of God. She constantly felt at odds with her readers. Yet because of her belief in real, objective good and evil, she felt an obligation to teach a redemption found in Christ. In order to do this, she wrote grotesque stories as a sort of shock treatment for her readers.

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[366] Giannone, 36.
[367] O'Connor, *Habit of Being*, 90.
[368] Ibid., 275.
[369] Ibid., 456.

Her characters tended to be Protestants or atheists in the South who underwent a violent or horrific experience that put them on the path to salvation. Responding to reviews of the stories in *A Good Man is Hard to Find*, O'Connor acknowledged "[t]he stories are hard but they are hard because there is nothing harder or less sentimental than Christian realism…when I see my stories described as horror stories I am always amused because the reviewer always has hold of the wrong horror."[370] Thus, while never the public figure that Fulton Sheen and Dorothy Day were, O'Connor was no less an evangelist, and perhaps even more so because she recognized that her audience largely held views that opposed hers.

If one is to argue that O'Connor's theology is to be found in her fiction, and that her Christian realist theology is what makes her fiction unique, then it is useful to compare her to other writers. Certainly, she was familiar with European Catholic authors; she often spoke of Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene.[371] She seemed particularly taken with the fiction of François Mauriac.[372] In order to examine her identity as an American Catholic author, however, it is more appropriate to stay within the United States, especially the American South.

In terms of style, O'Connor's work almost seems a variation of William Faulkner's writing. It is clear that O'Connor admired Faulkner's work. In a 1958 letter to John Hawkes she said, "[Faulkner] makes me feel that with my one-cylinder syntax I

[370] Ibid., 90.
[371] Ibid., 33-35, 79, 98, 108, 119, 121, 130, 137, 159-160, 193, 201, 236, 258, 297, 357, 400, 469, 520, 522, 570.
[372] Ibid., 98, 105, 130, 143, 152, 183, 213, 231, 237, 241, 263-264, 285, 297, 345, 356-357, 360, 421, 520, 570, 589.

should quit writing and raise chickens altogether."[373] Their shared Southern heritage influenced both of them, with both writing in a Southern gothic style. Most of their fiction is set in the deep South. Violent action and the grotesque are common to both.

Beyond this, deeper considerations united O'Connor and Faulkner. Both held strong misgivings about modernity. For Faulkner, this manifested itself in anxiety over the sway of empiricism and the physical at the expense of the spiritual. As he stated in his 1950 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, he believed "our tragedy today is a general and universal physical fear so long sustained by now that we can even bear it. There are no longer problems of the spirit."[374] For O'Connor, of course, the problems of modernity were both empiricism and relativism. They also agreed that writing was vocation, and its practitioners were obligated to impart truth. Faulkner's view was that the writer's voice "need not merely be the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail;" O'Connor presented Catholic doctrine in a particularly graphic manner.[375]

These differing truths illustrate what separated the two. O'Connor was a Catholic while Faulkner was a humanist. To O'Connor herself, this constituted an enormous divide:

> It makes a great difference to the look of a novel whether the author believes that the world came into being and continues to come by a creative act of God, or whether he believes that the world and ourselves are the product of a cosmic accident. It makes a great difference to his novel whether he believes that we are created in God's image, or whether he believes we create God in our own.[376]

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[373] Ibid., 292.

[374] William Faulkner, "Nobel Prize Speech, " *William Faulkner on the Web*, 10 December 1950, Available from http://www.mcsr.olemiss.edu/~egjbp/faulkner/lib_nobel.html, accessed 9 February 2006.

[375] Ibid.

[376] Flannery O'Connor, "Novelist and Believer," in *Mystery and Manners*, 156-157.

O'Connor was a Catholic writer who worked within divine boundaries that set the rules in her fictional universe. Faulkner, on the other hand, believed "the basest of all things is to be afraid."[377] The result was a profound difference in emphasis in their fiction. For O'Connor, hope was to be found in the external – in God. Faulkner found it within humanity.

Where Faulkner's work does not provide an entirely appropriate companion to O'Connor's, Walker Percy's is a much better fit. Like O'Connor, he was a Southern Catholic. They were acquaintances, having met once in New Orleans and occasionally corresponding. Percy acknowledged that his views on religion owed a great deal to O'Connor.[378] She, in return, admired Percy's work, telling him in reference to *The Moviegoer*, "That was a good story you wrote. I hope you make up another one."[379]

There were, of course, some differences between the two – primarily created by time and circumstances. Percy did most of his writing after O'Connor's time, after the Civil Rights movement. He never openly embraced Southern identity in the way that O'Connor did.[380] He realized the "Southern renaissance" of which O'Connor was so proud had ended. The problems of the South were the same ones found throughout the country. Also, Paul Elie writes that Percy was never as certain of his faith as O'Connor. He admitted that he did not always see the work of the Holy Spirit in his stories.[381] This may have been the result of him being a convert and his training as a doctor. Both would have exposed him to points of view not necessarily common to the Catholic mind.

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[377] Faulkner, "Nobel Prize Speech."

[378] Walker Percy, "Novel-Writing in an Apocalyptic Time," in *Signposts in a Strange Land* ed. Patrick Samway and introduction by Patrick Samway (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1991), 153.

[379] There is some confusion about the exact quote. It appears here in what seems to be the most accurate form. See Elie, 517, for full explanation.

[380] Walker Percy, "Questions They Never Asked Me," in *Signposts in a Strange Land*, 397.

[381] Elie, 454.

Despite this, there are important similarities between the two. Like O'Connor, Percy rarely dealt explicitly with Catholic situations and characters, though his book *The Thanato Syndome* is the exception to this.[382] O'Connor and Percy also shared the belief that the best way to teach truth was to present it in a story rather than as an abstraction.[383] This is perhaps the result of their shared Southern heritage. Most importantly, both offered their writing as Christian art.

It is apparent, after examining her non-fiction writing, that O'Connor did not regard herself as significant in and of herself. She never saw herself as a saint or as worthy of emulation. Rather, it was her stories that imparted theological truth and beauty. She thoroughly subscribed to Aquinas's view on art, as filtered though Maritain. It did not require abstractions, only faith. No question, her stories can be difficult, especially when one is not attuned to her humor or her sense of God's mercy. The fundamental theology underlying these stories, however, is straightforward: life is a struggle between good and evil. It is a theology stripped to its essentials that allows for no "pious pap" or feel-good charity, only the choice for or against salvation.

Extrapolating her understanding of Christian art into other areas, O'Connor provides a powerful example to the ordinary individual. If Christian art is the result of the artist's Christian faith and talent rather than the Christian content of the art, then any vocation or occupation could be a Christian one. Catholics did not have to achieve the heroic; they did not have to preach Church teachings on television or run houses of

[382] Ibid., 456.
[383] Percy, "Novel-Writing in an Apocalyptic Time," 159.

hospitality to be devout. Instead, salvation was theirs through faith and performing their tasks in life to the best of their ability.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Having examined the careers of Fulton Sheen, Dorothy Day, and Flannery O'Connor, we return to the initial question of this study: what Catholic identity were they projecting? Any answer gained from these three individuals must be qualified by noting that all three were extraordinary in their devotion to and knowledge of the Catholic Church; the average American Catholic of the mid-twentieth century did not immerse him or herself in Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, nor were they experts in the finer points of *Rerum Novarum*. Nonetheless, a reasonable answer can be extrapolated from the careers of Sheen, Day, and O'Connor that can be applied to the American Church because they are all representative of different trends in the Church during the era. Besides being a priest, Sheen was the personification of the Church's move from a cultural ghetto to the cultural mainstream. Day embodied the continued growth of social conscience among Catholics. And O'Connor, while by no means ordinary in terms of talent or intellect, was, in many ways, an ordinary lay Catholic in practice. Like these three, the identity of the American church was diffuse because of differing external influences, but coherent in its adherence to traditional Catholic orthodoxy.

When comparing Sheen, Day and O'Connor, it becomes clear that circumstances unique to each created the distinctions in their approach to Catholicism. The old ghetto mentality of the American Church shaped Sheen in many ways. He attended Catholic schools throughout his education. Sheen grew up in a relatively small town in Illinois, but he gravitated toward city life, becoming urbane if not necessarily urban. He joined the clergy at a young age and, as a priest during this era, was held in esteem and slightly apart from the average layperson. Despite this traditional Catholic background, Sheen served as the bridge for and beneficiary of the Catholic move to the American mainstream. Sheen became a part of this transition because he had honed a speaking style acceptable and accessible to the average Catholic and non-Catholic across the country. The fact that he was fiercely patriotic helped as well and reinforced his anti-Communism. Because of his extensive training in philosophy, he used logic more than mysticism in making arguments in favor of Catholicism. Thus, his upbringing and education had prepared him to be the public face of Catholicism.

Dorothy Day's background could not have been more different. She had been raised in an Episcopalian family of mild faith, embraced radicalism, searched for some sort of faith, and found it by converting to Catholicism in her thirties. She lived her whole life in urban areas, seeing poverty from an early age. This contributed to her development as a radical – first as a socialist and later as a Catholic. Although she physically ministered to the urban working class, the *Catholic Worker* and her notoriety as an activist and writer allowed her to communicate to a national audience. Her experience of faith relied more on spirituality than logic; it was "quasi-mystical." Peter Maurin, the street prophet who served as her religious guide, certainly played a role in the

direction of her faith. In some sense, Day played St. Francis of Assisi to Sheen's and O'Connor's St. Thomas Aquinas, working among the people rather than separating herself to contemplate God.

Flannery O'Connor had ample reason to be removed from the Catholic masses. Her lupus confined her to her family's farm much of her adult life – which was understandable considering that too much sunlight would aggravate her pain. The illness left her with no energy to pursue anything other than her vocation as a writer. Beyond this, she lived in the South, an area dominated by evangelical Christians with few Catholics. Likewise, as a writer, she tended to write about events rather than to live them. Intelligent and independent, O'Connor sought out theology, reading the works of Aquinas and Catholic intellectuals of her era. Consequently, she had no time for what she felt was the soft theology of Sheen – she apparently failed to recognize the Thomistic foundations of his talks – and appreciated the practical work done by Day.

Different as they were, there was a common thread linking all of them: devotion to the Catholic Church. Certainly, all of them had problems from time to time with the reality of the Church compared to its principles, but there is no doubting their fidelity to Catholic orthodoxy. As Kathleen L. Riley noted at the beginning of her biography of Sheen, the papacy of Leo XIII defined orthodoxy in the American church.[384] From this pontificate sprang two main thrusts: a revival of Thomistic thought and an emphasis on social justice. Both of these ideas are evident throughout the careers of Sheen, Day, and O'Connor. Two other leitmotifs appear as well. The first is the heavy influence of

[384] Kathleen L. Riley, *Bishop Fulton J. Sheen: An American Catholic Response to the Twentieth Century* (Staten Island, NY : Alba House, 2004), 224.

French theology on all three. The second is that all three share the pre-Vatican II predilection for the veneration of saints. Thus, the nature of the American church shaped the philosophy, if not the practices, of all three.

Aquinas' influence is most obvious in Sheen. Like Aquinas, Sheen was a public intellectual and priest. The bishop actually participated in the neo-Thomist movement of the first half of the twentieth century. One early biographer actually went so far as to write that Sheen could have become a modern Aquinas if he had continued writing and teaching at the Catholic University of America.[385] While this was obviously hyperbole, Sheen's writing did indicate a level of theological sophistication for which he is rarely credited. Aquinas was particularly crucial to Sheen as one of the foundations for his criticism of Communism. Sheen would have never identified it as such, but his Thomistic opposition to Communism shared a foundation with Day's opposition based on personalism. Both opposed Communism because of its denial of the innate value of the individual as a creation of God.

Day's connection to Aquinas is more difficult to pinpoint; as stated earlier, she had more in common with Francis. In some ways, this actually strengthens Day's ties to orthodoxy. If Francis and Thomas could coexist comfortably in Catholic tradition, then Day and Sheen could as well. Nevertheless, Day did take an important philosophical idea from Aquinas. Her idea of personalism had its roots in the idea of the inherent worth of the individual advocated by Aquinas. It should be noted as well that Peter Maurin introduced Day to the idea through the writings of the neo-Thomist Jacques Maritain.

O'Connor also came to Thomas largely through Maritain's interpretation of Scholasticism. The Thomistic understanding of Christian art influenced her a great deal.

[385] D. P. Noonan, *The Passion of Fulton Sheen* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1972), 5.

Maritain argued that art did not need to be overtly Christian in its content in order to be Christian art. The faith of the artist, instead, consecrated the work of art. It is difficult to overstate how important this idea was to O'Connor's work, as it freed her to write stories that dealt with free will and redemption without presenting them as explicitly Christian parables. O'Connor also shared with Aquinas the belief that faith and reason were necessary in equal measures. Her lifestyle resembled Thomas' a bit as well; both relied more on their writing than their lifestyle to express their faith.

Just as Aquinas' influence is clear in the lives of all three, so is the influence of the papal encyclicals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Having seen the reality of Communism in Europe, Sheen embraced the Catholic Church's anti-Communist stance as part of the struggle against liberal secularism described in Pius IX's encyclicals, *Nostis et Nobiscum* and *Quanta Cura*, and Pope Leo XIII's *Diuturnum Illud*.[386] Even more important to Sheen were Leo's *Rerum Novarum* and Pius XI's *Quadregesimo Anno*. These encyclicals, along with *Divini Redemptoris*, reaffirmed the Church's support for the solidarity of workers and opposition to Communism. These Church pronouncements were the other source of Sheen's anti-Communism; as a member of the clergy, Sheen was compelled to obey them. The philosophy expressed in the encyclicals echoed Aquinas' belief in the individual's God-granted rights, which in turn strengthened the influence of Thomism on Sheen.

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[386] Pope Pius IX, *Nostis et Nobiscum*, 1849. Available online at http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9nostis.htm, accessed 15 April 2006; Pope Pius IX, *Quanta Cura*, 1864. Available online at http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9quanta.htm, accessed 15 April 2006; and Pope Leo XIII, *Diuturnum Illud*, 1881. Available online at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_29061881_diuturnum_en.html, accessed 15 April 2006.

Day certainly acknowledged the encyclicals' teaching against Communism, despite her earlier tendencies. On the other hand, she preferred the flip side of *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*, focusing more on the rights of workers and charity. Leo's statement that men were worth more than the labor they could produce conformed to Day's ideas on personalism. Pius' expansion of the idea of subsidiarity was even more important to her. The idea that the local level (rather than state or large organizations) could best provide charity and support to those in need offered the framework for the Catholic Worker hospitality houses. Day loved John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris* beyond any other encyclical because it appeared to be the summation of her career: it continued the Church's message of charity while condemning all war as being out of step with the Gospel.

The social justice encyclicals had the least bearing on O'Connor's career, primarily for practical reasons. Her illness left her too weak to be an activist. Likewise, living in the South limited her opportunities to become involved in Catholic social justice movements. Georgia had its poor, but the sort of conditions in which Day lived simply did not surround O'Connor. Her letters make clear, however, that she was familiar the encyclicals and their teachings. Like the others, she vehemently opposed Communism because of its atheism, echoing the anti-Communist stance of the encyclicals.

Besides obedience to these twin pillars of orthodoxy, Sheen, Day, and O'Connor shared other influences. The importance of French theology to each is a particularly distinct commonality. Sheen had French professors while studying at the University of Louvain; he learned French there as well. As part of the neo-Thomist movement, he regularly encountered the French theologians that made up an important part of the

movement. As for Day, she had the most direct connection to French thought as her mentor, Peter Maurin, actually was French. He introduced Day to the work of Maritain, and she later actually had to the opportunity to speak with Maritain at the Friday evening round tables held at the New York Catholic Worker house.[387] As mentioned earlier, Maritain was vitally important to O'Connor's theories on art. The French writer François Mauriac inspired her as well. Later in life, she became familiar with the work of French Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who challenged O'Connor's views that most of modern life opposed the Catholic Church.

Another common feature of the Catholic identity of all three was their strong emphasis on the veneration of saints. For Sheen, the saints offered useful teaching examples in his books, if not necessarily his television program. He dedicated each of his books to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and wrote "J.M.J" – "Jesus, Mary, Joseph" – at the top of the chalkboard he used on *Life is Worth Living*.[388] Day sought to emulate a saint's life, though she did not want to be referred to as a saint herself. More than merely talking about them, she attempted to follow the example of St. Therese of Liseux, St. Teresa of Avilla, and most especially, St. Francis of Assisi. O'Connor regularly professed her fondness for Aquinas and mentioned other saints in her letters.

In placing these individuals in an historical context, one must note the social issues facing the American Catholic Church at the time. Following World War II, members of the Church were more upwardly mobile in terms of economics and culture

[387] William D. Miller, *Dorothy Day: A Biography* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 266.

[388] See bibliography of this paper for a listing of Sheen's books. Thomas C. Reeves, *America's Bishop: The Life and Times of Fulton J. Sheen* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2001), 14.

than at any other time in American history. Unsurprisingly, this mobility resulted in a change in Church identity. Closely tied to this new affluence was the Catholic perspective on social justice and moral life. Beyond issues specifically related to Catholicism, the same cultural issues that affected Americans of any religious tradition affected Catholics. Catholics were on the vanguard of the anti-Communist movement. Clergy, such as the Berrigan brothers, were heavily involved with the Civil Rights movement. Finally, like other Americans, the Church had to deal with changing ideas on sexuality.

By far the most important cultural issue specifically facing the American Catholic Church was its emergence into the American mainstream and middle class. Along with the rest of the country, Catholics moved to the suburbs and focused on creating nuclear families. Both trends contributed to the erosion of the traditional extended family ties that characterized Catholics. By enabling more Catholics to attend college than ever before, the G. I. Bill contributed to this mobility as well. Sheen, of course, was the face of this move. On one hand, Sheen had no problem with this ascendancy because he loved America; Catholics were taking part in the American dream of which he was so fond. On the other hand, as Mark Massa suggests, Sheen did not approve of many of implications of this shift, such as conforming Christ to fit a consumer culture and a soft religion based on emotion.[389] His writings clearly demonstrated that Sheen knew the problems found in unchecked capitalism, most especially materialism. Where Sheen was generally positive about the shift with a few misgivings, Day railed against the materialism of the culture. Besides the fact that it did not fit with her Francis-like vow of poverty, the fact that this

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[389] Mark S. Massa, *Catholics and American Culture: Fulton Sheen, Dorothy Day, and the Notre Dame Football Team* (New York : Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 114.

ascension left many people behind bothered her. The welfare of the poor concerned her far more than the middle class. It is not unreasonable to suggest that she devoted much of her career to challenging the people who benefited from the newfound affluence. O'Connor was wary of the arrival of middle class Catholicism as well. For her, it was not a matter of dereliction of obligation to others so much as the fear that middle class comfort would kill faith. She saw the era, at least as experienced by the general public, as frivolous. It seems that she may have actually benefited from living in the relatively backward South, as it sharpened her understanding of her faith.

The Catholic move to the suburbs affected its members' understanding of social justice and moral life as well. Gone were the ethnic enclaves, replaced by nuclear families in isolated suburban homes. On the issues of morality, all three voiced in concert the belief that a Christian society was the ideal. Though he never presented them explicitly, Sheen tied Catholic principles to American principles, suggesting this was the path to true patriotism and justice. Belief in the inherent worth of the individual was a foundation of both his and Day's commitment to moral life. Day was obviously the most overtly committed to social justice, influenced by personalism and the example of Francis. While lupus limited what O'Connor could actually achieve in working toward social justice, the idea of the moral life was crucial to her. She acknowledged that all people failed at some point in living a moral life, yet she believed that faith could save people despite their failings. For her, Christianity, specifically the Catholic variation of it, represented the best form of society because it held the truth, and there was no escaping this.

In terms of larger American society, the Cold War and fear and loathing of Communism dominated the post-war era. The issue was of tremendous public concern to Catholics, with its official opposition to Marxism comparable to its current official opposition of abortion. Here, Sheen came to the forefront as the "prophet and philosopher" of American Catholic anti-Communism, which was, perhaps, the most important aspect of his public career because it enabled him to touch on a number of issues. He based his fundamental opposition to Communism on the philosophy's atheism. Thomistic emphasis on the soul of the individual caused him to oppose the idea of the masses. The stance also allowed him to demonstrate the compatibility, at least in some ways, of American and Catholic ideals. Despite her earlier connections to social organizations like the I.W.W., Day opposed Communism as well. On one hand, her opposition was borne out of many of the same reasons as Sheen's. On the other hand, she emphasized the importance of personalism in a way that Sheen did not. For her, Communism represented the collective as a "higher order individual" at the expense of the rights of actual individuals. O'Connor also opposed Communism because of its atheism, which demonstrated the philosophy's denial of reality. Beyond this, she saw it as the most virulent form of liberal secularism.

The stirrings of the modern civil rights movement began in the post-war era as well. Sheen, as always, talked a great deal about the subject, and supported the movement, albeit usually from afar. Day, per her usual mode, was more immediately involved in the movement, actually going to the South to support civil rights workers and join in protests. For both of them, their ideas on civil rights again stemmed from their belief in the worth bestowed by God on the individual. Living in and influenced by the

South, O'Connor had the most ambivalent views on race of the three. While she supported activists like Martin Luther King, Jr. – whom she saw as a modern equivalent to Old Testament preachers – and the Berrigan Brothers, O'Connor was hesitant to become involved with the Civil Rights movement or write about it directly.

Given the primacy of sexual and gender issues in the American Catholic Church at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is interesting to note that the writings of Sheen, Day, and O'Connor did not deal with either of them a great deal. Part of the reason that for this is that sexual revolution in America occurred largely after the Second Vatican Council. Also, the Church's definitive modern statement on sexuality, *Humanae Vitae*, appeared in 1968. Sheen naturally took the orthodox Catholic stance emphasizing family and sexual chastity. He spoke on issues of motherhood and family life on *Life is Worth Living* and wrote about married life in his book *Three to Get Married*, but these were by no means central to his ministry. Day led a very active sexual life and had an abortion when she was young, but after her conversion, she took a Franciscan vow of chastity. O'Connor has never been conclusively romantically linked to anyone. Evidence suggests that lupus caused her to forgo any sort of romantic engagement because she realized that she would have a short life. In fact, both women appear to have chosen to devote all their energies to their given vocations at the expense of outside interests, including sex.

Clearly, Sheen, Day, and O'Connor, like the American Church itself, had varying approaches to the issues of the day. This is, in fact, an understandable response to the era. With such a period of change within the Church and society, different responses

should be expected. Sheen took the role of the public intellectual, presenting the Church's philosophical position on the issues of the day. Day was the public activist; she was the embodiment of the spirit of the social justice encyclicals. Because of the public nature of their ministries, both provided inspiration to thousands, both Catholic and non-Catholic. For this, they are being considered for sainthood by the Catholic Church. O'Connor, while not under the same consideration, offered an approach that was, perhaps, applicable to more people. She emphasized personal interpretation. Her faith did not require one to be a saint, but rather to have faith and perform one's vocation to the best of one's ability.

Just as clearly, Sheen, Day, and O'Connor were all united in an understanding of core principles – in an adherence to orthodoxy. To paraphrase Day and O'Connor, they shared principles while differing on policy. In the face of the challenges presented to the Catholic Church by modernity – Communism, capitalism unchecked by conscience, pragmatism, and atheism – they all reflected the Church's emphasis on the medieval principles of Aquinas and emphasis on the dignity of the individual. They all rejected modernism to some extent while providing ways to deal with it. In doing this in such different ways, they demonstrated the catholic nature of the American Catholic Church between World War II and Vatican II. Divergent in the practice of their vocations, and in their desire to lift humanity closer to God, they converged in Catholic faith.

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Thesis: "EVERYTHING THAT RISES MUST CONVERGE:" FULTON SHEEN, DOROTHY DAY, FLANNERY O'CONNOR AND AMERICAN CATHOLIC IDENTITY IN THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY

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Scope and Method of Study: This thesis deals with American Catholic identity in the middle of the twentieth century. The years between World War II and Vatican II represent the most important era in the relationship between the Catholic Church and larger American culture, as Catholicism emerged from its cultural ghetto of the nineteenth and early twentieth century and into the mainstream of American life. Catholics dealt with this transition in a variety of ways. This study seeks to use the public careers of Bishop Fulton Sheen, Dorothy Day, and Flannery O'Connor to examine how Catholics responded to this change. Clearly, all three had different approaches: Sheen was a bishop and the star of one of the most popular television programs of the 1950s; Day was a radical activist on behalf of the poor, the working class, and pacifism; O'Connor was a writer and novelist whose struggle with lupus largely confined her family's home in Georgia.

Findings and Conclusions: Despite these different approaches, this study shows that all three operated within the same coherent philosophical framework, that is to say orthodox Catholicism. At this time, American understanding of orthodoxy was defined by Pope Leo XIII's emphasis on social justice and the Scholastic philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas. All three adhered both to papal encyclicals on social justice and to Thomism. French theology and the pre-Vatican II predilection for the veneration of saints influenced them as well. The study concludes by placing these three figures in an historical context, focusing on the social issues facing the American Catholic Church at the time: emergence into the middle class, social justice, anti-Communism, civil rights, and issues of sexuality.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: ______________________________