

“Dorothy Day and Catholic Social Teaching: The Witness of a
Life and the Mission of the Church in the World”

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This dissertation aims to show that the meaning of Day’s life and work *is* holiness—a reflection of and a participation in the love of God incarnate in Jesus Christ and his Church. I demonstrate that Day’s life and work are an invitation to re-conceive in light of the mystery of Jesus Christ the authentic meaning of Catholic social teaching, human work, economic and political institutions, and human culture more generally. **Chapter One** introduces the problematic and contested nature of interpretations of both Day and Catholic social teaching. It establishes that these are related questions, and most importantly that the problem underlying them is a *theological* one. **Chapter Two** is a narration of the story of her conversion. It is a theological biography of Day, a story of a life pledged to Jesus Christ *and* to the Catholic Church as Christ’s continuing presence in the world. I show that Day’s life and work is a *theological* response to the ills of the world. The focus is on the meaning of her conversion. **Chapter Three** focuses on the foundational works undertaken by Day in the founding of the Catholic Worker movement. This was a gift to the life of the Church which involved publishing a newspaper, opening houses of hospitality, and starting farms. In all of these works she embraced the “little way” as the way of exercising responsibility for the whole. The focus of Day’s life was on the centrality of the Church and the Eucharist, in a way such that the work of man, and the work for social justice, find their source and end in the liturgy. In **Chapter Four** I explore the theological depth of her various worldly initiatives. Day understood that there is a mysterious relation between holiness and justice. This relation must be correctly maintained, or else there is

a tendency toward disastrous outcomes of reduction or deferral. In either case a separation ensues in which the church accepts a situation of “privatized holiness” and a “secularized justice.” I show that Day is an important witness to the unity of ethics and worship, and thus an authentic witness to the radicality and catholicity of the Church’s mission to gather the whole of creation into the body of Christ.