

# Inhabiting the Kingdom: Theologies of Nonviolence in the Catholic Worker Movement

Studies in Christian Ethics  
1–13

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DOI: 10.1177/09539468241258962

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## Abstract

This article considers understandings of nonviolence within the Catholic Worker movement and their embodiment. The aim is to make the Worker's position theologically understandable, demonstrating how this drives their methods for action. The article argues that a particular ethic of nonviolence can be found within the movement, grounded within the aims of its founders and the current practices of the movement today, drawing on the example of the Jubilee Ploughshares 2000 from which the London Catholic Worker was founded to illustrate this. By exploring the movement's theological foundations for the practice of grassroots, active nonviolence, it will seek to present an important example of Catholic nonviolent practice questioning how this may challenge contemporary Catholic thinking on war and peace.

## Keywords

Catholic Worker movement, Dorothy Day, Peter Maurin, nonviolence, nonviolent resistance

## Introduction

On 3 November 2000, future co-founder of the London Catholic Worker movement, Fr. Martin Newell, and Dutch Catholic Worker, Susan van der Hijden, engaged in what would become known as the Jubilee Ploughshares 2000 at Wittering air force base, Cambridgeshire. Newell and van der Hijden aimed to 'symbolically' disable the Nuclear Weapons Convoy, used to transport weapons between Trident submarines, in an act of disarmament. As well as hammering and disabling a nuclear warheads carrier they painted 'The Kingdom of God is Among You' and 'Love is the fulfilment of the Law' upon the carrier. Both were charged with damaging property and burglary. In a statement that the pair released, they explained that

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We have acted in a spirit of repentance for our complicity in crime against humanity and God. We have acted to uphold the law. Through the Jubilee 2000 campaign, the church has committed herself to working for justice for the poor and the oppressed. British nuclear weapons are a central part of the chains of oppression. As Christians we have taken responsibility and acted in solidarity with the 'least of this world'.<sup>1</sup>

Such commitment to nonviolence and opposition to war has become a hallmark of the Catholic Worker movement. Throughout its history the movement has inspired and influenced countless members of the Catholic peace movement such as Eileen Egan, the co-founder of Pax Christi USA,<sup>2</sup> and prominent Catholic activists such as the Berrigan brothers; it has had direct involvement in the establishment of groups such as the Catholic Peace Fellowship, and has even exercised influence on Church teaching on the viability of conscientious objection.<sup>3</sup> As Tom Roberts has argued, it is the 'legacy of pacifism' that 'anchors' the movement.<sup>4</sup> Ninety years since the inception of the movement this legacy holds true.

Whilst the Worker's practice of nonviolence remains far from mainstream within Catholic approaches to war and peace, the movement follows a deep-rooted pacifist strand within the tradition stemming from a 'general pre-Constantinian consensus that Christians should abstain from military service'.<sup>5</sup> As Christopher Hrynkow and Maria Power argue, just war has dominated 'popular understandings' of magisterial teachings on peace due to its association with Augustine and Aquinas.<sup>6</sup> However, since the mid-nineteenth century, and the loss of the papal states, Church teaching has shifted in a more pacifist direction 'embracing the essential coupling of peace and justice, holistic peacebuilding, and active nonviolence'.<sup>7</sup> This direction of travel has intensified since the 1960s<sup>8</sup> and the papacy of Pope Francis

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1. London Catholic Worker, 'Jubilee Ploughshares', [https://web.archive.org/web/20220519220640/https://www.londoncatholicworker.org/jubilee\\_ploughshares.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20220519220640/https://www.londoncatholicworker.org/jubilee_ploughshares.htm).
  2. George M. Anderson, 'A Woman of Peace: An Interview with Eileen Egan', *America* 174.4 (1996), pp. 19–22.
  3. Day travelled to Rome during the Second Vatican Council to persuade the Council to issue a statement on nonviolence. See Marl Zwick and Louise Zwick, 'Introduction: Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement', in Dorothy Day, *On Pilgrimage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 51.
  4. Tom Roberts, 'Legacy of Pacifism Anchors Movement', *National Catholic Reporter* 44.24 (25 July 2008), p. 5.
  5. Theodora Hawksley, *Peacebuilding and Catholic Social Teaching* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), pp. 21–22.
  6. Christopher Hrynkow and Maria Power, 'Are the Popes Leaving Behind Just War and Embracing JustPeace?', *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 31.2 (2019), pp. 238–46 (242).
  7. Hrynkow and Power, 'Are the Popes', p. 238.
  8. Hrynkow and Power cite numerous examples of support for active nonviolence in modern papal teaching. Here they cite condemnations of violent revolt, support for diplomacy above militaristic solutions, Paul VI's support for international development in achieving peace, John Paul II's call for a peaceful settlement in Northern Ireland and denouncement of the IRA's use of just war theory, as well as Benedict XVI's emphasis on interreligious dialogue. See Hrynkow and Power, 'Are the Popes', p. 243.

has seen direct challenges to the primacy of the just war tradition in his calls to ‘make active nonviolence our way of life’.<sup>9</sup>

However, as Theodora Hawksley argues, Church teaching on peace focuses on the macro and personal levels favouring political institutional solutions or individual conversions. This is at the expense of reflection on midlevel, local, grassroots efforts, the level at which the Worker operates and prioritizes.<sup>10</sup> Yet, as scholars such as David Kwon note, midlevel actors play a prominent role in sustaining and promoting peace.<sup>11</sup> Coupled with an increased use of the language of nonviolence within Church teaching, the positionality of those who champion the communal level and nonviolent methods in their pursuit of peace is worthy of further consideration. As one of the most prominent modern Catholic examples of such action, the Worker provides a fruitful case study.<sup>12</sup>

## The Development of Nonviolence in the Catholic Worker Movement

Formed during the turmoil of the 1930s Great Depression, the Catholic Worker movement aimed for a radical renewal of the social order based on the Gospel imperatives. The co-founders, French philosopher Peter Maurin and American radical journalist Dorothy Day, aimed to target the economic and social difficulties of the day by promoting the social teachings of the Church and directly enacting the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. This would come to form a three-tiered approach which consisted of the distribution of a

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9. Pope Francis, *World Day of Peace Message* (2017), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco\\_20161208\\_messaggio-1-giornata-mondiale-pace-2017.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20161208_messaggio-1-giornata-mondiale-pace-2017.html).
  10. Hawksley, *Peacebuilding*, p. 11. Some Catholic Workers, such as Lincoln Rice, argue that it is necessary for the movement to compromise with government on certain issues, such as racial discrimination, though the communal level remains the ideal. See Lincoln Rice, ‘Catholic Worker Anarchism at a Crossroads: The Difficulty of Addressing Anti-Blackness’, *Political Theology* 25.1 (2024), pp. 62–68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1462317X.2023.2194085>.
  11. David Kwon, ‘*Jus Post Bellum* and Catholic Social Thought: Just Political Participation as Civil Society Peacebuilding’, *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 20.2 (2023), pp. 407–30.
  12. Whilst the history of the Worker’s impact on the Catholic peace movement has been well documented, as has Day’s pacifist spirituality, theologies of nonviolence that underpin the movement as a whole remain underexplored, especially outside of the American context. See for example Ira Chernus, *American Nonviolence: The History of an Idea* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004); Nancy Roberts and Anne Klejment (eds.), *American Catholic Pacifism: The Influence of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996); Patricia McNeal, *The American Catholic Peace Movement 1928–1972* (New York: Arno, 1978); McNeal, ‘Origins of the Catholic Peace Movement’, *Review of Politics* 35.3 (1973), pp. 346–74; McNeal, *Harder Than War: Catholic Peacemaking in Twentieth-Century America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992). For an appraisal of the theological motivations behind the London Worker’s resistance actions see Anna Blackman, ‘Holy Disobedience: Political Resistance in the London Catholic Worker Community’, *Implicit Religion* 21.2 (2018), pp. 122–41.

newspaper, *The Catholic Worker*, to spread the social teachings of the Church and Gospel, houses of hospitality, in which Workers lived in community alongside the marginalized, and acts of resistance directed at structural injustices. Alongside hospitality, which provided immediate assistance to the marginalized, resistance functioned to challenge the existing system which created such marginalization. Whilst initially the movement's resistance actions focused on issues of labour, advocating for trade unions and the use of strikes, the movement soon began to turn its attention towards issues of war and militarism. Steeped in the activist tradition, Day's influence was essential in ingraining nonviolence and resistance within the movement. Though Maurin too was a pacifist,<sup>13</sup> it was Day who made this principle central.

Pacifism was a dominant feature of the Catholic Worker since its inception, for instance during the Spanish Civil War; however, World War II became a decisive period for the Worker's commitment to nonviolence and nonviolent resistance. Though for many the Second World War could be seen as just, under Day's commandeering the Worker held a nonviolent position. Though Day's firm pacifist stance proved controversial even within the movement,<sup>14</sup> this became 'a key point in Catholic Worker history and evolution' and for 'what it means to be a Catholic Worker'.<sup>15</sup> Subsequently, the Worker became an increasingly vocal voice in war resistance. Whilst this involved tactics such as nonparticipation, conscientious objection, and the publishing of anti-war articles, during the 1950s and 1960s<sup>16</sup> the Worker shifted into a more direct approach incorporating civil resistance and disobedience, including actions such as destroying draft cards and tax avoidance.

Forms of resistance continued to escalate as many Workers became involved in the Plowshares<sup>17</sup> movement, following the example of Daniel and Phillip Berrigan, friends of the Worker. This form of action emerged in America during a period of increased military activity in light of the Cold War arms race and was heavily inspired by the Worker model.<sup>18</sup> Plowshare activism went beyond nonparticipation and protest, directly aiming to undermine military efforts through the destruction of weaponry<sup>19</sup> following the biblical prophecy of Isa. 2.4 to beat swords into plowshares. Plowshare activism has become

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13. Rice notes that Maurin's absolute pacifism has been debated by Catholic Worker Thomas Sullivan who claims Maurin challenged Day's stance during World War II. Rice, however, claims that Sullivan 'was prone to exaggerate'. Day maintained that Maurin shared her pacifist position. See Lincoln Rice, 'Introduction', in Lincoln Rice (ed.), *The Forgotten Radical Peter Maurin: Easy Essays from the Catholic Worker* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), p. 17.
  14. The Chicago Catholic Worker, for instance, refused to accept this position, ceasing circulation of the paper and removing the 'Catholic Worker' label from their name. See Paul V. Stock, 'Consensus Social Movements and the Catholic Worker', *Politics and Religion* 5.1 (2012), pp. 83–102 (92, 98).
  15. Stock, 'Consensus', p. 98.
  16. The influence of Catholic Worker Ammon Hennacy was noticeable here.
  17. This is the US spelling of this form of action.
  18. Sharon Erikson Nepstad, *Religion and War Resistance in the Plowshares Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 53.
  19. Nepstad, *Religion and War Resistance*, pp. 55, 46.

nearly synonymous with the Worker in America and continues to influence Worker activism internationally alongside the use of older means of resistance.<sup>20</sup>

## Faith Seeking Understanding: Theological Roots of Nonviolence

Whilst the extent of participation in nonviolent resistance differs amongst Worker communities, and whilst attempting any generalised theology of the Catholic Worker proves difficult due to the movement's anarchic structure,<sup>21</sup> there are core principles that bind together the diffuse movement, such as community, hospitality, and resistance. As Paul Stock notes, this also includes the writings and theories of Day and Maurin, notably as explicated in the 'The Aims and Means of the Catholic Worker'. This statement of the movement's position and methods, republished annually, provides the foundational principles that infuse the movement.<sup>22</sup> These include an overarching aim to 'live in accordance with the justice and charity of Jesus Christ' to be pursued through 'personal and social transformation' as 'Jesus revealed in His sacrificial love'. Importantly, this includes a commitment to nonviolence which Jesus exemplified.<sup>23</sup>

As can be seen with the 'Aims and Means', the Worker's position on nonviolence is rooted in their faith commitments, echoed in the writings of its founders. Though neither Day nor Maurin were theologians, clear theological rationales for their approach to nonviolence can be gleaned from the intellectual heritage that they drew upon in their writings. Though it was Day who made nonviolence and resistance a prominent feature of the movement, the programme which Maurin had developed, infused with the influences of personalism and anarchism, gave a particular flavour to their reading of the Church's social tradition. Both Day and Maurin drew on traditional sources of Catholic thought yet interpreted these in a radical way to challenge thinking on war and peace.

## Christian Anarchism and the Mystical Body of Christ

As with other Christian anarchist groups, the Sermon on the Mount is of primary importance in 'providing the scriptural roots' for the Worker's nonviolence.<sup>24</sup> Indeed at numerous times, Day declared in the Worker paper that the Sermon on the Mount serves as the movement's 'Manifesto'.<sup>25</sup> As Patrick Coy argues, though 'neither fundamentalist nor literalist', the Worker's approach 'revolves around trying to transfer gospel principles to daily life in a

20. This is despite the fact that Day was cautious about these forms of actions.

21. As Segers has argued, 'It is decentralized and anti-organizational; every house is autonomous and the Catholic Worker does not attempt to perpetuate itself as an institution or organization'. See Mary C. Segers, 'Equality and Christian Anarchism: The Political and Social Ideas of the Catholic Worker Movement', *The Review of Politics* 40.2 (1978), pp. 196–230 (226).

22. Stock, 'Consensus', p. 93.

23. The Catholic Worker, 'The Aims and Means of the Catholic Worker', <https://catholicworker.org/aims-and-means/> (accessed 20 January 2024).

24. Patrick Coy, 'An Experiment in Personalist Politics: The Catholic Worker Movement and Nonviolent Action', *Peace & Change* 26.1 (2001), pp. 78–94 (83).

25. See, for instance, Day, 'Editorial', *The Catholic Worker* (January 1942).

sustained and uncommonly direct manner',<sup>26</sup> and Jesus' injunctions, 'turn the other cheek', 'love your enemies', 'blessed are the peacemakers', are to be followed literally. In appraising this message as one of nonviolence, Day followed the Tolstoyan anarchopacifist tradition<sup>27</sup> in rejecting forms of action that depended on a violent premise.

Seeing the state as based on a monopoly of violence, its authority could not be accepted as this ran contradictory to the Gospel demands for peace. A commitment to nonviolence, therefore, demanded an adherence to anarchism. By utilizing a lens of Christian anarchism, Day and Maurin saw God as the only source of authority and legality. As Geoffrey Gnehuhs concludes, for the Worker, 'the justice of the state, when there is any, can never fully be the justice of the Sermon on the Mount'.<sup>28</sup> Rather than owing allegiance to one's state or nation, therefore, sole allegiance is given only to God.

Day's understanding of the Mystical Body of Christ is imperative here. Following the Liturgical Movement in seeing an 'inseparable connection between worship and life',<sup>29</sup> Day was deeply inspired by Fr. Vigil Michel in her understanding of the doctrine. As Mark and Louise Zwick explain, Michel 'believed that our responsibility for our neighbour ... flowed from the fact that we were connected to one another in the Body of Christ and the Eucharist'.<sup>30</sup> For Day, this had a direct impact on how she conceived of the impossibility of violence. As Chernus reflects,

Since God transcends all time ... from God's perspective, anyone who may in the future take the Eucharist as a Catholic is already part of the body of Christ. The body of Christ includes all potential as well as actual members of the Catholic church. For Dorothy Day, this meant that every human being is part of that single body.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, a commitment to the Mystical Body necessitated social responsibility for the other,<sup>32</sup> insisting on the inherent dignity of the human person and their communion with God, and a resistance to anything that harms them. Eileen Egan, the cofounder of Pax Christ USA, reminisced how even during World War II, Day had 'said we should see Jesus in the enemy'.<sup>33</sup> For Day, this doctrine meant that 'When the health of one member suffers, the health of the whole body is lowered'<sup>34</sup> and that any form of violence constituted a literal 'rending of the Mystical Body of Christ'.<sup>35</sup>

26. Coy, 'An Experiment in Personalist Politics', pp. 82–83.

27. Segers, 'Equality and Christianity Anarchism', p. 211.

28. Geoffrey B. Gnehuhs, 'Peter Maurin's Personalist Democracy', in P.G. Coy (ed.), *A Revolution of the Heart: Essays on the Catholic Worker* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1988), pp. 56–57.

29. Zwick and Zwick, 'Introduction', p. 39.

30. Zwick and Zwick, 'Introduction', p. 36.

31. Chernus, *American Nonviolence*, pp. 148–49.

32. Zwick and Zwick, 'Introduction', p. 39.

33. Anderson, 'A Woman of Peace', p. 19.

34. Jeff Dietrich and Susan Pollack, 'An Interview with Dorothy Day', *Catholic Agitator*, December 1971, p. 1.

35. Dorothy Day, 'Beyond Politics', *Catholic Worker*, 1 November 1949, p. 2.

## Personalism and the Primacy of the Spiritual

Following this premise, Day and Maurin also argued against perceiving ‘secular life as requiring a social ethic more compromised to worldly standards’.<sup>36</sup> Following Emmanuel Mounier, Maurin understood societal ills as being of both a material and a spiritual nature and, drawing on the personalist principle of the primacy of the spiritual, therefore, needed both material and spiritual resolutions.<sup>37</sup> As Marc Ellis reflects, Maurin’s personalist vision of society ‘existed to mirror and express the spiritual dimensions of the person. The trappings of an order built for itself—large-scale industry, affluence, and militarism—were to disappear in Maurin’s future society.’<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, for Day, a personalist approach allowed the Worker to avoid cooperation with and directly challenge the state. In her September 1936 column in *The Catholic Worker*, Day wrote that ‘We are Personalists because we oppose the vesting of all authority in the hands of the state instead of in the hands of Christ the King’.<sup>39</sup>

As Mark and Louise Zwick affirm, rather than leading the movement to become sectarian and withdraw from interaction with the world, personalism served to emphasise ‘personal responsibility in history’.<sup>40</sup> As William Miller explains, the personalism that the Catholic Worker espoused argued ‘that the primacy of Christian love should be brought from its position of limbo where human affairs are concerned and infused into the process of history’.<sup>41</sup> Day and Maurin were again influenced by the Liturgical Movement in the vocation of the laity. Day stressed that the laity were called to abide by the evangelical counsels of perfection, going beyond what she saw as a minimal ethic.<sup>42</sup> Mel Piehl argues that this ‘made the Catholic Worker’s politics unique ... to bring the highest spiritual and ethical values of Christianity directly into public life’.<sup>43</sup>

## The Works of Mercy and Christian Hospitality

Adhering to the values of the evangelical counsels had a direct impact on appropriate ways in which Christians should engage with the social order. Borrowing from the

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36. Mel Piehl, ‘The Politics of Free Obedience’, in P.G. Coy (ed.), *A Revolution of the Heart: Essays on the Catholic Worker* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1988), p. 209.

37. Mark Zwick and Louise Zwick, *The Catholic Worker Movement: Intellectual and Spiritual Origins* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), pp. 108–10. See also Emmanuel Mounier, *Be Not Afraid: A Denunciation of Despair*, trans. Cynthia Rowland (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1962), p. 115.

38. Marc Ellis, ‘To Bring the Social Order to Christ’, in P.G. Coy (ed.), *A Revolution of the Heart: Essays on the Catholic Worker* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1988), p. 18.

39. Quoted in Zwick and Zwick, ‘Introduction’, p. 22.

40. Zwick and Zwick, *Intellectual and Spiritual Origins*, p. 101.

41. William Miller, *A Harsh and Dreadful Love: Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement* (New York: Liveright, 1973), p. 5.

42. Zwick and Zwick, ‘Introduction’, p. 54.

43. Piehl, ‘Politics of Free Obedience’, p. 209.

thought of Jacques Maritain, Maurin advocated for the use of 'pure means'.<sup>44</sup> An example of this line of thinking, as it relates to war, is shown in Maurin's reflections on moral disarmament. Here he quotes Theodore Roosevelt, stating 'If you want peace/prepare for war'. Maurin concludes that by preparing for war, nations 'brought war'. He argues that 'If nations prepared for peace/instead of preparing for war/they might have peace'.<sup>45</sup> Here Maurin demonstrates a direct link between the means used and the outcomes produced; violent means produce violent ends. In his reflections on colonial expansion, in which further expansion is repeatedly justified by claims of protection, he demonstrates his thinking on the cyclical nature of violence in which violence begets violence.<sup>46</sup>

Rather, for Maurin, Christians are tasked with a specific role in building spaces of peace. He writes that 'To build up the city of God,/that is to say,/to express the spiritual/in the material/through the use/of pure means,/such is the task/of professing Christians/in this day and age'.<sup>47</sup> Here the means function both as a way to build the city of God, but also to bear witness to it. As Mary Segers notes, the means 'must embody so far as possible the ends which are sought and thus be small incarnations of the desired social order'.<sup>48</sup> In terms of nonviolence, this translated into actions that were directed towards furthering a nonviolent society, but also functioned as methods of embodying such a social order.

For Day and Maurin, a commitment to personal action and responsibility through the works of mercy aimed to embody such a society. Day saw 'the spiritual and corporal Works of Mercy and the following of Christ to be the best revolutionary technique and a means for changing the social order rather than perpetuating it'.<sup>49</sup> Here hospitality and community hold essential roles in bearing witness to the possibility of an alternative society based on the works of mercy and nonviolent love. For Day, the houses of hospitality were to 'teach and preach social justice, to form a powerhouse of genuine spirituality'.<sup>50</sup> Through the hospitality and community which the Worker aimed to provide, the person of Christ was also directly encountered. Day repeated Jesus' teaching that 'You only love God as much as the one who you love the least',<sup>51</sup> seeing Christ as present in the other; 'they *are* Christ, asking us to find room for Him'.<sup>52</sup> As Casey

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44. For further analysis see ch. 10 in Zwick and Zwick, *Intellectual and Spiritual Origins*, 'Pure Means from a Converted Heart: Jacques and Raïssa Maritain'. See also Peter Maurin, 'III. Means and Ends', in Rice (ed.), *The Forgotten Radical Peter Maurin*, p. 342.

45. Peter Maurin, 'VI. Moral Disarmament', in Rice (ed.), *The Forgotten Radical Peter Maurin*, pp. 196–97.

46. Peter Maurin, 'Colonial Expansion', in Rice (ed.), *The Forgotten Radical Peter Maurin*, pp. 193–96.

47. Peter Maurin, 'V. The City of God', in Rice (ed.), *The Forgotten Radical Peter Maurin*, p. 204.

48. Segers, 'Equality and Christian Anarchism', p. 206.

49. Dorothy Day, 'Catholic Worker Ideas on Hospitality', *The Catholic Worker* (May 1940), p. 10.

50. Dorothy Day, 'Houses of Hospitality', *The Catholic Worker*, November 1933, p. 7, quoted in Brigid O'Shea Merriman, *Searching for Christ: The Spirituality of Dorothy Day* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), p. 87.

51. Dorothy Day, *On Pilgrimage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 166.

52. Dorothy Day, 'Room for Christ', in Robert Ellsberg (ed.), *Dorothy Day: Selected Writings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), p. 97.



Mullaney explains, within the Worker tradition, ‘the guest who is offered hospitality is Christ’ and, through this encounter, the one who is transformed is ‘the one who performs the works of mercy and, ultimately, society as a whole’.<sup>53</sup>

As Mark and Louise Zwick reflect, the works of mercy, as practised within community, also directly aimed to counter ‘the works of war’.<sup>54</sup> As Harry Murray elucidates, Day and Maurin broadened traditional readings of the spiritual work of mercy to instruct the ignorant to include the publication of *The Catholic Worker*, pacifism, and protest.<sup>55</sup> However, the Worker’s engagement in the various works of mercy informed one another. As Coy explains, hospitality and resistance became inextricably connected as the experiences of hospitality, living with those directly affected by war and marginalization, fuelled the rationale behind resistance. Here, as Mullaney argues, encounter through hospitality deepens solidarity with the other, leading ‘the practitioner from acts of interpersonal charity to a deeper commitment to social transformation’ and a commitment to wider resistance and peacebuilding.<sup>56</sup> In this sense, hospitality serves as a ‘source of political knowledge leading to nonviolent action’ in which ‘nonviolent direct action becomes the political expression of the gospel injunction to love thy neighbor’.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, as Sharon Nepstad argues, community also functions to provide both practical support, for example taking charge of caring responsibilities, and emotional solidarity, for instance during incarceration, to facilitate members to undertake high-risk nonviolent actions.<sup>58</sup> This can be seen in the way that the London Catholic Worker developed from the Jubilee Ploughshares as supporters of the action drew together through the ‘need for a Catholic Worker community of hospitality and resistance in the world’s second imperial city’.<sup>59</sup>

## The Ethics of Resurrection

Reflecting on the action and subsequent statement of the participants in the Jubilee Ploughshares, the above strands within the Worker’s commitment to nonviolence can be seen. Firstly, following understandings of Christian anarchism is a prioritization of the laws of God as opposed to the laws of the world. In his personal statement on the action, Newell framed the Worker’s position in the world in terms of ‘when two-laws coincide’ and that, for the Worker, true allegiance can only be given to one.<sup>60</sup> Secondly, the Worker acknowledges its own complicity within violent structures and

53. Casey Mullaney, ‘Pope Francis and the Catholic Worker on the Ascesis of Attention’, *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 20.2 (2023), pp. 327–46 (337).

54. Zwick and Zwick, *On Pilgrimage*, pp. 10, 25.

55. Harry Murray, *Do Not Neglect Hospitality: The Catholic Worker and the Homeless* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1990), pp. xix, xx.

56. Mullaney, ‘Ascesis of Attention’, pp. 340–41.

57. Coy, ‘An Experiment in Personalist Politics’, pp. 85–87.

58. Nepstad, *Religion and War Resistance*, pp. 108–15.

59. ‘Who We Are’, *London Catholic Worker*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20220525154152/https://londoncatholicworker.org/www.php>.

60. Martin Newell, ‘Personal Statement from Fr. Martin Newell’, *London Catholic Worker*, [https://web.archive.org/web/20160421080252/http://www.londoncatholicworker.org/jubilee\\_ploughshares\\_martin.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20160421080252/http://www.londoncatholicworker.org/jubilee_ploughshares_martin.htm).

takes on personal responsibility to resist and change these, a responsibility implicit with being Christian. This is echoed in Newell's assertions that 'I have a duty to speak God's truth with my life', 'We are called to love God, do good and resist evil'.<sup>61</sup> Lastly, acts of resistance are interlinked with the Worker's commitment to community and solidarity with the marginalized who are directly affected by acts of violence. Both van der Hijden and Newell had experience working and living with marginalized peoples. Van der Hijden had worked with refugees in the Netherlands at the Dutch Catholic Worker and Newell had extensive experience of working with homeless people in London. Both saw this as inspiring their resistance actions. Van der Hijden stated that 'I have lived with the victims of international violence for seven years, it is high time to go to the roots of the problem—the rich exploiting the poor—and Trident plays a major part in that'.<sup>62</sup>

The work of baptist theologian James William McClendon Jr. is helpful in drawing these theological strands into a coherent ethic. Working within a narrative theological approach, McClendon explains that 'the narrative the Bible reflects, the story of Israel, of Jesus, and of the church, is intimately related to the narrative we ourselves live',<sup>63</sup> 'Scripture confronts its readers with another world and asks if it is not in truth their world; it confronts them with another hope than their own hope ... In at least that sense, the Bible is the Book of a story that claims to be our real story'.<sup>64</sup> The entire Christian life then constitutes an 'ongoing share in the Christ story'.<sup>65</sup> Such an approach is apparent within the Worker.

This narrative appraisal is also seen in the lived example of Day which McClendon uses as an illustration of a 'Resurrection ethic'. This provides an illuminating framework from which to think about the movement's approach to nonviolence. McClendon explains that 'entire Christian movement, the Christian church in all its manifold variety, is the realization of the glad news of Easter'<sup>66</sup> and that, for movements such as the Worker, this makes a qualitative difference in understanding the process of history and how Christians engage in its unfolding.<sup>67</sup> Here, the Easter moment interrupts history and Christian engagement in it, initiating an ethic 'that could not have been but for the resurrection fact'.<sup>68</sup> McClendon explains this thus:

- (i) It is the vindication of justice;
- (ii) It is a new way of construing the world;
- (iii) It is a transformation of human life.<sup>69</sup>

Importantly, the narrative of Christ's life is to share the truth of Christ but also of humanity and their participation within Christ's narrative. Here, the Resurrection constitutes the

61. Newell, 'Personal Statement from Fr. Martin Newell'.

62. London Catholic Worker, 'Jubilee Ploughshares'.

63. James William McClendon Jr., *Systematic Theology: Volume 1: Ethics* Revised ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), p. 36.

64. McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 37.

65. McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 37.

66. McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 246.

67. McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 245.

68. McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 245.

69. McClendon, *Ethics*, pp. 270–76.

beginning of a new epoch of history and a new construal of the world;<sup>70</sup> '[t]hus the resurrection is the reestablishment of the community of the Israel of God ... on a new basis, vindicating the justice of God in the older establishment, and promising that very justice, through Christ, to all the world'.<sup>71</sup>

However, as McClendon notes, 'the old epoch lingers, and disciples live between two 'times', participating in the new epoch even while they confront the old'.<sup>72</sup> Reflecting on 1 Cor. 7.29–31, where Paul speaks of a method of living according to a method 'as if not', for example, married men living as if they had no wives, McClendon argues that this presents a way to live within the between times in 'a vanishing epoch'. He argues that whilst Paul is not denouncing interaction in the world, or promising the abolition of marriage, he is suggesting 'investing in given societal practices only the moral capital that their published balance sheets justify when examined in resurrection light'.<sup>73</sup> This provides a hermeneutic in nonviolent living by distinguishing between social practices that are of the world and those that are of the Kingdom. Here, Day's call to 'build a new society in the shell of the old' echoes.

## Conclusion

Charles Curran argues that 'At times the eschatological vision means that the Christian community must reluctantly accept or tolerate some nonmoral evils',<sup>74</sup> as the Kingdom is yet to come. However, in the Worker's reading of the tradition, the Christian ethic calls them to live as though the Kingdom is here whilst awaiting its fulfilment, and here dual allegiance to laws of the world and to the Christian ethic is totally incompatible. This, therefore, presents a specific approach within Catholic thinking on peace and war that (a) prioritizes action at the communal level as the site of authentic social transformation, negating a role for the state, and (b) uses nonviolence as a method not simply to pursue peace but rather embody it in the here and now.

The Worker challenges dominant modes of thinking, particularly the just war tradition, in several ways. Firstly, their understanding of the state as inherently violent, as well as the belief that the only true authority is God, refutes the notion that there is a legitimate authority to declare war. Secondly, their refusal to acknowledge that the state has a role to play in promoting or seeking the good means a just cause in national militarism is incomprehensible. Furthermore, any cause would violate both the Gospel imperatives against violence, as well as the Mystical Body of Christ. Lastly, through the importance of pure means, in the Worker's understanding it is nonsensical to speak of ends as proportional to the means.

By understanding the state as inherently violent, the Worker differs from a Thomistic understanding of the state as natural with a role in promoting the common good. Whilst

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70. McClendon, *Ethics*, pp. 270–76.

71. McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 271.

72. McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 271.

73. McClendon, *Ethics*, pp. 272–73.

74. Charles Curran, *American Catholic Social Ethics: Twentieth Century Approaches* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), p. 212.

Aquinas held a prelapsarian view of the state, in which it would have existed even if the Fall had not occurred, the Worker's interpretation lies closer to the Augustinian reading of state as existing only due to the fallen nature of humanity. However, though in agreement with Augustine that the state holds no positive role, the Worker goes further in their critique seeing the state as inherently unnecessary and sinful, actively contributing towards injustice.

Instead, like approaches found within just peace thinking that prioritize local action and accompaniment, the Worker focuses its attention in building peace on the personal, interpersonal, and communal level, even if simultaneously resisting militarism. Here, it moves beyond certain strands of just peace thinking in its anarchist nature by rejecting any positive role for the state, as well as ruling out any recourse to violence. The Worker's reading places a concrete optimism on the capability of the person, situated in community and assisted by grace, in emulating the nonviolent example of Christ. Moreover, rather than seeking only to minimize the use of violence, the Worker's ethic focuses, in a similar fashion to just peace, in building positive forms of peace.

However, by living within an ethics of Resurrection, the movement moves beyond only seeking peace but rather aims to bear witness to, and inhabit, the nonviolence of the Kingdom. Here, Christian engagement within the world is transformed and liberated, providing freedom from the old order and making possible nonviolent ways of living. As Tripp York argues, speaking on Christian anarchism more broadly, the Resurrection frees Christians from colluding with inadequate political systems through a liberation 'to enact ... an ontology of *peace*'.<sup>75</sup> This is both a form of spiritual confrontation which challenges structures of violence and a way to instead create structures of peace.

Rice argues that 'neither Day nor Maurin saw the *polis* as centered in the church or a parish. Nevertheless, a strong argument could be made that the Catholic Worker was instituting a new social system.'<sup>76</sup> By practising personal works of charity and accepting personal responsibility for those in need in the community, the Worker practises both a form of resistance by refusing state interference and aims to build a society in which the state becomes obsolete, and, therefore, so does its military power. Furthermore, communities aim to embody spheres of peace, building alternative modes of nonviolent living, even if imperfectly, functioning as a form of witness to living according to the laws of the Kingdom.

For the Worker, it is not only that Jesus preached nonviolence, but that Jesus also acted in a nonviolent manner and, therefore, Christ's nonviolent mode of action is the path to emulate. However, as Lisa Cahill notes, such modes of practice go beyond addressing issues of conflict, or promoting theories for achieving peace, but rather constitute a 'a way of life'.<sup>77</sup> This is a form of living within the continued narrative of the Resurrection event. Remembering Pope Francis's call to make nonviolence the 'hallmark

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75. Tripp York, *Living on Hope While Living in Babylon: The Christian Anarchists of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 2009), p. 13, original emphasis.

76. Rice, 'Catholic Worker Anarchism at a Crossroads', p. 64.

77. Lisa Sowle Cahill, 'Theological Contexts of Just War Theory and Pacifism: A Response to J. Bryan Hehir', *Journal of Religious Ethics* 20.2 (1992), pp. 259–65 (261).

of our decisions, our relationships and our actions',<sup>78</sup> the Catholic Worker offers an important example of what a communal and theologically rooted embodiment of non-violence can look like in practice. As Newell reflected, 'It is the planting of those seeds that ultimately bear fruit'.<sup>79</sup>

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78. Pope Francis, *World Day of Peace Message*.

79. Quoted in Nepstad, *Religion and War Resistance*, p. 200.