

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
Robert F. Sayre, PhD

## **Dorothy Day** (1897-1980) *Having a Baby and Love Overflows*

Although she has not been canonized by the Church, Dorothy Day has been called a saint by many of her admirers; and as with saints, her behavior was often puzzling to her friends. As the following two chapters from *The Long Loneliness* (1952) illustrate, her behavior was also not the kind traditional hagiographers celebrated for imitation by the young. Yet, as Day tells it, it has a profound consistency.

The early chapters of *The Long Loneliness* tell of her childhood in Berkeley and Oakland, California (her father was a sports editor of a San Francisco paper), ending with the great earthquake of 1905 and her memories of the compassion among the victims. After the quake the family moved to Chicago, where Day showed early promise as a writer. She worked her way through the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, and then wrote for socialist papers in New York. She supported numerous radical causes and was arrested in a women's rights demonstration in Washington, D.C. In the 1920's she divided her time between Greenwich Village and a beach house on Staten Island which she shared with Forster Batterham, a British biologist and anarchist who was her common-law husband. She was extremely happy, sexually fulfilled, and artistically productive.

Unlike many religious conversions, therefore, hers did not come about from misery and dissatisfaction. Nor did it lead to a rejection of her political past. She remained an anarchist, pacifist, and advocate of the homeless and oppressed. In fact, the Catholic Worker Houses of Hospitality which she founded in the 1930's with her new friend Peter Maurin (Forster Batterham left her when she joined the church) and which she wrote about in her last volume of autobiography, *Loaves and Fishes* (1963), became famous examples of direct action.

All these changes and continuities in her life seem epitomized in these two chapters, which tell her overwhelming joy in the birth of her daughter, her decision to have her baptized a Catholic, and her own baptism a year later (in the summer of 1928). Her autobiography is a unique combination of tradition and change, social commitment and religious piety.

Our source is *The Long Loneliness* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981). The definitive biography of Day is by William Miller, *Dorothy Day: A Biography* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982). An excellent study of *The Long Loneliness* and her other Autobiographies is by June O'Connor, "Dorothy Day as Autobiographer," *Religion* 20 (1990): 275-95.

"Having A Baby" and "Love Overflows" are reprinted from *The Long Loneliness*, by Dorothy Day. Copyright 1952 by Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Harper Collins Publishers.

### Reading

#### Memoirs

<http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/deliberative-topics/religion-morality-in-public-life/dorothy-day-union-square-speech-6-november-1965/>