

Douai Oblate

May 2006 No 26

Dorothy Day 1897 - 1980

Role model for oblates

The cause for canonization of Dorothy Day, a Benedictine oblate of St Pachopius Abbey, Illinois, was introduced several years ago by the late Cardinal John O'Connor, archbishop of New York. Usually canonisation causes are not of great interest, but this case is different.

Abortion

Dorothy's canonization would give important signals to the contemporary world. Dorothy Day would be an unusual saint in many ways, not least because she had had an abortion. This had happened before she had undergone a religious conversion. The message her canonisation would give, is that no sin is unforgivable. It would be a great sign of hope for the many women who have suffered abortions and then sunk into despair at what has happened. No one need ever doubt the grace of forgiveness to enable them to rise again and leave the past behind.

Option for the Poor

A second sign would be the preferential option for the poor. Dorothy gave her life to the service of the poor, setting up Houses of Hospitality and establishing the Catholic Worker Movement for the sake of the poor

in the depression years. Dorothy had been baptised and confirmed in the Episcopal Church at the age of twelve and had become quite religious until her time at University, when she became quite bohemian in her lifestyle. Always being concerned about the injustices of society and poverty in the such a rich country as the United States she adopted socialist views and flirted with communism, although never becoming a card carrying member of the party.

After her abortion she longed to have a child and eventually succeeded after entering into a common law marriage. Shortly after this she became a Catholic, seeking baptism first for her child, Tamar Teresa, and then for herself. As a result of her conversion she was abandoned by the father of her daughter.

Many of her companions thought she had abandoned the cause of the poor by becoming a Catholic. As she wrote, "That very winter I was writing a series of articles, interviews with the workers and with the unemployed ... I was just as much against capitalism and imperialism as ever, and here I was going over to the opposition, because of course the Church was lined up with property, with the wealthy, with the state, with capitalism, with all the forces of

reaction.”

But Dorothy had been reading Christian writers for years and her understanding was far wider than the perspective of the catechism in which she was ‘instructed’. Becoming Catholic involved a complete conversion away from her bohemian lifestyle to total commitment to Christ. She wrote, “If I could have felt that communism was the answer to my desire for a cause, a motive, a way to walk in I would have remained where I was. But I felt that only faith in Christ could give the answer. The Sermon on the Mount answered all the questions as to how to love God and one’s brother.”

Dorothy continued her work for the poor, at first chiefly through her writings. She knew it was not enough to condemn Communism, she saw that the Christian response was ‘to actively challenge an economic system that created so many poor and to offer solidarity and a greater vision to those workers whose only support had seemed to come from the half-truths propagated by Communism organisers.

Dorothy knew that it was not enough merely to write about Christian teaching, it had to be put into practice. This she did with the help of Peter Maurin. They established the Catholic Worker Movement in 1933 and in May that year the first issue of the newspaper *The Catholic Worker* was published. The aim of the paper was in the words of Peter Maurin “to blow the dynamite of the Church”, in other words to publish what is often called “the Church’s best kept secret’, its social doctrine.

This led onto the setting up of farming communes and Houses of Hospitality. Today this work continues in the Casa Juan Diego Houses of Hospitality for immigrant workers in the southern United States, where persecution for living the gospel may again become a daily reality if the proposed American immigration bill becomes law.

Pacifism

A third sign for our times is that Dorothy was a pacifist. In the present era of pre-emptive wars and unjustifiable invasions it is highly to the credit of the Archdiocese of New York that this cause is being actively promoted. It goes against the prevailing governmental wind. During the Second World War Dorothy lost a great deal of support and suffered a great deal of opprobrium for her unflinching pacifism.

“One of Dorothy Day’s great gifts to the Catholic Church and to the United States was her drawing together of biblical and theological resources to establish pacifism and conscientious objection as a legitimate stance for Catholics and Americans.”

The spiritual influences on Dorothy were many, St Terèse of Lisieux and Charles de Foucauld among them. St Benedict had an important influence on the Catholic Worker movement. “From the Benedictines we get the ideal of Hospitality - Guest House - Farming Communes - Liturgical Prayer. Take these away and there is very little left in the Catholic Worker program.” Rembert Sorg’s book *Toward a Benedictine Theology of Manual Labor* had an important influence on Dorothy’s view of work. She first met Benedictines at St John’s Abbey, Minnesota in 1930. A profound influence on her was Virgil Michel OSB, the liturgical scholar, who started the Liturgical Movement in the USA and who was also an apostle of Catholic social teaching. Authentic worship cannot be separated from service of the poor. Her first affiliation was with the English Benedictines at Portsmouth, Rhode Island, but in 1955 she became an oblate of St Pachopius Abbey, Lisle, Illinois. She was drawn to that monastery because of her interest in Eastern theology and liturgy.

Dorothy is a role model for Benedictine Oblates.

For further reading see *The Catholic Worker Movement* by Mark & Louise Zwick. Paulist Press ISBN 0-8091-4315-1 and *Great Mystics & Social Justice* by Susan Rakoczy. Paulist Press ISBN 0-8091-4397-0 ☐

Monastic revival in Italy—sign of church renewal?

A recent article* on *Yahoo News* from *The Weekly Standard* by Christopher Levenick stated that although Europe is in decline, not least in religion, a change has been noted in Italy.

“Italy, for instance, is often viewed as a case study in secularization. Yet across the peninsula, weekly attendance at Catholic Mass has been steadily climbing for two decades. In 1980, roughly 35 percent of Italians regularly attended the Mass; by 2000 that figure had climbed to nearly 50 percent.

But even more pregnant with possible significance is Italy's sudden surge in new monastic vocations. A recent conference organized by the Vicariate of Rome and the *Unione Superiore Maggiori D'Italia* revealed that in the last year, no fewer than 550 women entered cloistered convents—up from 350 two years earlier. In contrast to recent trends, the new candidates were predominantly native-born and college-educated Italians. Similar gains are said to have occurred among male monastics. The Italian village of Nursia, for example, recently welcomed a small group of American monks

to rehabilitate a monastery built at the birthplace of St. Benedict, the great patriarch of western monasticism. Last year, for the first time since its suppression by Napoleonic edict, the community celebrated a Benedictine ordination. Though many monasteries continue to close, new houses are beginning to open, suggesting—perhaps—that a corner has been turned.”

The author wonders what this may signify, he asks whether this is just a reaction to Pope Benedict XVI's devotion to St Benedict or is it the sign of a more profound change. He refers to the attack on monasticism in Gibbon's 'Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire', written in 1781, a time when monasticism has reached its lowest ebb. However within a very few years monasticism was to experience spectacular growth, and the author wonders whether we are at the beginning of a new period of similar growth. Pope Benedict has said that monasticism is “the indispensable bearer not only of cultural continuity but above all of fundamental and religious and moral values”. Pope Benedict may well hope that a monastic revival will stimulate a religious revival which itself will invigorate western civilisation.△

* To read whole article http://news.yahoo.com/s/weeklstandard/20060323/cm_weeklstandard/monkish_1

Building Works

As you will have seen from *Douai Abbey Newsletter* the building works at Douai continue to make good progress. As things stand at the moment we are hoping that the new build, refectories, kitchen and four guest rooms, suitable for disabled people will be completed sometime this summer. After that we shall be starting work on upgrading the existing north block so that the monastic community can move into it. That will enable the present south block, presently occupied by monks to become available for guests, male and female, as it will be connected to the new buildings at first floor level.

While this conversion work is happening and it will probably start at the end of July or in August, we shall be short of rooms, so that we may not be able to accommodate everyone who wishes to come to the oblate retreats. It could be helpful, if there are more applicants than rooms, for those oblates living close enough to come by day, and possibly offer to put someone up for the duration of the retreat. It will probably affect retreats after September.

We have made provisional planning to bless the new building on October 15, but, of course with new buildings nothing is certain until it actually happens.△

Notes and News

Fr Boniface appointed assistant Director

In December Fr Francis was obliged to resign all his duties owing to ill health. This left the position of assistant Oblate Director vacant and in January Fr Abbot appointed Prior Boniface Moran to undertake this task. We welcome Fr Boniface and hope he will be with the oblates for many years.

Happily Fr Francis is recovering and is currently assisting Fr Timothy in the Gloucestershire parish of Kemerton.

Blessing of the Maison St-Benoît

Four oblates had been invited to the formal opening of our French dependency on February 5, and Helen & Dan O'Connor, Simon Bryden-Brook and Paul Jenkins represented us there. Paul has written an account of the event which is published in *The Douai Magazine*. Now that the monastery is established, we hope other oblates will visit the community there in Douai, France.

Oblation

Barbara Stocker made oblation at the Conventual Mass on Wednesday December 14, 2005, taking the name Hildegarde.

Oblates Congress

The influence of last year's Oblates Congress continues to be felt. It appears to have stimulated interest throughout the world and it is interesting to read the many accounts that are appearing in print by those who took part. All have felt it a great blessing and found encouragement from it.

Books

There has been an explosion of publishing about St Benedict and Benedictine spirituality. In the past few months the following have appeared:

Perspectives on the Rule of St Benedict by Aquinata Böckman.

Benedict of Nursia. His Message for Today by Anselm Grün.

Strangers to the City. Reflections on the Beliefs and Values of the Rule of St Benedict by Michael Casey.

Oblation. Meditations on St Benedict's Rule by Rachel M Srubas.

Day by Day with St Benedict by Terrence G Kardong.

A Life of St Benedict. Man of Blessing by Carmen Acevedo Butcher.

Such a proliferation of books suggests that St Benedict is having an ever increasing influence in the contemporary world. I hope we might have accounts of some of these books in future issues.

Articles are now arriving for the forthcoming *Oblates Handbook* which is to be co-published by Canterbury Press in the this country and Liturgical Press in the USA.

Retreats

Dates for forthcoming retreats are:

Mon 15 - Wed 17 May,

Fri 7 - Sun 9 July,

Fri 29 September - Sun 1 October,

Tues 24 - Thurs 26 October,

Fri 8 - Sun 10 December,

Mon 11 - Wed 13 December,

Next Year

Fri 20 - Sun 22 April 2007

Mon 14 - Wed 16 May 2007

Fri 22 - Sun 24 June 2007

Tues 10 - Thurs 12 July 2007

Fri 28 - Sun 30 September 2007

Mon 22 - Wed 24 October 2007

Mon 3 - Wed 5 December 2007

Fri 14 - Sun 16 December 2007.△