

7

The Catholic Worker Ethic and the Spirit of Marxism

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In reality and for the practical materialist, i.e., the communist, it is a question of revolutionizing the existing world, of practically attacking and changing existing things.

—Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, p. 169

A Radical Change

1. The order of the day is to talk about the social order.
2. Conservatives would like to keep it from changing but they don't know how.
3. Liberals try to patch it and call it a New Deal.
4. Socialists want a change, but a gradual change.
5. Communists want a change, an immediate change, but a Socialist change.
6. Communists in Russia do not build Communism, they build Socialism.
7. Communists want to pass from capitalism to Socialism and from Socialism to Communism.
8. I want a change, and a radical change.
9. I want a change from an acquisitive society to a functional society, from a society of go-getters to a society of go-givers.

—Peter Maurin, cofounder of the Catholic Worker movement (n.d.)

We must continue to protest injustice, bad working conditions, poor wages which are general now in face of the high cost of living; but our vision is of another system, another social order, a state of society where, as Marx and Engels put it, "Each man works according to his ability and receives according to his need." Or as St. Paul put it, "Let your abundance supply their want."

—Dorothy Day, cofounder of the Catholic Worker movement (1947)

The first issue of the *Catholic Worker* newspaper was distributed on May Day in 1933, at a communist rally in Union Square. The setting for the genesis of the Catholic Worker movement was selected by Dorothy Day, editor of the paper and cofounder of the movement, a communist turned Catholic for whom the Catholic Worker was an answer to her prayers for a way to integrate her faith with her burning need to ally herself with the masses. A movement at once Marxist and Catholic is hard to imagine, and Day herself would be the first to admit that it was actually not possible to fully embody both. And while elements of Marxism were rejected and refined as the movement solidified, and criticism of Marxism frequently found within the pages of the movement's newspaper, the influence of Marxism on the philosophy and work of the Catholic Worker movement is unmistakable. In fact, an examination of the points of convergence and divergence between Catholic Worker ideology and Marxist thought reveals the Catholic Worker movement to be, at its core, an experiment in synthesizing a Christian Marxism.

As Dorothy Day biographer Robert Ellsburg notes, the cofounder of the Catholic Worker "spent her youth among socialists, anarchists, and Communists, and considered herself one of them" (Ellsburg 2005, xix). She first joined the Socialist Party in 1914, her first year of college, and spent the decade after she left college writing for various socialist and communist publications, most notably *The Call*, *The Masses*, and *The Liberator*. She carried the card of the Industrial Workers of the World and was once arrested when a Red Scare raid was carried out on an I.W.W. flophouse where she was spending the night. And even as she found herself growing increasingly attracted to religion during these years, her eventual conversion to Catholicism did not, to her, feel like the betrayal of her convictions that her friends saw it as. As Ellsburg writes, "In becoming Catholic, Dorothy had not forsaken her political convictions. But what she found in the Gospels was an understanding of human liberation, a sense of community and solidarity much larger than politics alone could provide." (Ellsburg 2005, xix) What Day saw in Catholicism, then, was the essence of her political convictions but with a scope and scale she had not previously imagined.

Though she eventually shed the label of communist, Day continued to identify with communists throughout her career, often defending them in the pages of the *Catholic Worker*. She even credited her fellow communists with leading her down the path to God. On one occasion, when she was being criticized by other Catholics for defending a group of communists under investigation by the government, she responded to her critics by stating, "Let it be remembered that I speak as an ex-Communist and one who has not testified before Congressional Committees, nor written works on the Communist conspiracy. I can say with warmth that I loved the people I worked with and learned much from them. They helped me to find God in His poor, in His abandoned ones, as I had not found Him in Christian churches" (Day 1949). Day was often quick to point out that though they rejected the Gospel, communists and socialists often did a better job living out the Gospel message than those who professed faith in the Church.

While Dorothy Day, as editor of the *Catholic Worker*, was the voice of the Catholic Worker movement, her cofounder Peter Maurin provided the momentum behind it. It was Maurin's vision of a new social order, achieved through a program of learning, direct action, and indoctrination that, when combined with Day's practical sense of getting things done, launched the movement. A philosopher and a poet, among many other talents, Maurin was heavily influenced by Marx. Though he was critical of communism and never identified as a communist, his fascination with and reliance on Marxist principles was evident. Describing his early influences in an article on Maurin, Day wrote, "Peter Maurin studied the prophets of Israel and the Fathers of the Church; he studied Proudhon, Karl Marx, Kropotkin and familiarized himself with utopian socialist thought as well as Marxist thinking" (Day 1953).

Maurin was known for what he called his "easy essays," short works of free-verse poetry that encapsulated broad themes in his thinking, which he was prone to recite to anyone who might or might not be willing to listen. Several of these pieces, including his essay "To Be a Marxist," dealt with his critique of Marxism and demonstrate the degree to which Marxism influenced his thought.

TO BE A MARXIST

1. Before he died Karl Marx told one of his friends: "I have lived long enough to be able to say that I am not a Marxist."
2. To be a Marxist, according to the logic of *Das Kapital*, is to maintain that the best thing to do is to wait patiently till Capitalism has fulfilled its historic mission.
3. To be a Marxist according to the logic of *Das Kapital*, is to step back, take an academic view of things, and watch the self-satisfied Capitalists dig their own graves.
4. To be a Marxist, according to the logic of *Das Kapital*, is to let economic evolution do its work without ever attempting to give it a push. (Maurin n.d.)

Here Maurin critiques the Marxist idea of the inevitability of revolution. Maurin believed passionately in the need to create a new social order, to demonstrate the possibility of a different kind of society, and to bring about social change by actually creating social change. In another one of his easy essays, "I Agree," Maurin stated that he agreed with the communist critique of capitalism and with the main social aim of the Communist Party but that he did not agree that class struggle and "proletarian dictatorship" were "the best practical means to realize their sound social aim" (Maurin n.d.).

What Maurin and Day believed, then, was in the ideals of Marxism but not the means of Marxism. They saw truth in the Marxist critique of capitalism and in the Marxist vision of a new social order, but the path they envisioned to arrive at that social order was where they diverged from their Marxist influences. To what extent, then, was the Catholic Worker movement Marxist? What specific aspects of the

Catholic Worker vision, plan, and actions were in line with Marxist ideals? In examining the program of action of the Catholic Worker, alongside Day's writings describing the motivations and ideals behind their work, several points of convergence between Catholic Worker ideology and Marxist ideology emerge.

The program of the Catholic Worker movement centered on three major components: "clarification of thought" via roundtable discussions and publication of a newspaper, houses of hospitality, and farming communes or "agronomic universities" (Ellsburg 2005, xxviii). The goal of all three was simple: to create, as Maurin often said "the kind of society where it is easier for people to be good" (Ellsburg 2005, xxix).

The Catholic Worker plan was, first and foremost, practical. Though theorizing was important, especially to Maurin, what was most important was putting theory into action and ideals into practice. Day, reflecting upon Peter Maurin, noted that:

He was a great indoctrinator, a great agitator. He believed in "a theory of revolution" and advocated much study. "The evil is so deep seated," he said, "that of course much of the time will be given up to an immediate practice of the works of mercy." But he believed too, in constantly trying to create order out of chaos. "To be a social missionary," he said in one of his essays, "requires social mindedness, historical mindedness and practical idealism." (Day 1953)

The similarity between Maurin's desire to balance study of society with practical action, and Marx's own insistence on practicality, is striking. In *The German Ideology*, Marx wrote that, "in reality and for the *practical* materialist, i.e., the *communist*, it is a question of revolutionizing the existing world, of practically attacking and changing existing things" (Tucker 1978, 169).

What things needed to be attacked and changed? Maurin, like Marx, saw that there were certain basic needs that had to be met for all people before liberation was truly possible. "In general," Marx wrote, "people cannot be liberated as long as they are unable to obtain food and drink, housing and clothing in adequate quality and quantity" (Tucker 1978, 169). This same notion was at the core of the second tenet of the Catholic Worker program, houses of hospitality. The simple notion behind houses of hospitality was that they were places where those who had no bed could come and sleep, those who had no food could come and eat, and those who had no job could come and work to provide these needs for others. Maurin observed that the "evil" of the capitalist society was "so deep seated" that much of their energy would be directed to this end (Day 1953), but he understood that a new society could not be expected to thrive when so many of its people did not have their basic needs provided for. But the houses of hospitality did more than just provide for basic needs: They also served as a foil to the capitalist mind-set, demonstrating not greed and selfish pursuits but a model of a community in which each looked out for the other. Day noted that "[Peter] saw the need for the works of mercy as a practice of love for our brother which was the great commandment and the only way we can show our love for Christ, and he saw too that such a practice would mean conflict with the

State” (Day 1953). The very existence of houses of hospitality, providing for those ignored by the state, served as a critique of the state.

This critique of the capitalist state is perhaps the most obvious point of convergence between the Catholic Worker and Marxist ideologies. Day and Maurin critiqued capitalism on much the same lines as Marx: for the way it estranged men from themselves and each other, for the way it deprived the worker of his basic human dignity, and for the way it prized selfishness and greed.

In *The German Ideology*, Marx explains that, in the capitalist system, man becomes estranged from himself, and from nature, and hence, from his fellow man:

An immediate consequence of the fact that man is estranged from the product of his labour, from his life-activity, from his species being is the *estrangement of man from man*. If a man is confronted by himself, he is confronted by the *other* man. What applies to a man's relation to his work to the product of his labour and to himself, also holds of a man's relation to the other man, and to the other man's labour and object of labour. In fact, the proposition that man's species nature is estranged from him means that one man is estranged from the other, as each of them is from man's essential nature. (Tucker 1978, 77)

Capitalism, according to Marx, is isolating and dehumanizing. The laborer works in order to live, but his work has no connection to his life, as the product of his labor is completely detached from him—and therefore when he is working, the laborer is not living. What he receives from his labor is the pay needed to survive, but for this pay, and the work that provides it, he is in constant competition with others. Because he is pitted against his fellow laborer, the laborer fails to see himself reflected in the other, and therefore, the two are further estranged from each other. And because man's essential nature is his social nature, realized in his connection to other men because they are like him, this estrangement from other men estranges the laborer from his own humanity.

Dorothy Day criticized capitalism on similar terms when she wrote that capitalism cannot morally be in accord with principles of justice because it thrives on conflict between individuals. “Since the aim of the capitalist employer is to obtain labor as cheaply as possible and the aim of labor is to sell itself as dearly as possible and buy the products produced as cheaply as possible there is an inevitable and persistent conflict,” she wrote (Day 1972). A society in which each person is constantly pitted against the other is not viable, not just, and most importantly, not one in which the Gospel could be carried out. But beyond setting men against each other through competition, she argued, capitalism also robs the laborer of his individual humanity. “Capitalist society fails to take in the whole nature of man but rather regards him as an economic factor in production,” she argued. “He is an item in the expense sheet of the employer. Profit determines what type of work he shall do. Hence, the deadly routine of assembly lines and the whole mode of factory production” (Day 1972). Capitalism reduces the laborer to his usefulness, failing to see him in his totality as a human being.

Beyond estranging the laborer from his fellow worker and from his own humanity, both Day and Marx criticized capitalism for the way in which it robs the worker of his or her basic human dignity. To begin with, capitalism does not afford the laborer full exercise of free will. Marx argued that the work of the laborer is “not voluntary, but coerced; it is *forced labor*. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a *means* to satisfy needs external to it” (Tucker 1978, 74). Day took this critique a step further and argued that factory work was a form of slavery. In criticizing the Church’s stance of the dignity of work, Day fumed that “[The Church has] lost the concept of work, and those who do not know what work in the factory is, have romanticized both it and the workers, and in emphasizing the dignity of the worker, have perhaps unconsciously emphasized the dignity of work which is slavery, and which degrades and dehumanizes man” (Day 1946).

The laborer has no choice but to work and is enslaved by the system that makes it so. Furthermore, he or she is forced to work in dangerous, unhealthy, inhumane conditions. Describing the typical conditions of factory labor, Marx wrote:

Every organ of sense is injured in an equal degree by artificial elevation of the temperature, by the dust-laden atmosphere, by the deafening noise, not to mention danger to life and limb among the thickly crowded machinery, which, with the regularity of the seasons, issues its list of the killed and wounded in the industrial battle. Economy of the social means of production, matured and forced as in a hothouse by the factory system, is turned, in the hands of capital, into systematic robbery of what is necessary for the life of the workman while he is at work, robbery of space, light, air, and of protection of his person against the dangerous and unwholesome accompaniments of the productive process, not to mention the robbery of appliances for the comfort of the workman. (Tucker 1978, 410–11)

To labor in the factory, Marx explained, is to be deprived of the use of your senses and to risk being deprived of your own life. The conditions are not only unpleasant; they are unhealthy and downright dangerous. Day argued that to be forced to work in such conditions, or even in the best of factory conditions, was not only unjust, it was also downright sinful. Even “in the great clean shining factories, with good lights and air and the most sanitary conditions,” Day wrote, “an eight-hour day, five-day week, with the worker chained to the belt, to the machine, there is no opportunity for sinning as the outsider thinks of sin. No, it is far more subtle than that, it is submitting oneself to a process which degrades, dehumanizes” (Day 1946). This critique is indicative of why, though she stood with the worker in fighting for labor reform, Day refused to believe that labor reform would ever accomplish any real good—for the labor system, no matter how regulated it became, was still degrading to the laborer. As Marx argued in *The Communist Manifesto*, the system was so depraved that “for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation” (Tucker 1978, 475).

Capitalism, then, was criticized by both Marx and Day for the ways in which it estranged people from one another as well as for the ways in which it exploited and

dehumanized the worker. But beyond robbing the worker of his or her essential humanity, capitalism went a step further in encouraging such negative traits in people as selfishness and greed. Capitalism makes not only the capitalist but the worker selfish, both Marx and Day argue, and this goes against man's very nature as a social being. "Under private property," Marx wrote, "every person speculates on creating a *new* need in another, so as to drive him to a fresh sacrifice, to place him in a new dependence and to seduce him into a new mode of *gratification* and therefore economic ruin" (Tucker 1978, 93). Because capitalism necessitates that the success of one person depends on the lack of success of another—for one worker to be hired for a job at the expense of another, for the capitalist to earn profit from the labor of the worker—all such economic activity is activity against another person. And at the root of all such activity is power over the other, Marx noted, in that "each tries to establish over the other an *alien* power, so as thereby to find satisfaction of his own selfish need . . . every new product represents a new *potency* of mutual swindling and mutual plundering" (Tucker 1978, 93). The goal of the individual under capitalism is taking for oneself, which necessarily means taking from another. Day argued that this is a feature that is inherent to capitalism, noting that one of the central reasons the Catholic Worker was anticapitalist was in protest to "the spirit of greed, of rampant materialism, that has become synonymous with that system" (Day 1936).

Because of all of these factors inherent in the capitalist system—that it estranges man from man and from himself, that it dehumanizes the worker and denies him his dignity, and that it encourages greed, selfishness, and the drive to have power over others—Day insisted that capitalism was fundamentally incompatible with Christianity. In an editorial describing a conversation with her son-in-law, David Hennessey, in which they were discussing the views of the Vatican on capitalism, Day and Hennessey came to the following agreement:

Capitalism seizes, confiscates, and dries up wealth, i.e. reduces the numbers of those who may enjoy riches, holds up distribution and defies Divine Providence who has given good things for the use of all men. St. Thomas Aquinas says that man must not consider riches as his own property but as common good. This means that communism itself, as an economic system, apart from its philosophy—is not in contradiction with the nature of Christianity as is capitalism. Capitalism is intrinsically atheistic. Capitalism is godless, not by nature of a philosophy which it does not profess, but in practice (which is its only philosophy), by its insatiable greed and avarice, its mighty power, its dominion. (Day 1954)

Day was highly cognizant of the fact that Marxist communism professed atheism as a central belief—and was quick to point out on countless occasions that this was one of the many reasons that she, and the *Catholic Worker*, were not technically communists. But despite this fact, she did not feel that communism was fundamentally out of line with Christianity, as she felt capitalism was.

In fact, Day argued that in many respects, Marxist thought was actually very much in line with the teachings at the heart of Catholic social thought. An examination of

Marx's writings reveals that the Catholic doctrine at the core of the Catholic Worker movement—the doctrine of Mystical Body of Christ—is a concept that is paralleled in the idea of the species-being in the writings of Marx.

In a statement of Catholic Worker aims and ideals published in the third anniversary edition of the *Catholic Worker*, Dorothy Day explained the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, stating, "We believe that we are all members or potential members of the mystical Body of Christ, and that we must show that faith by translating the spiritual into the material. *All* men are our brothers, Jew or Gentile, white or black. . . . Since Christ is our Brother, *all* men are our brothers, the communist, fascist, the red baiter and the 'capitalist'" (Day 1936). The theological underpinning of the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ is that all people are bound up in each other through Christ because of Jesus's humanity: Because God became human in the person of Jesus Christ, humans became like Christ—their fleshly humanity makes them one with the human God, and thus one with each other.

According to this doctrine, all people, whether we know them or not, whether we agree with them or not, are our "brothers." When we see another, we see in him or her ourselves, reflected back at us, at the same time as we see Christ reflected back at us. This doctrine, as Day and Maurin understood it, had many ramifications for how one must live in the world. Day wrote that "this teaching, the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, involves today the issue of unions (where men call each other brothers); it involves the racial question; it involves cooperatives, credit unions, crafts; it involves Houses of Hospitality and Farming Communes" (Day 1940). In short, Day argued, the Mystical Body of Christ influenced every facet of life and therefore undergirded every aspect of the Catholic Worker plan. The actions of the Catholic Worker movement to create a new social order were made necessary by the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ.

For Day and Maurin, one of the most critical components of the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ was the way it tied one person's suffering to the suffering of all, and thus, one person's liberation to the liberation of all. Through all of the actions of the Catholic Worker plan—clarification of thought, houses of hospitality, and farming communes—"It is with all these means," Day wrote, "that we can live as though we believed indeed that we are all members one of another, knowing that when 'the health of one member suffers, the health of the whole body is lowered'" (Day 1940). This notion—that the whole body suffers when one member suffers—was for this reason that, Day argued, a class system, in which some suffered such that others could prosper, was inherently anti-Christian. The new social order that the Catholic Worker envisioned was one in which people could actually live in accordance with this doctrine.

What is interesting about the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ and its centrality to the philosophy of the Catholic Worker movement is the striking similarity it bears to the concept, so central to Marxist thought, of the species-being. The species-being, a concept derived from the writings of Feuerbach, is described by Marx scholar Robert C. Tucker as a way of describing the particular form of consciousness

possessed by humans that distinguishes them from other animal species. “Man is not only conscious of himself as an individual,” Tucker notes, but “he is also conscious of himself as a member of the human species, and so he apprehends a ‘human essence’ which is the same in himself and in other men” (Tucker 1978, 33–34). The human being is unique, then, in recognizing that he is like other humans, and other humans are like him, because they are also human. Tucker goes on to explain that:

According to Feuerbach this ability to conceive of the “species” is the fundamental element in the human power of reasoning: “Science is the consciousness of species.” Marx, while not departing from this meaning of the terms, employs them in other contexts: and he insists more strongly than Feuerbach that since this “species-consciousness” defines the nature of man, man is only living and acting authentically (i.e. in accordance with his nature) when he lives and acts deliberately as a “species-being,” that is, as a *social* being. (Tucker 1978, 33–34)

What is implied, then, by the concept of the species-being is that man is conscious of the fact that other beings are like him and thus can relate to them because they hold their human-ness in common. Additionally, because this consciousness of being part of the species is what makes man unique, it is an essential part of what it means to be human. Man acts out his humanity by being social with other men. Therefore, when society is structured such that man is denied the opportunity to relate to others socially, denied the ability to act in recognition of the species-being, man is thus denied his humanity.

Though it is not grounded in any theological explanation, the concept of the species-being bears striking similarities to the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ. Both assert a sense of individuals being connected to each other in a way that makes them more than just individuals but individuals as a part of a whole—either of the body of Christ, in Day’s view, or of the species, in Marx’s view. Either way, this belonging to a greater whole not only makes humans unique but necessitates a specific mode of action—action that takes into account the experience of the other. In both cases, the individual sees that the other is like him and therefore is compelled to treat him as if he is just like him, as if he *is* him. For Day, one cannot truly be Christian if one does not act as such; for Marx, one cannot truly be human if one does not act as such.

Just as Day’s vision of a just social order revolves around the ability to live in accordance with the Mystical Body of Christ, Marx believes that human liberation is characterized by the ability of all to live in recognition of the species-being. Marx writes, “Human emancipation will only be complete when the real, individual man has absorbed into himself the abstract citizen; when as an individual man, in his everyday life, in his work, and in his relationships, he has become a *species-being*; and when he has recognized and organized his own powers (*forces propres*) as *social* powers” (Tucker 1978, 46). In order for true liberation to be achieved, society must be structured such that each person has the ability to see himself or herself as a species-being and thereby to see others similarly, as members of the species, as humans just

like him or her. Only when each person, in every arena of life, can and does internalize the species-being can all persons be liberated.

Just as Day believed that capitalism made living according to the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ fundamentally impossible, Marx also saw capitalism as denying man the species-being. As noted above, Marx saw estrangement of man from himself and man from man—in essence, estrangement from man's own social nature—as an immediate and necessary consequence of the capitalist wage-labor system. “In fact,” Marx asserted, “the proposition that man's species nature is estranged from him means that one man is estranged from the other, as each of them is from man's essential nature” (Tucker 1978, 77). Communism, on the other hand, because it transcended private property, necessitated an end to human estrangement. When all property is held communally, it is impossible not to live as a social being. “Communism therefore is the complete return of man to himself as a *social* (i.e. human) being,” Marx wrote. “This communism . . . is the *genuine* resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man—the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species” (Tucker 1978, 84). For Marx, communism, marked primarily by property held in common and the resultant lack of competition, was the solution to the estrangement from the species-being brought about by capitalism.

Though Marx was critical of the damage of capitalism in general to the species-being, he was interested in the extreme degree to which the species-being was denied in particular in the political systems that upheld such societies. In *On the Jewish Question*, Marx looks specifically at civil societies whose political systems are founded upon principles of the inherent rights of man, such as those espoused in the French Declaration of 1791 or the American Declaration of Independence. He notes first that the “rights of man” upon which such societies rests are actually rights given to man *as a member of society*, that is, man as he exists as an individual, “of egoistic man, of man separated from other men and from the community” (Tucker 1978, 42). The fundamental rights of liberty, property, equality, and security all work to reinforce this understanding of man as isolated individual. Because the right of liberty is defined in terms of what one cannot do to others, Marx argues, “liberty as a right of man is not founded upon the relations between man and man, but rather upon the separation of man from man. It is the right of such separation. The right of the *circumscribed* individual, withdrawn into himself.” Similarly, the right of property is the “right of self-interest” that “leads every man to see in other men, not the *realization*, but rather the *limitation* of his own liberty.” The right to equality, Marx argues, is meaningless in and of itself; all it does it provide that each individual is equally seen as an isolated individual. And finally, the right to security provides each individual the right to protection of himself as an individual. “The concept of security is not enough to raise civil society above its egoism,” Marx notes. “Security is, rather, the *assurance* of its egoism” (Tucker 1978, 42–43).

The “rights of man,” then, serve only to reinforce an understanding of man that denies the species-being. In a system that guarantees such rights, man cannot live in such a way that recognizes the species-being but rather can only live as an isolated individual operating alongside other isolated individuals, attempting to protect himself and what is “his.” Marx finds it remarkable that nations that have undergone revolutions and then have the opportunity to define the nature of their citizenry would choose to isolate their individual citizens in this way. Marx wrote:

It is difficult enough to understand that a nation which has just begun to liberate itself, to tear down all the barriers between different sections of the people and to establish a political community, should solemnly proclaim (*Declaration of 1791*) the rights of the egoistic man, separated from his fellow men and from the community. . . . [T]he matter becomes still more incomprehensible when we observe that the political liberators reduce citizenship, the *political* community, to a mere *means* for preserving these so-called rights of man; and consequently, that the citizen is declared to be the servant of egoistic “man,” that the sphere in which man functions as a species-being is degraded to a level below the sphere where he functions as a partial being, and finally that it is man as a bourgeois and not man as a citizen who is considered the *true* and *authentic* man. (Tucker 1978, 43)

The fundamental incompatibility of capitalism with the species-being is compounded by the incompatibility of this particular conception of the function of the state—that is, to protect and ensure the rights of the citizenry—with the species-being.

Dorothy Day felt similarly about the incompatibility of the state with the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, and therefore she felt, somewhat contrary to Marx, that the new social order that had to be built should be one that was completely devoid of centralized authority. The ideal, she believed, was that “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need” be accompanied by the “withering away of the state.” Day proclaimed that:

We believe in the communal aspect of property as stressed by the early Christians, religious orders, the communes of Switzerland and Spain, and in a society of federated associations, cooperating in about the same way as postal companies, railroads, Red Cross, cooperate now, without the aid of the state, and without the interference of hostile states. We believe in the constructive activity of the people, “the masses” and the mutual relations which existed during the mediaeval times and were worked out from below. We believe in loving our brothers regardless of race, color or creed and we believe in showing this love by working for better conditions immediately and the ultimate owning by the workers of their means of production. We believe in an economy based on human needs rather than on the profit motive.

Certainly we disagree with the Communist Party, as we disagree with other political parties who are trying to maintain the American way of life. We don’t think it’s worth maintaining. (Day 1949)

Day was quite clear that her goal in critiquing the American economy, American politics, and the American way of life was not to reform them but to do away with them. There was nothing about the American state, with its individualism, egoism, materialism and acquisitiveness, greed, and denial of the very humanity of man that was “worth maintaining.” Absolutely nothing about the state or the economy was compatible with the Catholic vision of the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ; therefore, the entire system had to be rejected. Just as Marx felt that in order for man, as a member of the species, as a social being, to live as man fundamentally was, the social order needed a radical change, so Day felt a new social order was needed so that man could live as if he were bound up in all others through their shared membership in the Mystical Body of Christ. “There must be formed a sphere of society which claims no *traditional* status but only a human status . . . which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all the other spheres of society, without, therefore, emancipating all the other spheres, which is, in short, a *total loss* of humanity and which can only redeem itself by a *total redemption of humanity*” (Tucker 1978, 64). Marx may have written these words with the species-being in mind, but these words could just as easily have been Dorothy Day’s.

Day agreed with Marx’s critique of capitalism and this agreement was reflected in the criticisms of capitalism that appeared in the pages of the *Catholic Worker*. Furthermore, as we have seen, an understanding of the human person as one who is connected in an essential way with other persons, though described in vastly different terms, is seen in both Day’s and Marx’s writings. Though the influence of Marxist thought on Catholic Worker ideals is quite evident, there are, of course, several points of divergence between the two that are worth noting.

The first and most obvious divergence is on the issue of religion. As Marx saw it, religion played no role at all in the ideal social order. Religion, as he observed it, served only to maintain the current social order by providing those who were oppressed by capitalist society a sense of divine meaning for their misery, thus robbing them of any inclination to rebel against the structures and conditions that caused them to suffer. In what would become likely his most quoted statement, Marx wrote in *On the Jewish Question* that “*Religious* suffering is at the same time an *expression* of real suffering and a *protest* against real suffering. Religion is the sign of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people” (Tucker 1978, 54). Marx saw that religion made people feel happy, but that this happiness was not true happiness but an illusion, a medication that masked the pain rather than treating the condition that caused it. Rather than simply treat the pain, Marx argued, the better solution would be the eradication of the condition that caused the pain, such that the opiate was no longer needed. “The abolition of religion as the *illusory* happiness of men, is a demand for their *real* happiness,” Marx argued. “The call to abandon their illusions about their condition is a *call to abandon a condition which requires illusions*. The criticism of religion is, therefore, the *embryonic criticism of this vale of tears* of which religion is the *halo*” (Tucker 1978, 54).

Though Day disagreed with Marx on the illusory nature of religion, she expressed an understanding of how such a view of religion could come about. Everywhere around her, Day observed people who claimed to practice Christianity whose practices amounted at best to a watered-down version of the Gospel. The problem with Christianity as practiced by most people, Day believed, was that it focused only on Christ as divine and not enough, if at all, on the human Christ, the embodied Christ, the Christ whose becoming-flesh caused him to undergo bodily suffering, a suffering that meant he could relate to the suffering of the worker.

This ignoring of the material body of our humanity which Christ ennobled when He took flesh, gives rise to the aversion for religion evidenced by many workers. As a result of this worshipping of the Divinity alone of Christ and ignoring His Sacred Humanity, religious people looked to Heaven for justice and Karl Marx could say—"Religion is the opium of the people." And Wobblies could say—"Work and Pray—live on hay; you'll get pie in the sky when you die." It is because we love Christ in His Humanity that we can love our brothers. It is because we see Christ in the least of God's creatures, that we can talk to them of the love of God and know that what we write will reach their hearts. (Day 1935)

Marx was right, Day argued, to criticize the Christianity he saw being practiced as unhelpful and even useless in addressing the plight of the worker under capitalism. But this was not, she argued, because Christianity itself was worthless but because the Christianity practiced by most was at best only a half-developed Christianity. It was for this reason that study of Catholic social teaching and roundtable discussions for "clarification of thought" were so important to the Catholic Worker plan, because it was vital to their success that people understand the fullness of the Catholic faith in order to understand how living out that faith necessitated a change in the social order.

Though Day understood Marx's reasons for rejecting religion, the emphasis on atheism was one of the main points that kept Day and Maurin from identifying as communist. In an editorial clarifying their stance on Cuba, Day repeated something she often wrote in her columns for the *Catholic Worker*: "First of all we must quote Lenin, 'Atheism is an integral part of Marxism.' We therefore are not Marxist Leninists" (Day 1962). Because Catholicism was always at the core of Catholic Worker beliefs, if identifying as Marxist would compromise their identity as Catholics, then identifying as Marxist would have been out of the question to both Maurin and Day.

But beyond the question of religion, there were several other fundamental points on which Day and Maurin disagreed with Marx. The one Day wrote about most often was the question of the use of force. Marx was clear in his belief that class war was not only inevitable but desirable as a means of overthrowing the current social order. He declared this viewpoint most succinctly in *The Communist Manifesto* when he wrote, "The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions" (Tucker 1978, 500).

For Day and Maurin, however, the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ did not allow for the use of force against the bourgeoisie, for the capitalist, too, was the workers' fellow member of the Body of Christ. "To assent to violence is to give way to the spirit of the times," Day wrote. "Agreeing with the necessity for force is making concessions to the immediate, the expedient. It is in reality denying the doctrine of the brotherhood of man and the dogma of the Mystical Body. 'Why must the members war one against the other?'" (Day 1935). Though violent overthrow may produce more immediate results, Day and Maurin did not believe that it would achieve lasting results, but rather that the use of violence in attaining a new social order would inevitably lead to another imperfect social order. Furthermore, Day and Maurin were unwavering in their belief that "since Christ is our Brother, *all* men are our brothers, the communist, fascist, the red baiter and the 'capitalist'" (Day 1936). If it is wrong for the capitalist not to view the worker as his brother in Christ, it is just as wrong for the worker not to view the capitalist as his brother in Christ. The use of violent means against the capitalist, then, would have been a violation of the core beliefs of the Catholic Worker movement.

In the early years of the Catholic Worker movement, Day wrote that she believed in the possibility of Christian capitalism and in the possibility of Christian communism (Day 1936). Though Day and Maurin were quick to deny that they were Marxist and they diverged from Marxist thought on multiple points, that Marx heavily influenced both Day and Maurin and hence the aims and ideals of the Catholic Worker is highly evident. Whether or not it was their aim to do so is unclear, but what we find in the Catholic Worker movement is an apparent attempt at creating a Christian Marxism. That bringing together Marxism and Catholicism to construct a Christian Marxism may actually have been Day's goal is only hinted at in her writings: "Others may come who will not reconcile Marxism to Christianity, but the Marxist to the Christ. There is truth to be found in Karl Marx as there was in Aristotle."

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