



Dorothy Day

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc. or its Licensors. Please see [copyright information](#) at the end of this document.

The plight of the homeless is one of the most widely discussed social issues of the 1980's. Certainly, there has been no lack of newspaper and television stories documenting this growing problem, and editorialists have not hesitated to identify its causes: Reaganism, the selfishness epitomized by the yuppie generation, the gradual erosion of America's position in the world economy. The causes, it seems, are always somewhere out there. One shakes one's head and turns the page, or changes the channel.

The example of Dorothy Day points to an alternative response. On May 1, 1933, Day and Peter Maurin, a visionary layman who had emigrated from France some years before, distributed the first issue of THE CATHOLIC WORKER, a newspaper which called for social justice in radical Christian terms. Day, then a woman in her mid-thirties, a journalist and novelist and a recent convert to Roman Catholicism, chose a life of poverty and self-sacrifice among the urban poor. Over the years, the Catholic Worker movement established "houses of hospitality" across the United States--places of refuge for the hungry, the homeless, the unemployed.

DOROTHY DAY: A RADICAL DEVOTION is not a conventional biography. (That job, as Coles notes, has already been done by William D. Miller in his biography DOROTHY DAY.) While Coles summarizes the essential facts of Day's life, he concentrates on an in-depth portrait. Drawing on remembered conversations, tape-recorded interviews, and an extensive correspondence with Day, ranging from their first meeting in the early 1950's to shortly before her death in 1980, Coles also quotes frequently from Day's wonderful autobiography, THE LONG LONELINESS. The vitality of her voice, and the conversational give-and-take between Coles and his subject, give this book a striking immediacy.

The text is supplemented by notes and a selected bibliography. This volume is an outstanding addition to the Radcliffe Biography Series, devoted to "depicting the lives of extraordinary women." Day herself would be pleased by it but would remind the reader that "ordinary" lives, too, are of inestimable value. That is what her work was all about.

Copyright Notice

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems without the written permission of the publisher.

For complete copyright information, please see the online version of this work:
<http://www.enotes.com/dorothy-day-robert-coles-salem>