

Analysis of Dorothy Day's: The Long Loneliness

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Abstract:

I had trouble finding the will to write this essay, in the end, however, it was written. My biggest struggle was identifying a theme in the novel. How do you put a theme on someone's life? I eventually decided that Dorothy Day's novel had a very strong theme of loneliness. This made my citations easy to find and made the paper phenomenally easier to write. My main strength would have to be the number and accuracy of citations throughout the essay. This strength is followed by my constructive argument for the theme of loneliness. My main pitfall in this essay however, was connecting everything in the final paragraph. I've never been good at conclusions after all.

Dorothy Day's *The Long Loneliness* is an autobiographical account of Day's relationship with God, stirred by her lifelong loneliness. The novel serves to inform the reader that loneliness can be mediated with a relationship with God. In Day's childhood and early adult life, she was without the love of God and felt immeasurably lonely. It is only until she is converted to Catholicism that she is cured of her loneliness (Day, 149).

Day developed an interest in religion at a very young age. She even pretended to be like a Saint as a sort of game with her sister: "So we began to practice being saints- it was a game with us." (Day, 25) During one of her first encounters with religion, attending church with her neighbors, she found comfort in collective worship during the congregation. This comfort helped ease Day's loneliness and began her long, twisting, journey with God. Day had a very lonely childhood; her family moved often, making it difficult for her to make many friends (Day, 22). After a childhood of constant moving, Day attended University on her own (Day, 36). She was attributed as a talented writer, but those talents were used for radical political philosophies, leaving her with little money and in-and-out of jail (Day, 73).

In Day's matured adult life she found herself isolated in her marriage and lonely. Day states about her marriage: "He would not talk about the faith and relapsed into a complete silence if I tried to bring up the subject." (Day, 147) Her second husband, Forster was a radical anarchist who opposed Day's spirituality and conversion to Catholicism. For Day, she was faced with a decision; she could either convert and become a Catholic, or she could remain with her husband. Day chose to convert and Forster left her (Day, 148). However, it was through this conversion that Day was able to find two forms of love. She had found love in her daughter and in God, and Dorothy Day was no longer lonely. She speaks of her love of Christ and of her lack of loneliness

as “I loved, ... I wanted to be united to my love... I loved the Church for Christ made visible.” (Day, 149) Afterward, Day began publishing for Catholic magazines. Dorothy Day had just begun her life without loneliness, leading to her meeting of Peter, a man who would influence her outlook on life after his passing.

Day’s loneliness was finally cured after meeting a man named Peter Maurin who went on to found the Catholic Worker Newspaper with her (Day, 169). Dorothy used her Catholic Worker Newspaper to promote anti-statism (opposition to state intervention), anti-militarism, communitarianism (emphasizes the importance of the family unit), and Catholic social teachings (Day, 175). The newspaper later went on to form a house of hospitality that aimed to serve the poor around the country (Day, 224). Day’s work with the newspaper and Peter Maurin emphasized her growth as a Catholic and derivation from her long loneliness.

On the contrary, it could be contrived that Dorothy was never lonely at all. She did not need religion to cure her loneliness. Dorothy wasn’t lonely that much in her life. She had a family and a baby brother whom she loved deeply. She even goes on to describe her love for him in the following quote: “...the very hardship of taking care of him, the hours I put in with him, made me love him the more.” (Day, 31) Later she even goes on to have her own child whom she loves very much named Tamar. “When I left Tamar that afternoon...I never was so unhappy, never felt so great a sense of loneliness.” (Day, 239) How is it that Day can feel lonely when she has such a deep love for her child and her brother? She is not at all lonely in the conventional sense throughout the novel.

Day’s novel is very well written and is a good account of her life. However, it is in my personal opinion that the book is not designed for younger audiences. It is of the publisher’s and

my own shortcomings that the book simply does not appeal to a younger demographic. I found very little interest in reading the novel despite that it was well written and organized. I will admit though that my interests stray away from social or religious activism and lean more towards the sciences and mathematics. I love Elon Musk's biography because it fits this category, but I struggle to find interest in Day's autobiography. I believe that since the novel is directed towards a more mature audience, I will grow to appreciate it more as I age.

I will admit, this novel did not change my perspective on religion in America. This is probably because I already had prior knowledge of Dorothy Day from AP US History in high school. It is interesting however how much emphasis she put on her family. It makes it very clear how important the idea of the family was during Dorothy Day's life. It is imperative to note, though, that Dorothy Day's newspaper allowed her to establish a social welfare group that was previously unprecedented in modern America. This aided the poor and led to social programs in the US, something we need more of today.