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DOROTHY DAY, WELFARE REFORM, AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

HARRY MURRAY*

INTRODUCTION

The 1930s and 1940s were the time of the origin of the welfare program that was abolished in 1996. This article will reflect on this time through the lens of an unusual woman, Dorothy Day, who was the founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, and who was recently proposed for sainthood by Cardinal John O'Connor.

"Welfare reform" advocates invoke a language reminiscent of Day in describing their program. "Personal responsibility," a favorite term of Day's publication, *The Catholic Worker*, is in the title of the Act. Further, the "reform's" devolution of power from the federal to the state governments mirrors both Day's criticisms of "Holy Mother State" and her support for the principle that charitable functions should be performed at the most feasible local level of society.

The Catholic Worker has always advocated personal responsibility rather than government programs as the way for Catholics to share their resources with poor neighbors. In *The Long Loneliness*, Day reconstructed an early conversation with Peter Maurin about these issues:

"That is why people prefer going on relief, getting aid from the state," I told him. "They prefer that to taking aid from their family. It isn't any too easy . . . to be chided by your family for being a failure. People who are out of work are always considered failures. They prefer the large bounty of the great, impersonal mother, the state."

But the fact remained, he always reminded me, no matter what people's preferences, that we are our brother's keeper, and the unit of society is the family; that we must have a sense of per-

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sonal responsibility to take care of our own, and our neighbor, at a personal sacrifice. . . . "It is not the function of the state to enter into these realms. Only in times of great crisis, like floods, hurricane, earthquake or drought, does public authority come in. Charity is personal. . . ." He admitted we were in a crisis then, but he wanted none of state relief.¹

Thus, Day's *The Catholic Worker* stood for personal action and against entitlement, much like many advocates of contemporary welfare reform.

Despite these apparent similarities, the spirit of today's welfare reformers is inconsistent with that of Day and the Catholic Worker movement. Since the founding of the movement, its members have accompanied poor persons to welfare offices, advocating for them with the welfare bureaucracy. Regardless of similarities in language between Catholic Workers and contemporary advocates of welfare reform, the mean-spiritedness lurking beneath the glibly altruistic pronouncements of welfare reformers is irreconcilable with the gentle personalism of the Catholic Worker movement.

To understand this divergence between Day and modern welfare reformers, one should review Day's writings to recall her views on welfare. Articles in *The Catholic Worker* are more spontaneous than the retrospective accounts in her autobiographies. Since, however, many of the articles were not signed, it is impossible to know for certain which were authored by Day.

I. DOROTHY DAY'S VIEWS ON WELFARE

Day's views on welfare in the 1930s and 1940s are particularly relevant to the 1990s. *The Catholic Worker's* first issue was published in May, 1933, at the depths of the Great Depression, just two months after Franklin D. Roosevelt ("FDR") assumed the Presidency. This was two years before the Social Security Act created the Aid to Dependent Children program, abolished by President Clinton in 1996. The early issues of *The Catholic Worker* span the period during which the old state and local relief systems were transformed into a federally subsidized welfare program, almost the reverse of the devolution of the welfare system to the states involved in today's "welfare reform."

¹ DOROTHY DAY, *THE LONG LONELINESS: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DOROTHY DAY* 179-80 (1952).

Despite the enormous long-term impact of the Social Security Act, *The Catholic Worker* virtually ignored it. There seems to be only one reference in *The Catholic Worker* to the social security legislation prior to 1944. Day's first extensive discussion of the New Deal welfare system appeared in February 1945. It was an elaboration of a rather controversial article she had published just prior to the 1944 presidential elections.

A. *Dorothy Day's Criticisms of Welfare*

In the 1930s, *The Catholic Worker* contained harsh criticisms of state and local home relief programs, though some support was expressed for federal efforts to raise relief standards. Day's criticisms of these relief programs did not have to do with the creation of "dependency" or destroying work habits. Rather, *The Catholic Worker* criticized the inadequacy of the benefits and the degradation imposed on recipients. A 1933 article by "FP" noted that in Mississippi, "families of five persons were being allowed as little as \$3.85 a month from relief funds," and argued for increased federal aid.² Benefits were still pitifully low in 1935, not only in quantity, as documented by Thomas Barry,³ but also in quality, as documented (perhaps) by Day:

In order to *prevent interference with private trade*, enough food is given to persons on the relief rolls "to keep them alive and in reasonable health, but not what they would have under normal circumstances," says New York Welfare Commissioner Hodson. . . .

. . . [O]ut in Toledo, the jobless complained that the canned meat given to them by the relief office was bad, and their children had been made ill by it. The local authorities tried it on mice, with such dire results that they immediately reported to Washington, from whence the meat came, that it was, indeed, *very bad*. The U.S. Department of Agriculture then re-tested the meat, this time on cats. The cats ate the meat and lived, so Toledo was ordered to continue using it on relief families. Moreover, the Federal investigators who visited the children made sick by the meat found that it really wasn't the meat, so

² F.P., *Families of Five Are Given \$3.85 a Month Relief*, CATH. WORKER, Nov. 1933, at 2.

³ See Thomas Barry, *Relief*, CATH. WORKER, June 1935, at 6.

much as the fact that the children were undernourished anyway. So why blame the relief?⁴

The Catholic Worker criticized the many ways in which welfare degraded its clients. Furthering her criticism of relief programs, Day also charged that the advocacy of birth control by relief officials was a form of eugenics: "Now that the PWA has failed to make any appreciable dent in the number on government doles, the next step seems to be to see that such 'social undesirables' at least don't reproduce their kind."⁵

Articles by Herman Hergenhan and Ben Joe Labray vividly denounced the way men were treated at the City's Municipal Lodging House. Day quoted Louis Ward, who bemoaned the fact that the poor are made to sit "for endless hours on the benches of some welfare agency to be subjected to a third degree on their personal lives, treated as crooks and investigated to the point of criminal persecution."⁶ Day even viewed welfare's demands for documentation as humiliating, expressing a viewpoint that we might do well to reflect upon in our contemporary culture of identification and surveillance:

One poor fellow came in from jail where he had been for ninety days for fighting with his boss who had fired him off a WPA job. He was getting back to work again, a blacksmith's job, and while he was talking to us he was showing us papers, cards, documents of all kinds in his pockets. And we thought, Here we are becoming a country where it is necessary to have "papers." A man must show where he lived, where he worked. He must identify himself. He must show, even, that he was born. Europe is used to regulations and registerings and everybody must have papers of one kind or another, but we were free up to this time of the bureaucracy of the old countries.⁷

This personal degradation inflicted upon the poor by governmental bureaucracies was sharply criticized by *The Catholic Worker* not only for its direct humiliation of recipients, but also for the lingering adverse consequences of that humiliation. In an

⁴ *Just Enough Food for Life, Says "Welfare" Man: Cabbage Comedy and Meat Masquerade for Unemployed*, CATH. WORKER, Jan. 1935, at 5.

⁵ Dorothy Day, *Relief and Birth Control*, CATH. WORKER, Jan. 1935, at 3.

⁶ Dorothy Day, *Catholic Worker Ideas on Hospitality*, CATH. WORKER, May 1940, at 10, available at <<http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=-358>>.

⁷ Dorothy Day, *Distinguished Visitors Mark Past Month: Day After Day*, CATH. WORKER, Apr. 1938, at 1.

emotional 1938 article, Day traced the roots of violence to this degradation of persons by the state's welfare bureaucracy, as well as by corporations:

During the month of February a desperate relief client ended his own life and another ended the life of the official entrusted with the care of the poor. "Nothing can excuse their acts"; we can hear from some enlightened and horrified watchers of the class war that is waged all-around us. We won't disagree, it isn't in our hearts to argue the matter. But we can understand the agony that led to these acts.

In Hoboken, . . . a hard-bitten Overseer of the Poor, holding on to the standards of former years, did what he thought to be his duty. Hoboken was always a prosperous city. . . . And among the hard working German population, poverty was considered a result of shiftlessness. . . . So the Overseer of the Poor had the distasteful job of dealing with a class considered as pariah. Hoboken kept the same Overseer right through the depression. . . .

Joseph Scutellero, was a carpenter. Victim of the failings of a vicious capitalist system, he had seen his family sink lower and lower. He had once been prosperous. Had held public office. But now, he had to listen to Harry Barck [the overseer] tell him when he complained that his lights were about to be turned off, "Use candles." It was as nothing to the Overseer. It was the climax of everything to the carpenter. [Joseph] lunged forward with a sharp weapon, and the Overseer was a victim [sic] of the capitalist system. The remark was a casual one, probably did not even express the Overseer's real feelings, but Scutellero saw it in years of privation for his family, scores of humiliating episodes of the same character, days of hunger and nights of worryful waking, the hundreds of little things that finally lead to unpremeditated but unfortunate results.⁸

After describing Michael O'Sullivan, a Brooklyn Edison employee who committed suicide after being fired for union activity, she concluded:

We hesitate to pass judgment on poor Harry Barck. Poor, miserable, uninformed individual, he acted because he knew no better. He was not essentially bad. But we do pass judgment upon Brooklyn Edison Company. The corporation IS essentially evil. It is organized for the purpose it accomplished in killing Mi-

⁸ Dorothy Day, *Killing and Suicide Mark Poverty Scene: Victim of Poor Relief System Kills*, CATH. WORKER, Mar. 1938, at 2.

chael O'Sullivan. And the men who run it are not the poor, ward-heeling wretches like Barck; they are educated, efficient business men.

Some of them, we are sorry to say, are Catholics.⁹

B. *Personal Responsibility in Welfare*

Day called on people to exercise personal responsibility by helping the poor, by stepping in where government programs failed. "[T]he ideal is personal responsibility. When we succeed in persuading our readers to take the homeless into their homes, having a Christ room in the house as St. Jerome said, then we will be known as Christians because of the way we love one another."¹⁰ She held up the Mormon system of relief as an example for Catholics to follow, declaring, "Mormons are personalists!"¹¹ She applauded the fact that their approach involved voluntary work by those in need and was run by the Church with no government aid.

Across the country, Catholic workers demonstrably assumed such personal responsibility. One instance was in response to the plight of Milwaukee workers when relief to transients was halted in the winter of 1937. After the cutoff of federal and state aid, the police began a systematic round-up of "non-resident unemployed, locking up those with criminal records and compelling the others to leave town."¹² The Catholic Workers of Milwaukee provided a "shelter" house, which served as a night-time shelter to transients and "present[ed] personal protests to [the] government."¹³

C. *Day's View of the Government's Role in Welfare*

Day insisted on calling on the government, as well as Christians, to take greater responsibility for the poor. Her account in *The Long Loneliness* of the 1932 march by the unemployed and the poor in Washington, D.C., which she attended just before

⁹ *Id.* at 7.

¹⁰ Dorothy Day, *Of Finances and Personal Initiative: Day After Day*, CATH. WORKER, Feb. 1938, at 1.

¹¹ Dorothy Day, *Mormons Relieve Brothers Without State Assistance: Teach Catholics Lesson in Personalist Way to Help Poor*, CATH. WORKER, Nov. 1936, at 1.

¹² *Poor Flock to Milwaukee C.W.*, CATH. WORKER, Dec. 1937, at 3.

¹³ *Id.*

meeting Peter Maurin, indicates her openness to government action:

The demands of the marchers were for social legislation, for unemployment insurance, for old-age pensions, for relief for mothers and children, for work. . . .

The years have passed, and most of the legislation called for by those workers is on the books now. I wonder how many realize just how much they owe the hunger marchers¹⁴

The advocacy of personal responsibility and government relief programs may seem inconsistent, but one incident shows how Day combined the two. On a visit with the Southern Tenant Farmers Union in Arkansas in February 1936, she witnessed appalling destitution at an encampment of homeless sharecroppers and immediately telegraphed Eleanor Roosevelt:

To the credit of Mrs. Roosevelt, be it said that she responded immediately. She did not take my word for it, but got in touch with the Governor of the State at once. Governor Futrell and his entourage immediately proceeded to the road encampment and looked over the situation.

And they found nothing wrong! They reported to the press that the group comprised a happy-go-lucky colony who refused to work They mentioned their investigation was the result of a "Catholic woman's report to Mrs. Roosevelt."¹⁵

This attempt symbolizes Day's belief that government programs have potential to aid the needy. In fact, *The Catholic Worker* supported many aspects of the New Deal, though it was repeatedly critical of the racial discrimination it saw in its programs. For example, in contrast to its virtual silence about the Social Security Act, *The Catholic Worker* ran numerous articles about the National Recovery Administration ("NRA") (which contained guarantees of rights for unions) during its brief existence. A 1933 article stated: "[W]e become more and more enthusiastic about the NRA."¹⁶ A later piece sadly announced the demise of the NRA in 1935, commenting: "The Communist Party and big

¹⁴ DAY, *supra* note 1, at 166.

¹⁵ Dorothy Day, *Masked Men Plough Under Poor—Families Starve in Arkansas*, CATH. WORKER, Apr. 1936, at 2.

¹⁶ NRA, CATH. WORKER, Sept. 1933, at 6.

business are jubilant over the finish of the NRA, and the question of the day is "What next?"¹⁷

With sarcasm, *The Catholic Worker* decried corporate successes resulting from the demise of New Deal programs:

Eugene Grace, who heads the Steel Institute, attacked . . . the Social Security Bill . . . [but] Mr. Grace received a \$1,600,000 bonus in 1929. . . .

"It is about time we had a little old-fashioned economy, that we encouraged efficiency and thrift," he said. "The steel industry has taken a vital interest in providing for the economic security of its employees."¹⁸

When one of the editors of *The Catholic Worker* passed through some of the steel towns in Pennsylvania, his description of the industry was quite different from Mr. Grace's portrayal: "[A]nd we would advise any of our readers passing that way to notice these homes of steel workers. Rows upon rows of black, begrimed houses, mud streets, hovels fit for animals."¹⁹

Day's attitude toward FDR and the New Deal prior to the war was revealed in her 1939 open letter to the President, which criticized his foreign policy as the United States moved toward war: "It is a painful duty to criticize one whom we have learned to love for his sense of charity and whom we have learned to respect for the wonderful way in which he handled the internal affairs of our country during its most trying economic years."²⁰

Her attitude toward FDR appeared to change dramatically for the worse after the entrance of the nation into World War II, perhaps also influenced by the far more conservative direction the New Deal had taken by the late 1930s. In the October 1944 issue of *The Catholic Worker*, just before the presidential election, Day published an article entitled *Cake and Circuses*:

Everybody is talking about the election, so in the light of the folly of the cross, we would like to make our predictions. Roosevelt will be elected on the platform of *Cake and Circuses*. During the depression years the relief checks flowed in, and now during the war years the government checks come regularly on

¹⁷ *Capital and Marxists Applaud as Supreme Court Kills New Deal; Strikes and Violence Imminent*, CATH. WORKER, June 1935, at 1.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ Editorial, *Open Letter to the President on Policy*, CATH. WORKER, Feb. 1939, at 1.

the first of every month. The millions who are thus bought and paid for do not want any change. They are afraid of change. Mothers of six children cash their \$180 stipend every month and go on a binge of department-store [sic] buying, movies, cigarettes [sic], candies, radio, and even sometimes a car. It's amazing how much you can get in the way of luxury if you just do without the necessities. And start to run up debts. Housing is lousy anyway—you can't rent or buy a decent place for love or money, so you might as well spend your money and have a good time. Every radio, every magazine, every newspaper is anxious to tell you of all the things you need and can now obtain. "If the war lasts another year If my husband doesn't get another furlough and I don't have another baby next year, I can And then on the other hand if I do, I'll get another twenty a month!" Untold wealth. It is no longer bread and circuses—it is cake and circuses.²¹

Apparently the article aroused protest, at least to the extent that in the February 1945 issue, Day wrote a much more detailed column in response to the letters she had received:

"Cake and Circuses," which I wrote for the October issue just before the election, called forth many protests. "That you personally could have had part in it or sanctioned it, I cannot believe," one reader writes. "That the CATHOLIC WORKER should have been the instrumentality of its dissemination troubles me"

. . . .

"That mothers of six children can 'go on a binge of department store buying, . . .' all on one hundred and eighty dollars a month, strikes me as ridiculous; certainly the six children and their mother will not live very long 'if they just do without the necessities' From the former heads of the A.M.A. (does he mean the American Manufacturers' Association?) such matter would not seem strange, but it is almost unthinkable coming from a group concerned with the welfare of the poor and disadvantaged. . . ."

First of all, let me apologize for the brevity of the editorial We owe it to our kind and charitable readers to try to explain at greater length what in our stupidity, and presumption, we wrote so briefly.²²

²¹ *Cake and Circuses*, CATH. WORKER, Oct. 1944, at 1 (omissions in original).

²² Dorothy Day, *More About Holy Poverty, Which is Voluntary Poverty*, CATH. WORKER, Feb. 1945, at 1.

Her response is worth quoting in detail, since it is one of the most systematic statements she ever made on welfare. She began by denouncing the Social Security Act both for destroying the sense of personal responsibility for the poor and for creating "welfare dependency."

We believe that social security legislation, now hailed as a great victory for the poor and for the worker, is a great defeat for Christianity. . . . It is an acceptance of Cain's statement, on the part of the employer. "Am I my brother's keeper?" Since the employer can never be trusted to give a family wage, nor take care of the worker as he takes care of his machine when it is idle, the state must enter in and compel help on his part. Of course, economists say that business cannot afford to act on Christian principles. . . . In other words, business has made a mess of things, and the state has had to enter in to rescue the worker from starvation.

. . . .

But we in our generation have more and more come to consider the state as bountiful Uncle Sam. "Uncle Sam will take care of it all. The race question, the labor question, the unemployment question." We will all be registered and tabulated and employed or put on a dole, and shunted from clinic to birth control clinic.²³

She then moved into what begins as a critique of the "culture of poverty," but evolves into a condemnation of consumerism:

Of course, it is the very circumstances of our lives that lead us to write as we do. . . . We live with the poor, we are of the poor. We know their virtues and their vices. We know their generosity and their extravagances. Their very generosity makes them extravagant and improvident.

Please do not think we are blaming the poor when we talk so frankly about their failings, which they, too, will acknowledge. They do not want people to be sentimental about them. They do not want people to idealize them. . . .

We are not being uncharitable to them when we talk about a binge of department store buying. Did I say that? What I meant was installment-plan buying. Who do we blame for such installment-plan buying, for the movies, cigarettes, radio, magazines, for all the trash, the worthless trash with which they try to comfort their poor hard lives. We do not blame

²³ *Id.*

them, God knows. We blame the advertising men, the household loan companies, the cheap stores, the radio, the movies.

The people are seduced, robbed, stupefied, drugged and demoralized daily. They are robbed just as surely as though those flat pocketbooks of those shabby mothers were pilfered of the pennies, dimes and nickels by sneak thieves.

The people say proudly, "We got it coming to us. We pay taxes. This ain't charity. It's justice." And they hug their sweets, their liquor, their movies, their radio, their dissipations to them, in a vain endeavor to find forgetfulness of the cold and ugliness, the leaking plumbing, . . . the ugly housing, the hideous job

....

Some of our readers wrote indignantly, "Do you think \$180 is exorbitant for the government to pay? They should be paying much more. I do not see how they can live on that, prices being what they are."

What I tried to say was that that puny, insignificant \$180 which looms tremendous in the minds of the poor, was not enough for essentials. Could they rent a decent house to live in? Or could they buy a house? . . .

....

Yes, the poor have been robbed of the good material things of life, and when they asked for bread, they have been given a stone. They have been robbed of a philosophy of labor. . . . They have been robbed of their skills and made tenders of the machine. They cannot cook; they have been given the can. They cannot spin or weave or sew—they are urged to go to Klein's and get a dress for four ninety-eight.

Bought and paid for? Yes, bought and paid for by their own most generous feelings of gratitude. Of course, they feel grateful . . . to the good, kind government that takes care of them. . . . The government gives its paternal care and the people give their support to that particular governing body. Naturally they do not want change.²⁴

She then invoked two notions from the Papal Social Encyclicals, explaining the principle of subsidiarity and the key role of the family as the basic unit of society:

²⁴ *Id.*

But who is to take care of them if the government does not? That is a question in a day when all are turning to the state, and when people are asking, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Certainly we all should know that it is not the province of the government to practice the works of mercy, or go in for insurance. Smaller bodies, decentralized groups, should be caring for all such needs.

The first unit of society is the family. The family should look after its own and, in addition, as the early fathers said, "every home should have a Christ room in it, so that hospitality may be practiced." . . . "If your brother is hungry, it is your responsibility."²⁵

Finally, she turned to the question of voluntary poverty:

The poor mother of six cannot reject the one hundred and eighty dollars. She cannot say, "Keep your miserable, puny, insufficient \$180 which you give men [sic] in exchange for my husband.' She has poverty, involuntary poverty.

But we must reject it. We must keep on talking about voluntary poverty, and holy poverty, because it is only if we can consent to strip ourselves that we can put on Christ. It is only if we love poverty that we are going to have the means to help others. If we love poverty we will be free to give up a job, to speak when we feel it would be wrong to be silent. . . . We can only embrace voluntary poverty in the light of faith.²⁶

Day elaborated what she meant by embracing voluntary poverty, in her article entitled *Poverty and Pacifism*.

Poverty will result from our examining our conscience as to jobs. . . .

If these jobs do not contribute to the common good, we pray God for the grace to give them up. Have they to do with shelter, food, clothing? Have they to do with the works of mercy? Fr. Tompkins says that everyone should be able to place his job in the category of the works of mercy.

This would exclude jobs in advertising, which only increases people's useless desires. In insurance companies and banks, which are known to exploit the poor of this country and of others. Banks and insurance companies have taken over land, built up farms, ranches, plantations, . . . and have dispossessed the poor. Loan and finance companies have further defrauded

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ *Id.*

him. Movies, radio have further enslaved him. So that he has no time nor thought to give to his life, either of soul or body. Whatever has contributed to his misery and degradation may be considered a bad job.

....

If we examine our conscience in this way we would soon be driven into manual labor, into humble work

Poverty means non-participation. It means what Peter [Maurin] calls regional living. This means fasting from tea, coffee, cocoa, grapefruit, pineapple, etc., from things not grown in the region in which one lives. . . .²⁷

She described conditions on one farm she had seen and concluded: "We ought not to eat food produced under such conditions."²⁸

II. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN DAY'S VISION OF WELFARE AND CONTEMPORARY WELFARE REFORM

These articles crystallize the earlier themes. Taken together, they lead to two points that delineate the difference between Day's approach and that of 1990s "welfare reformers."

A. *Corporate Capitalism's Role in Welfare*

Most crucial to *The Catholic Worker's* critique of welfare is a profound critique of corporate capitalism. To Day, capitalism failed to provide enough jobs at decent wages, and the jobs it did provide were not true "work," because they did not contribute to the Common Good and the service of others. Corporate capitalism created false needs in people, formulating a consumer mentality that is the real cause of "welfare dependency."

This distrust also overlapped into her feelings about government charity. Day argued that government welfare would undermine the responsibility of both the recipient and the employer. Specifically, she believed that it would absolve the employer of the responsibility to pay a living wage to his or her employees and benefit the corporate world to the destruction of the poor.

Current welfare reform, in contrast to these beliefs, is based on an uncritical acceptance of the capitalist labor market. The

²⁷ Dorothy Day, *Poverty and Pacifism*, CATH. WORKER, Dec. 1944, at 1.

²⁸ *Id.*

current bureaucratic focus is to move people from welfare to jobs, but not to challenge the type of jobs the market provides, or the greed, de-industrialization, union bashing, downsizing, and globalization present. Day's voluntary poverty was her ultimate repudiation of capitalism and consumerism; capitalism remains the cold heart spurring today's "reforms."

B. *Personal Responsibility*

Although both Day and the advocates of "welfare reform" use the term "personal responsibility," they mean very different things by the term. The personal responsibility of "welfare reformers" is imposed on the poor in a way that relieves the middle and upper classes of the duties *The Catholic Worker* emphasized. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 emphasizes "responsible fatherhood and motherhood"²⁹ and "male responsibility, including statutory rape culpability."³⁰ The National Governors Association ("NGA") includes the responsibility to get a job in its description of personal responsibility:

States are sending a clear message about work and responsibility. The most pervasive message is that work is valuable and that all adults receiving assistance have an obligation to work in some capacity. States report that past assumptions about who can work are being overturned as individuals who were considered unemployable are going to work. States also are communicating strong messages about the importance of behaving responsibly, especially regarding forming families and meeting parental responsibilities related to child support, keeping children in school, and getting children immunized. In addition, states are lining up incentives, supports, and sanctions to reinforce these messages³¹

Thus, the personal responsibility of "welfare reform" might better be termed "individual responsibility" or the responsibility to provide for oneself and one's family. This type of responsibility is analogous to the "rugged individualism" condemned by *The*

²⁹ Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-193 § 101(3), 110 Stat. 2105, 2110.

³⁰ *Id.* § 101(7), 110 Stat. at 2111.

³¹ National Governors' Association, *Nation's Governors Transform Welfare* (Feb. 21, 1998) (visited Nov. 10, 1999) <<http://www.nga.org/Releases/PR21Feb98Welfare.htm>>.

Catholic Worker. If the poor are held to this standard, Day would suggest, then others have no personal responsibility to aid them.

For Day, on the other hand, the moral scope of personal responsibility extends beyond the family to include the stranger and all of humanity. To her, we are all brothers and sisters, all members of one body, and while we have a responsibility to perform work that benefits others, this is responsibility not equated with getting a job in the capitalist labor market. Careful raising of one's children, for example, is more truly work than many of the jobs available in the capitalist job market.

Day's view of personal responsibility is opposite of that of contemporary "welfare reform." While her vision involved a community of charity, the present program places all the responsibility on the poor, relieving the upper classes of the burden of personal responsibility that Day would place upon them.

Consistent with their very different vision of personal responsibility, "welfare reformers" believe that it is something that can be achieved through incentives, penalties, and contracts. The NGA stated:

To achieve an appropriate balance between supports and sanctions, many state welfare reform initiatives center on personal responsibility plans or contracts. These contracts identify the participants' responsibilities—such as seeking and accepting work, immunizing their children, or cooperating with child support enforcement—and the consequences of not fulfilling those responsibilities.³²

For example, North Carolina's Work First program conceives of personal responsibility as something that can be contracted for:

[All w]elfare recipients must sign a mutual responsibility contract detailing their plan for moving off welfare. They must assume responsibility for their families, [such as making sure their children attend school regularly and get immunizations and health check-ups]. If they don't sign, they won't get benefits. If they break the contract, their benefits will be cut. . . .³³

For Day, personal responsibility was not something that could be contracted—one can achieve personal responsibility only

³² *Welfare Reform*, GOVERNORS' BULLETIN, Aug. 18, 1997, available in <www.nga.org/Welfare/WelfareDocs/bul-970818.htm>.

³³ North Carolina Dep't of Health & Human Servs., *North Carolina's Work First* (visited Nov. 10, 1999) <www.dhhs.state.nc.us/docs/factsh.htm>.

if one is allowed the freedom to exercise personal responsibility. Reacting to a calculated system of rewards and punishments is the antithesis of personal responsibility, because personal responsibility can develop only under conditions of freedom.

CONCLUSION

In sum, *The Catholic Worker* calls for a revolution, a nonviolent transformation of heart and social structure. It does not advocate systems like today's, which are based upon misconceptions of personal responsibility, and which leave the poor at the mercy of corporate capitalism. Day was not an apologist for welfare, but neither would she be an apologist for contemporary "welfare reform."