

Dorothy Day: Love in Action by Patrick Jordan. Collegeville, USA: Liturgical Press, 2015. 132 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8146-3703-6

Prophets, by definition, make us uncomfortable. Their acute insight into the pitfalls of human society, and their incessant clarion calls to justice, make us squirm in our comfortable pews. Dorothy Day (1897-1980), the prickly American prophetess who, along with Peter Maurin, founded the Catholic Worker movement, elicited, for many, this experience of prophetic discomfort. It is into this uneasy space that Patrick Jordan ventures with his pocket biography, *Dorothy Day: Love in Action*.

Jordan is well-placed to write such a biography - he lived and worked with Day during the last 12 years of her life. His writing is steeped in the ethos of the Catholic Worker and filled with stories of direct encounters with the force for good that was Dorothy Day. Perhaps in honour of Day's own journalistic background, the biography adopts a newsy and accessible style that will engage a broad readership. For those unfamiliar with Dorothy Day, it will serve as a gateway into the life of this remarkable woman. For those who already know her well, this biography provides a depth of insight into her psychological and spiritual life that only a friend could provide. All this is done without falling into the trap of hagiography, respecting the paradoxical and complex nature of Dorothy's personality.

Jordan's contribution is part of Liturgical Press's *People of God* series, which aims to provide "inspiring biographies for the general reader" (according to <https://www.litpress.org/Category/S-POG/People-of-God>). As such, it is not meant to be a scholarly text. The author's familiarity with English literature nevertheless seeps through; for example, Day's own life is reflected in light of the writings of George Eliot, among others. Careful use is also made of Dorothy's own writings (both personal and published) and commentaries from others who knew her well.

Love in Action works as a psychological and spiritual memoir of Day. It begins with an overview of her personality and many conflicting traits. Fiery and reserved, sensual and pious, angry and humble, compassionate and short-tempered, the list of her characteristics portrays a very human saint, full of paradox and passionate love for God and for God's most vulnerable people. Jordan then continues with a brief chronology of what he calls "Dorothy's peripatetic life" (p. 13). This section reveals a woman responding to her times, impacted by such diverse events as the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, two World Wars, the Great Depression, Vatican II, and the Vietnam War. Once these basics are covered, Jordan then moves into more thematic reflections on Dorothy Day's life - her morality and radicalism, her conversion experiences, her guiding principles and personalism, her relationship with the Roman Catholic Church and her voluntary poverty, her struggles with depression and her hard-won ability to embrace delight. Each well-crafted segment serves to whet the appetite for a more in-depth study.

The volume unavoidably suffers from its brevity. As much is said by what is left out about Day's life as by what is included. For example, very little is revealed about her family

relationships, both with her family of origin and with her daughter, Tamar. As a reader who is inspired by Day's prophetic stance, I am left curious about the impact of her radical choices on these key relationships. Only near the end of the volume does Jordan allude to some difficulties, later resolved, with her father. Some of Day's grandchildren are quoted throughout the text, but there is no explicit focus on the nature of these relationships. Despite Day's own candid revelations about her tumultuous early life – revelations she made in her only novel, *The Eleventh Virgin*, and which she later regretted – very little of Jordan's biography deals with relationships beyond those with the Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker.

Much ink has already been spilled over Dorothy Day. She wrote her own autobiography, *The Long Loneliness*, in 1952. Several other biographers have already memorialized her (many of these are listed in Jordan's secondary sources). The value of *Love in Action* for the engaged scholar comes from its effective portrayal of how faith and social action intersect and nurture each other in the life of one, very real, woman. While Day would not have called herself a scholar, her biography fits within a journal on engaged scholarship because of the impact she has had on how Catholics, particularly American Catholics, perceive their call to social engagement. Her life's work broke down the barriers between faith and action and thereby can provide a template for breaking down similar barriers between the scholarship and social engagement.

Day's sacrifices served to fuel her commitment to both her faith and the people her faith called her to serve. Her thirst for social justice ultimately led her to the foot of the cross and a spirituality that could sustain her throughout her loneliest and most challenging of days. If Dorothy Day makes us uneasy, it is because she challenges us to step into the same uneasy commitments she herself made: to embrace those living in poverty in a real way, to stand for peace and justice, and, thus, to be faithful to the Gospel.

Dorothy Day: Love in Action is an inspiring peek into the life of a prophetic and saintly woman. Jordan both respects her complexity and highlights her contributions to American society and global Catholic thought. He wades into uncomfortable waters and allows Day to emerge in all her disruptive glory, the type of disruption that only happens when radical truth is told.

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