

THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE:  
REFLECTIONS ON GREAT AMERICAN CATHOLICS: PART VI  
WITH LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL:  
AL SMITH AND DOROTHY DAY

I. Al Smith rose from very modest circumstances to the governorship of New York and represented the merger American optimism, hard work, and appreciation for common folk with Catholic social values of charity, fraternity among social classes, and dedication to the public good. He showed how a good Catholic serves his nation well by being true to his faith.

A. Raised in modest circumstances, Al Smith's energy and optimism, guided by his family's Catholic faith, soon made their mark.

1. Born in 1873, Alfred Emmanuel Smith was the son of a trucker, also named Alfred Smith and his wife Catherine. The couple later had a daughter.

2. Al Smith was raised in a tenement near Brooklyn Bridge, with his father earning a modest salary and sending him to the local Catholic school. Even early on Al Smith worked as a newspaper boy to support the family. He once said, "The Brooklyn Bridge and I grew up together."

3. When Al Smith Jr. was 13, his father died and he left schooling to support the family, first working for an oil company. His education ended at that point and he worked 12 hours a day at the local fish market to earn \$15 a week, which was the wage for a grown man at that time. He later said that his higher education came from meeting people in the fish market

B. In 1900, Al Smith married another faithful Catholic Catherine Dunn. They had five children, two daughters and three sons, one of whom would also go on in New York politics.

C. As a young man, Al Smith rose up quickly in New York City government.

1. He was involved in politics joined civil service, becoming a clerk for the Commissioner of Juries at age 22.

2. By his mid-20s he was elected to the state Assembly and was known for the dedication to informing himself about the bills, including reading the entire 300 page appropriations bill. He was also apparently very personable and witty. His talents brought him election as Speaker of the state House in 1913 at the age of 40.

3. He was vice chairman of the committee that investigated the Triangle factory fire of 1911, which killed 146 employees, largely because crucial doors were locked and the fire escape collapsed. Building upon this experience, Al Smith then spearheaded a bipartisan effort to draft new labor laws that would provide for the safety and dignity of workers.

4. Al Smith was also very active in the commission that was drafting a modernization of the state constitution. During this bipartisan effort Elihu Root, the dean of the Republican delegation said "Of all the men in the convention, Mr. Smith is the best informed man on the business of the State of New York."

6. In 1915, Al Smith was then appointed the Sherriff of New York County, which commanded a substantial salary.

7. During the height of World War I (then called simply The Great War), Al Smith supported the war effort, but also the freedom of speech for dissidents.

D. Al Smith was elected governor of New York in 1918 and then served four terms.

1. Al Smith won a surprise election in 1918 against a popular two term incumbent Charles Whitman.

2. As governor, he supported the Nineteenth Amendment for woman's suffrage. He wanted a popular vote of the Eighteenth Amendment, which instituted Prohibition, but the legislature passed it without a referendum. He then proposed the first state income tax to make up for the lost alcohol taxes

3. Al Smith also called for higher salaries for teachers, more care for the mentally infirm, child protection laws, and labor laws that improved factory conditions and extended protections for women. On the point of labor protections, he worked with Frances Perkins, who would become Franklin Roosevelt's Labor Secretary and the first female Cabinet member in the federal government.

4. Al Smith also sponsored the first state park system and civil service reforms.

5. There was an increasing opposition between Al Smith and the news magnate William Randolph Hearst. Among other things, Mr. Hearst accused Al Smith of allowing milk prices to be too high. Al Smith argued that the charge was demagoguery since the legislature controlled those prices.

6. Al Smith lost a narrow reelection bid in 1920, a year when the Republican party dominated elections in New York and across the nation. He ran again in 1922, contesting for the Democratic nomination against William Randolph Hearst, who was thought to have a great potential in politics. Al Smith won both the nomination and the general election handily.

7. In his gubernatorial elections, Al Smith's campaigns began using the term "the happy warrior" a phrase recommended by one of his campaign managers Judge Joseph M. Proskauer. The nickname reflected the fact that Mr. Smith was known for his cheerfulness and optimism about the future. He once said, "The American people never carry an umbrella. They prepare to walk in eternal sunshine."

E. Al Smith started running for the presidency in 1924 and stood up for justice and a sense of national unity and fraternity against the divisiveness common at that time.

1. He ran for the Democratic nomination in 1924, with him and William McAdoo, President Wilson's Treasury Secretary, being the main rivals.

- Franklin Roosevelt, then known for his role in New York politics and for being President Woodrow Wilson's Secretary of the Navy, was his campaign manager.

- The rules required a two thirds majority for the nomination. And when the convention began, neither of the candidates had a majority of the delegates, much less the required supermajority.

2. Al Smith fought for a provision in the Democratic platform that would condemn the Klu Klux Klan, which was revived in 1915 and was becoming more popular at the time; for the anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic and anti-minority prejudices were becoming more common during the 1920s. That plank was narrowly defeated, and the KKK was very active in stopping Al Smith from getting the nomination.

3. When it was clear that neither William McAdoo nor Al Smith could get the votes of even half of the delegates, both withdrew of them their candidacies. The delegates then nominated John Davis, a former ambassador to Britain, on the 103<sup>rd</sup> ballot. At the request of Al Smith and others, he joined in the denunciation of the KKK. They also tried to get the Republican President Calvin Coolidge to issue a formal condemnation of the KKK, but as usual he remained silent.

4. The New York Democratic party then re-nominated Al Smith for a third term as governor of New York; and he won a third and then a fourth term in 1926 and

1928. The Republicans often dominated the legislature during this time, but Al Smith was generally able to find middle grounds.

F. Al Smith then ran for the Presidency in 1928 and was nominated, but lost the general election to Herbert Hoover. During the campaign for the nomination, he wrote a classic defense that described how a loyal Catholic is also a good public servant.

1. There was a fair amount of opposition to Al Smith's candidacy, both on the ground that he wanted to end Prohibition, and on the grounds that he was Catholic.
2. When an Episcopalian lawyer named Charles Marshall wrote an open letter to the Atlantic Monthly questioning whether a Catholic could be President, Al Smith wrote a very famous response to the same magazine, describing how he as a good Catholic stood up for all that was great in this nations. That response would be a classic statement of complementarity of Catholicism with patriotism and national service.
  - a. To ground the letter in solid theology and philosophy, Al Smith consulted Fr. Francis Duffy, a priest who had been a highly decorated chaplain in the U.S. Army since World War I.
  - b. Al Smith's argument first appealed to experience and said that never in his public service had there been a conflict between his duties to the country and his duties to the government. He pointed out that no cleric had ever told him how he must vote.
  - c. He then said that, as a Catholic, he had supported both a strong public school system and private schooling to give parents the right to educate their children as they best see fit. For his own family, he exercised that right by having his children in a Catholic school, but he supported other parents who chose public school. In this argument, Al Smith pointed out how his faith led him to greater respect for diversity and for individual and family rights, as opposed to the narrow focus on one form of schooling.
  - d. Al Smith also argued that he had supported programs for the less fortunate and freedom of speech during World War I, once again pointed out that his faith made him more able to sense the rights of others.
  - e. Al Smith then went on to say that the nation was founded upon the Commandments of God. He argued that the Catholic faith, all Christians,

and in fact all traditional religions, likewise agree the fundamental principles of right and wrong, principles upon which this nation was founding. He argued that the antagonism between religions leads many people, especially the young, to abandon all religion. And thus he called for a freedom of faith and cooperation between faiths that has made this nation great.

f. Al Smith then pointed out that the Pope and bishops have authority within the Church over what faithful Catholics should believe. But those conclusions should not bother people other than Catholics because it does not affect them

i. Thus, for example, Charles Marshall had criticized Pope Leo XIII for declaring Anglican orders invalid. Al Smith pointed out that Anglican priests had asked the question and Pope Leo gave an answer that affected only their status in the Church.

ii. He likewise argued that annulments of marriages involving non-Catholics should not concern those who do not believe that Church has authority over such matters.

iii. Overall, he pointed out that Papal authority over Catholics does not mean that it is authority over non-Catholics or over the political sphere.

g. Al Smith then addressed Charles Marshall's argument that Catholic teaching favored toleration of non-Catholics only as a favor or to keep the peace, and that they would not be tolerated otherwise. Once again, he appealed to experience, pointing out that non-Catholics now have freedom in Catholic nations.

- Charles Marshall had pointed out that, in the past, Catholic nations had made Catholicism the official religion, to the detriment of others. But Al Smith pointed out that that different nations have different policies, and that the policies of a bygone era in Catholic countries no longer apply. As he said, this argument about what the official religion should be is now in "the limbo of defunct controversies."

h. He said that, with regard to dealing with a law that required what is forbidden in the Catholic Church, there was no such law, nor would there

be “except on the unthinkable hypothesis that some law were to be passed which violated the common morality of all God-fearing men.” He also said that a member of any faith would face such a conflict if there were an immoral law. For hopefully anyone of any faith would resist a law that he considers immoral on the grounds, which America upholds, that an unjust law is not binding.

i. Al Smith concluded by saying that that the ecclesial authorities have the absolute right to govern the church, and civil authorities to run the government; and the two sides should respect each other.

- Charles Marshall had said that the American bishops had tried to dictate American policies a few years earlier when they encouraged intervention in Mexico after the new government there oppressed the Church.

- Al Smith responded that the U.S. bishops did issue a pastoral letter calling for action, but what the action was would be determined by political judgment. He also said that the American bishops were not simply defended the interests of the Catholic Church, but the interests of liberty. Thus he stated, “I recognize the right of no church to ask armed intervention by this country in the affairs of another merely for the defense of the rights of a church. But I recognize the propriety of Church action to request the good offices of this country to help the oppressed of any land, as those good offices have been so often used for the protection of Protestant missionaries in the Orient and the persecuted Jews of eastern Europe.”

j. Thus, Al Smith defended the consistency of his faith and his public life by appealing to the American values of relying on experience, of respecting diversity and human rights, and of an understanding that these rights and the role of government are themselves based upon the laws of God that are accessible to reason.

3. At the convention, Franklin Roosevelt gave his nominating speech in which he described Al Smith as “the happy warrior of the political battlefield.” The term “happy warrior” then caught on as a common description of Al Smith.

4. Al Smith won the nomination easily, but lost the election to the very popular Herbert Hoover.

G. After the election, he became president of Empire State Inc., which built and managed the Empire State Building. He was also the chairman of the board for New York County Trust Company, which later became Lawyers Trust Company

H. Al Smith and his friend Franklin Roosevelt would clash in subsequent years.

1. Al Smith ran for the Democratic nomination in 1932, but Franklin Roosevelt won. Mr. Smith warned against setting class against class, saying that the emphasis should be more in cooperation between the classes and between government and business.

2. During the 1930s, he became increasingly skeptical of excessive government, criticizing “the cold, clammy hand” of bureaucracy and was skeptical about easy money. In 1934, he helped found the American Liberty League, whose stated goal was “to teach the necessity of respect for the rights of persons and property as fundamental to every form of government...to teach the duty of government, to encourage and protect individual and group initiative and enterprise, to foster the right to work, earn, save and acquire property, and to preserve the ownership and lawful use of property when acquired.”

3. Al Smith also supported the Republican Alf Landon in his 1936 presidential bid against Franklin Roosevelt.

4. Overall, Al Smith had a strong belief in compassion, but also in local presence. He once said, “You take care of you and your family first. Then you go to your neighborhood, and then you spread it on out within the community.”

5. Al Smith remained active in politics, although he did not again run in any election. He was again a delegate to the state constitutional convention in 1938 and worked on housing and transportation issues. Also in 1938, he received the honors of being declared a Knight of St. George and a Papal Chamberlain.

I. Al Smith died in 1944, five months after his wife, after receiving last rites from Archbishop Francis McIntyre of New York. The next year, the Alfred Smith Memorial Foundation began arranging the Al Smith dinners, which is to this day a prominent fundraiser for the support of Catholic charities dedicated to needy children.

J. Overall, Al Smith strongly represented both the Catholic and American values of dedication, hard work, cooperation between political and economic interests, courage in standing up for principles and the notion that any legitimate human law must respect the law of God and the rights He has given.

II. The life of Dorothy Day showed the willingness to overcome social and moral evils, the power of grace and redemption, and the desire to unite people in the common pursuit of human dignity.

A. Dorothy Day was raised in a middle class Episcopalian family that set the stage for a good education and a sense of the faith, helping her to overcome a common prejudice against the Catholic faith.

- 1 She was born in Brooklyn on November 8, 1897 to John and Grace Day, who had three sons and two daughters. Her father was a sports journalist and an Episcopalian, who had rather anti-Catholic views.
- 2 The family lived in Oakland until the San Francisco fire of 1908 destroyed the newspaper her father worked for. But she was impressed by the mutual charity that the community and the family showed in the midst of the crisis.
- 3 The family then moved to Chicago, where her father eventually found a job as the sports editor of a local newspaper. There the Episcopalian pastor convinced her mother to join the choir. Dorothy herself became more interested in the church, reading the Bible and enjoying the liturgies. She also had devout Catholic neighbors, who gave her a good impression of the faith.
- 4 She was also very well read in her youth, engaging a wide range of works from socialists such as Upton Sinclair and Karl Marx to social Darwinists such as Herbert Spencer, to Christian writers such as Fyodor Dostoevsky.
- 5 Dorothy Day was then able to attend the University of Illinois on an academic scholarship for 2 years from 1914-16, living very simply to avoid relying on her family.

B. Dorothy Day then moved to New York and became involved in socialist and pacifist campaigns.

1. She wrote for socialist journals such as The Call and The Masses, but was against any idea of class warfare. When the U.S. entered World War I and censored those opposed to the war, federal agents closed down The Masses; Dorothy Day printed up the last issue as the editors were arrested.



2. In 1917, Dorothy Day herself was arrested for picketing in front of the White House in favor of women's suffrage and was sentenced to 30 days along with other protesters. The protesters went on a hunger strike, and President Wilson soon issued a pardon.
  3. She then moved to Greenwich Village and became friends with a number of socialists and communists.
  4. By this time, Dorothy day had left the Christian faith. She also had several love affairs, one of which resulted in a pregnancy in 1919. Her boyfriend pressured her into having an abortion, and then abandoned her. She described the scene afterward, "I hobbled down the darkened stairwell of the Upper East Side flat in New York City. My steps were unsteady. My left arm held the banister tightly. My right arm clutched my abdomen. It was burning in pain. I walked out onto the street alone in the dark. It was September of 1919. I was just 21 years old and had just aborted my baby." She then described the further sense of abandonment when she realized that her boyfriend had left her once he got what he wanted.
  5. She would later say about that time, "I thought I was a free and emancipated young woman and found out I wasn't at all ... [F]reedom is just a modernity gown, a new trapping that we women affect to capture the man we want."
  6. During all of this time, she often visited Catholic churches and prayed at them, even though she did not yet believe in the faith. At one point in 1922, she had three Catholic roommates and was impressed with their faithfulness and devotion. She also admired the Catholic liturgy and concern for the underdog, calling the Catholic Church "the church of the immigrants, the church of the poor."
  7. During part of this time, she also was a journalist in New Orleans. And when there, she attended evening prayer with Benedictine sisters.
- C. After another pregnancy, Dorothy day began moving to the Catholic faith.
1. In 1924, she began an affair with an activist Foster Batterham, and became pregnant again in 1925. She refused to have another abortion, and in fact was looking more into Catholicism when her daughter Tamar Teresa was born in 1926.

2. Also in 1926, she met Sr. Aloysia of the Sisters of Charity, who gave her instruction in the Catholic faith. In July of 1927, Tamar was baptized and Dorothy herself entered the faith on December 28 of that year. Tama would later marry and have nine children.
  3. After Tamar's baptism, Batterham stopped being her boyfriend, but they remained on good terms. He asked how there can be a God when there is so much cruelty in the world. She asked how there could not be a God when there is so much beauty and goodness among people.
  1. As a Catholic and now separated from Batterham, Dorothy Day became more involved in journalism.
  2. She first worked as a movie writer. But then, when the Great Depression began and opportunities diminished, she moved back to New York and began writing articles for secular and Catholic magazines, including Commonweal.
  3. As the Depression intensified, she admired the social activists, but wondered what she could do.
  4. In December of 1932, she travelled to Washington to cover The Hunger March, in which protesters were calling for more pensions, unemployment insurance and welfare. On December 8, she was praying at the newly built Basilica of National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, which was at the time only at the crypt level. She later said, "I offered up a special prayer, a prayer which came with tears and anguish, that some way would open up for me to use what talents I possessed for my fellow workers, for the poor."
  5. She then met Peter Maurin, who had been a Christian brother and was then working as a French tutor as well as a handyman in New York. He remained an informal scholar who was very well read and interested in social activism.
- D. She and Peter Maurin then started a magazine called The Catholic Worker to increase awareness of the status of those suffering the most.
1. Peter Maurin wanted to call it the Catholic Radical, but the staff understood that Catholic Worker would appeal to Americans much better.
  2. The Paulist press agreed to print the newspapers first edition of 2500 copies for \$87. Dorothy Day had it arranged in an 8 page format. It sold for one cent

per issue and did not have a paid staff. The initial issue said that it was designed to let “those who think there is no hope for the future” know that “the Catholic Church has a social program...there are men of God who are working not only for their spiritual but for their material welfare.”

3. The magazine had at first great success increasing to a circulation of 100,000 by the end of 1933 and to 150,000 by 1938.
  4. It was also the beginning the Catholic Worker movement, which was and is an informal effort to help people in localities by offering homes of hospitality. At first Dorothy Day’s own apartment housed 10 women. Then a group of people bought a house in Greenwich Village to house the homeless. That movement established 33 houses of hospitality in the U.S. to care for the needy, first in New York, and then also in Canada and Great Britain.
  5. There were also attempts at self-supporting farming communities, but they typically did not work out.
  6. The Catholic Worker movement also tried to raise awareness of the suffering of people and did engage in political advocacy. But it avoided any notion of class warfare unlike the Communist journal The Daily Worker. The Daily Worker, like Marx himself, was suspicious of moderate reforms because they tended to prevent a revolution.
  7. The magazine The Catholic Worker, and Dorothy Day individually, supported government programs for the poor, but always emphasized that individual efforts to make worker’s lives better and help the poor were first in priority because they could be based upon the personal love that no program could provide.
  8. The magazine was also pacifist and opposed all violence. It thus did not taking sides in the Spanish Civil war, which pitted the Communists against Francisco Franco, who was dictatorial but did defend the Catholic Church. This decision to avoid supported France, along with the increase of other organization, led to a situation in which circulation decreased from 150,000 to 30,000. But it then recovered to about 75,000 by the beginning of World War II.
- E. World War II posed a challenge for the Catholic Worker movement, for it pitted patriotism against the magazine’s pacifism.

1. When the war broke out the magazine tried to maintain a position that was both patriotic and pacifist. The January, 1942 edition said, "We love our country and we love our President. We have been the only country in the world where men of all nations have taken refuge from oppression. We recognize that while in the order of intention we have tried to stand for peace, for love of our brother, in the order of execution we have failed as Americans in living up to our principles."
2. Despite this effort, circulation plunged, both due to support for the war and to the fact that there were very few unemployed people any longer. Also many of the houses of hospitality closed because of the war effort and the fact that there were fewer people available to staff them.

F. After the war, Dorothy day continued activism and her involvement with The Catholic Worker.

1. She did have a dispute with the Archdiocese of New York when its cemetery workers went on strike in 1949 and Cardinal Francis Spellman used religious brothers to break the strike. She and The Catholic Worker sided with the workers.
2. The Archdiocese told her to stop using the word Catholic in the publication. She continued using the term and the Archdiocese did not respond.
3. She also some controversial stances, such as picketing the Offices of the U.S. Atomic Commission during a civil air raid drill. The government sometimes jailed her, but usually avoided it.
4. She also initially supported Fidel Castro in 1960. However, after he started persecuting the church, she said that she could not support the government because of its persecution, although she still admired its concern for the poor.
5. The Catholic Worker would sometimes quote from communist leaders such as Marx and Lenin, partially for shock value. For example, one issue in 1952 said, that Marx and Lenin "were animated by the love of brother and this we must believe though their ends meant the seizure of power, and the building of mighty armies, the compulsion of concentration camps, the forced labor and torture and killing of tens of thousands, even millions." The magazine was probably naïve in its willingness to credit their benevolence, but there was an effort to find goodness wherever it may be found.

G. Dorothy Day published her own autobiography called The Long Loneliness in 1955 and her history of the Catholic Worker Movement called Loaves and Fishes in 1963.

H. In the 1960s, Dorothy Day became an unusual figure, a defender of the economic reforms and the peace movement, but also of traditional morals.

1. Abbie Hoffman called her “the original hippie” because of her promotion of a simple life and willingness to be counter-cultural. But, while she admired the simplicity of life that he represented, she very much opposed the decline of sexual morals and the use of drugs. She also was very opposed to any notion of using violence as a part of protests. In one article, she said that the hippies, like the contented middle class, did not know what suffering was really like.
2. Some of the Catholic Worker houses favored the hippie movement. She thought that they were going too far, but exercised no direct authority over them.
3. Dorothy Day stood for both social awareness and moral responsibility, seeing the two as allied. Thus, for example, in 1963, she wrote in a column in The Catholic Worker, “The wisdom of the flesh is treacherous indeed.” She described herself as “a woman who must think in terms of the family, the need of the child to have both mother and father, who believes strongly that the home is the unit of society.” She went on to say, “[W]hen sex is treated lightly, as a means of pleasure ... it takes on the quality of the demonic, and to descend into this blackness is to have a foretaste of hell.” She also noted the number of women who were abandoned by their husbands, beaten or in poverty because of drunkenness or drug use.
4. She wrote of both clear morals and of the opportunity to receive forgiveness. And she saw in the sacrament of Confession the unity between the two values. In December of 1972, one of her articles said, “And so, when it comes to divorce, birth control, abortion, I must write in this way. The teaching of Christ, the Word, must be upheld. It must be held up though one would think that it is completely beyond us—out of our reach, impossible to follow. I believe Christ is our Truth and is with us always. We may stretch towards it, falling short, failing seventy times seven, but forgiveness is always there. He is a kind and loving judge. And so are 99% of the priests in the confessional. The verdict there is always “not guilty” even though our “firm resolve with the help of His grace to confess our sins, do penance and amend our lives” may seem a hopeless proposition. It always contains, that act of contrition, the phrase “to confess our sins,” even though we have just finished confessing

them, which indicates that the priest knows, and we know, and we want to be honest about it, that we will be back in that confessional, again and again.”

5. Dorothy day also continued to be a daily communicant, pray the rosary daily, and read the Bible daily.

I. Dorothy Day continued trying to uphold a peaceful and Catholic vision of social justice to the end.

1. She visited Mother Theresa in India in 1971, just as the Missionaries of Charity were beginning to gain worldwide notice. Later Mother Theresa came to see her and pinned on her the crucifix of the Missionaries of Charity.
2. At the same time, she supported the likes of Caesar Chavez, who organized farm workers in California. But she combined his economic activism with Catholic morals, writing in 1972, “They, together with the blacks, feel and have stated this, that birth control and abortion are genocide. . . . I agree with them.”
3. She also supported Alexander Solzhenitsyn, a Soviet dissident who was arrested and then expelled from the Soviet Union in 1974.
4. Dorothy Day was willing to join traditional Catholic worship with activism to the end. And so, when she was at a Eucharistic Congress to support veterans in 1976 in Philadelphia, she also reminded them that the day of the event, August 6, was also the day of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima.
5. She died in 1980, and was honored as one faithful to Catholicism, defending both social activism and traditional morals. Cardinal Terrance Cooke, Archbishop of New York led the procession at her funeral.
6. The Claritan Missionaries opened her cause for canonization in 1983. The Archdiocese of New York took it up, and it was approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2012. The cause has been sent to the Congregation of Saints in Rome.
7. In his talk at the U.S. Congress on September 24, Pope Francis listed Dorothy Day as one of four Americans representing the best of this nation and the Christian faith. He said, “Her social activism, her passion for justice and for the cause of the oppressed, were inspired by the Gospel, her faith, and the example of the saints.”