



Dorothy Day of New York

By Br. Robert Lentz OFM

Dorothy Day helped found the Catholic Worker movement. She spent the last 48 years of her life as a Christian anarchist on the margins of society. In a church organized like a pyramid, her Catholic worker houses were small, informal and decentralized. She traveled alternative paths where other members of the church often found it difficult to go. "The only way to live in any true security," she would point out, "is to live so close to the bottom that when you fall you do not have far to drop, you do not have much to lose."

She and her companions lived the beatitudes, embracing voluntary poverty. Their poverty included bedbugs, roaches and rats. She often spoke of foolishness for Christ's sake, and like St. Paul, called herself such a fool. "To attack poverty by preaching voluntary poverty seems like madness," she said. "But again, it is direct action."

Bishop O'Hara of Kansas City once told her, "You lead and we will follow." Dorothy did lead. When bishops were wrong, she told them so. As prophet she opposed any use of religion as a prop for nationalism, capitalism or militarism.

Even when religious leaders opposed her vision, and their lifestyles scandalized her, Dorothy remained

fiercely loyal to the church. Because her deep faith was rooted firmly in the sacramental life and traditions of the church, she was not only a faithful follower of the Gospel but also perhaps this century's most powerful witness.

"Don't call me a saint!" she once said. "I don't want to be dismissed so easily." Dorothy Day died on November 29, 1980. Now although Christians of many confessions easily recognize her as a saint and prophet, no one can dismiss the profound impact of her life and contribution.