

# Wise As Serpents and Simple as Doves

By Dorothy Day

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*Summary: Appreciates holy fools in literature and among workers for peace and justice. Against the backdrop of the execution of the Martinsburg Seven, she lauds the protest work for racial justice by Communists. Repeats the need to love our enemies, including those who deny God. (DDLW #620).*

Two of my favorite characters are Don Quixote and Prince Myschkin, two fools, two good men, two simple men. I am sure that Peter Maurin was thought to be just such a fool by many who knew him. Roualt, the greatest religious artist of our day, draws pictures of clowns, and of Christ, and they look alike, for he is portraying the folly of the cross that St. Paul speaks of.

I wish we could be such fools, always seeing the good in others, blind to their faults, not judging them, lest we be judged, always turning to the light rather than to the darkness, to the good rather than the evil. Perhaps it is a particular temperament that has this ability. St. Francis de Sales confessed himself to be a hot tempered and impatient man, but he said, “You will attract more people with a drop of honey than with a gallon of vinegar.” Still, we are supposed to put on Christ, and put off the old man.

I am told by some of my confreres that Christ went in for some denouncing, too, as well as blessing. He said, “Woe to ye, scribes and pharisees,” on a number of occasions. He was scathing, as far as I can see, when it was a matter of pride and wealth – lawyers, scribes, Pharisees and priests – His warnings are for them, but for the masses who shouted for His crucifixion, He said, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.” He forgave Peter, the fisherman, who denied Him even after Christ had called him a Rock on which He would build His church. De Rougement calls attention to the fact that Satan can be in the Church as well as in those who persecute the Church. Christ said, “Get thee behind me Satan,” to Peter, the first Pope.

Brother Augustine, of the Missionary Servants, tells hilarious stories of Father Judge and the beginnings of the two orders he founded. All holy founders did extravagant things, and were strange and startling in the eyes of the world because they were trying literally to practice Christian teaching. Accepting everything as the will of God and rejoicing always led them into strange situations. There are always the fools and the conventionals among us in our various Catholic Worker Houses around the country, and while I sympathize with the conventionals and rejoice that they are the backbone of the movement who keep things going, still I rejoice that we have an abundance of fools, like Joe for instance who went up into the choir loft after Holy Communion and started to play the organ because he was so happy. I wish we had a Joe now at Nativity Parish where we have not had a sung Mass since we moved in in September.

All this ruminating about fools may sound lightly written, but it comes as a result of the tragic case of the Martinsburg Seven, as they were called by the Communist press, who aside from the Negro press were admittedly the leaders in the protest against their execution which took place last month, and which we denounced on the front page of The Catholic Worker. We should have started denouncing long before the attitudes which led to the killing of these seven Negro youths. We urged the Commonweal to send a telegram, which they did, and we also urged the Sun Herald to send an eleventh hour protest and appeal, which they also did.

This article is a humble confession that we did nothing before, and we should have, and ignorance is our only excuse. But as Fr. Furfey once pointed out, Our Lord Himself did not excuse ignorance when His followers said, "When did we see you in prison and did not visit you?" and He replied, "Inasmuch as ye did not do it to one of the least of these, ye did not do it to Me." It is a clear condemnation.

The Negroes in this country have long been "the least of these." The fact that things are improving for them, thank God, must not blind us to the fact that they are one-tenth of our population, and the poorest, the minority group with the least chance at education, decent work, and the respect which we owe them as brothers and fellow citizens.

Ignorance on the one hand, and the fact that Communists led in the protest, are two reasons, the third being the fact that the crime of which the Negroes were accused was rape, a sex sin. One would think from the attitude of the white population that a sex crime in a Negro is more reprehensible than in a white, since no white man was ever executed for that crime in the State of Virginia. The one white man executed with the seven was accused of murder as well as rape.

I have again and again referred in print and in speech to the fact that the Communists are willing to risk poverty (losing their jobs) and violence, in espousing the cause of the Negro in the south, whether in the field of labor or in defending them when they are suffering injustice in courts and prisons. The Catholic Worker has a long record of trying to help in these instances, by enlisting popular sympathy and support, from the Scottboro case back in 1933 to today. The fact that the Communists take up a case should not deter us. The criticism is made that the Communists use it for propaganda and the Communist is condemned for hypocrisy, for using a case to show the masses of the world that here in America there is one justice for white men and another for Negro. On the one hand they are showing what is true, and must we be afraid of the truth? Father Dunne who has won fame and the love of the people for his magnificent articles, **The Sin of Segregation** and **The Short Case**, and his play, **Trial by Fire**, pointed out that we are always accused of stirring up class war and class hatred when we bring these putrid sores to light.

If, on the other hand the Communist is illustrating his constant point "all men

are brothers,” by his zeal in working for his brothers when they are in prison and discriminated against, he is doing just what Catholics are always doing. Only they neglect to perform these works during times of strikes for fear of being implicated perhaps, in a criticism of the status quo, or in class war, in which they seem to think all men should be pacifists.

As a convert I am always getting letters asking me to write articles showing how it was the social teachings of the Church that brought me to the faith, or reading of the Catholic Press. The latest letter wanted the latter thesis stressed. Neither had anything to do with it.

Missionaries care for the sick, feed the hungry, and perform many of the works of mercy as the simplest way of showing what they believe, that God is our Father and all men are brothers. That does not minimize what they are doing, the fact that they are trying to make a point by it. If we love another we want to show that love by gifts, and it is natural and supernatural to be grateful.

We will never do any harm by recognizing the good in our brothers, even in those who deny God and persecute religion. If they love their brethren we should do likewise and more – we should love our enemies and do good to those who persecute us and spitefully use us. Calling them hypocrites and cynics is neither forgiving nor doing them any good. It is judging their motives.

When we see Chinese generals like Mao-Tse-Tung and General Chu Teh exemplifying voluntary poverty, living in the caves in Shensi, for example, and exemplifying manual labor by cultivating fields around their headquarters, (as two Time reporters wrote in a book published in 1946) reading Chinese classics, writing poetry, starting a university at Yen-an and running a printing press to indoctrinate the Chinese masses, we must see the good in them and love it. Indeed we must look for these things in order to be able to love our enemies.

We fail seventy times seven in doing what we talk and write about. The night before the Martinsburg Seven were killed, Mike Kovalek, Joe Monroe and I prayed from twelve to one, saying the rosary and Matins for the seven who were being put to death as we thought at that moment. (We learned afterwards that they were legally murdered at seven.) We did not pray for their murderers, we prayed for them. And all night too there were prayer vigils being kept in Richmond where the executions were taking place.

It is a hard doctrine, this loving your enemies, this being as simple as doves, wise as serpents. Maybe the Communists are being just that, in expressing brotherhood. The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light. It is hard to love pharisees and scribes, the hypocrites and cynics too.

O God take away my heart of stone and give me a heart of flesh!