

From Union Square to Rome

Dorothy Day

Silver Spring, Maryland: Preservation

Summary: An autobiography written as a letter to her brother John. Conversion story genre of her conversion from Communism to Catholicism. Compiled from articles in America and Preservation of the Faith. Discusses Dostoyevsky's influence on her life and the lonely experience of her conversion Reads as a baptized version of The Eleventh Virgin, with emphasis on her religious experience throughout her life. Expounds on such topics as Eucharist, prayer, Marxism, capitalism, free will and St. Teresa of Avila. (DDLW #2).

CONTENTS

Introduction

Explains she is writing the book to answer her Communist brother and friend's question: "How could you become a Catholic?"

Chapter 1: Why

Considers the difficult task of reflecting on her life and recounting her path to conversion. Some markers along her way included praying the Psalms, reading Dostoyvsky's and Mauriac's novels, and seeing the love of the poor found among those who don't consciously accept Christ. Links her suffering with others to Christ's within His Mystical Body.

Chapter 2: Childhood

Recounts her first childhood experiences of discovering God in the Bible, helping others, singing in church, meeting her first Catholic – “. . .I was filled with lofty ambitions to be a saint, a natural striving, a thrilling recognition of the possibilities of spiritual adventure.”

Chapter 3: Early Years

Describes her sheltered childhood and her voluminous reading. After being baptized in the Episcopalian Church and loving the services she disavows organized religion as her sense of social justice develops.

Chapter 4: College

Recounts her loneliness and poverty at college as well as her conscious turn away from religion. Describes reading Upton Sinclair, Ignazio Silone, Kropotkin, Tolstoi, and Dostoevsky—the latter two allowing her to cling to faith in God. Her yearning grows to struggle with the masses. “Where were the saints to try to change the social order, not just to minister to the slaves but to do away with slavery?”

Chapter 5: Rayna Prohme

An account of the deep friendship with Rayna Prohme whose joyousness and love for truth deeply impressed her. Although Rayna died a Communist, she is counted among those who belong “to the invisible unity of the Church.”

Chapter 6: Reporting

Recounts the misery of New York in 1916, her loneliness, and life in tenements among the ethnic poor. Describes her first newspaper job with *The Call*, the competing social ideologies, and sporadic strikes and protests.

Chapter 7: New York

Describes her life as an advocacy journalist depicting the misery of the poor and working class. Engages in picketing, organizing, and anti-conscription activities. An account of being jailed with suffragettes and their hunger strike. Theme of being “tormented by God” and impulses toward faith recurs.

Chapter 8: The Rigorous Life

Describes her year as a nursing student—the long hours, fatigue, and the discipline it brought into her life. She admires the Catholic faith of another student and attends Sunday Mass with her. After a year she realizes “my real work was writing and propaganda” and leaves the hospital for Chicago.

Chapter 9: Chicago

Recounts her involvement with the I. W. W. in Chicago and, in some detail, an accidental jail experience. After a move to New Orleans she starts to make “visits” to Church. With the money from selling a book she wrote, she buys a beach house, enters into a common law marriage, and begins to “read and think and ponder, and I notice from my notebooks that it was at this time that I began to pray more earnestly.”

Chapter 10: Peace

A vivid description of the bucolic life in the beach house on Staten Island. Elaborates on her growing faith and life of prayer, spurred on by the beauty, stillness, and knowledge she is pregnant.

Chapter 11: New Life

An account of her final conversion after the birth of her daughter Theresa. She describes the struggle and anguish she felt while preparing for her and Theresa’s Baptism—knowing her decision would end her relationship with her agnostic husband.

Chapter 12: Wheat And Cockle

Answers the question as to how she rejected Communism. In spite of Communism’s good ideals and the faults of Christians, she repudiates Communism as a heresy and rejects its resort to violence in class struggle.

Chapter 13: Your Three Objections

Answers three objections of her brother to her faith: that religion is morbid, the Catholic belief in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and the problem of evil. Relies on St. Theresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and the scriptures to elaborate her faith and love of God.