

sides which speak to women's roles as subjects of state policies and as influential historical agents of social, political, and economic change.

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## **ALL IS GRACE: A BIOGRAPHY OF DOROTHY DAY**

Jim Forest  
Toronto: Novalis and New York: Orbis Books, 2010

**REVIEWED BY DANIEL LAGACÉ-ROY**

For some, Dorothy Day was a visionary, a feminist, a human and civil rights advocate, and even an anarchist. For others, she was a humanist, a catholic defender, a saint and, above all, a special human being. These names or labels are describing some facets of Dorothy Day's personality. Though none of them fully capture the complexity of her extraordinary "ways" of being herself.

In reading the third edition of Jim Forest's book, first published in 1986 by the Paulist Press under the title *Love is the Measure* and republished in 1994 by Orbis Books, you have no trouble in noticing that these different appellations didn't come from Day herself but were attributed to her by friends, family, and various authorities she dealt with. While it is often tempting to label people, it is important to recognize that in the case of Dorothy Day these labels serve, at least to a certain extent, as examples to illustrate how she expressed herself at various times of

her life *vis-à-vis* the changing world she was in.

*All is Grace* is a good introduction to the life and work of Dorothy Day. The author sketches the usual sequence of someone's life by providing an account of important dates and the description of defining moments. But more importantly, he introduces the reader to the essentials of her life by identifying their central meaning which is a profound calling to help others based on the teaching of Christ. In other words, the reader is invited to closely participate to the comprehensive calling (i.e., Christian calling) that shapes her entire life.

Jim Forest met Day in 1960 and joined *The Catholic Worker* thereafter. His close encounter to her life and work gives recognitions to his book and makes it more personal. While he follows, as mentioned above, the typical account found in biographies, he gave Dorothy the central stage by quoting her countless times throughout his book. This overload of citations is, at times, distracting and overwhelming. However, it reveals something that is particular to this book: it is Dorothy that dictates how the book should be presented. In a sense, it is Dorothy herself as it was when she was alive who sets the agenda. No one speaks for her because she likes to be in control.

The trajectory of her life could be described as someone struggling to find her own identity. A vigilant reader would notice that Dorothy's journey contains the tribulations of a woman living in today's society although she was born in 1897. Since her childhood, she discovered that her life had to have a "meaning" different than the one assigned to women by the society of her time. Very soon, her avid love for reading combined with her sharp ability to structure her ideas around various issues collided with her surroundings. It is obvious that the search for a "life meaning"

traveled through challenging paths that shaped her own vision of what her life should be. The practice of becoming a journalist was for her an opening door to the discovery of a world where poverty, labour disputes, low salaries, and much more are customary to many people. Her writings would turn out to be the medium by which she would express her views and opinions on various issues. More importantly, her writings reveal a woman dealing with her own limitations as she experienced intimate relationships that didn't work: she became pregnant twice and had to go through one abortion; struggled to be a single parent; decided to embrace Catholicism; founded a newspaper called *The Catholic Worker*, and more. Jim Forest's book is packed with examples of what she was, became, and achieved during her life. But more importantly, this book is a testimony to a woman before her time. She was the type of woman who, in spite of what happened to her—being jailed a few times is a good example—she would not stop believing in and advocating for social justice. Is there a special label for that? Maybe, just being herself!

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