Three Innovators in the Practice of Mission: The 2021 Scherer Lecture

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The organizers of the 2021 Scherer Lecture invited me—and now you who are readers—to consider an important angle of reflection: Innovation in the Practice of Mission. The other part of the invitation was this: explore the contributions of three individuals you consider to have been innovators in the practice of mission. They suggested a couple of people as possibilities, and I have embraced their suggestions. Those were Lamin Sanneh and Lesslie Newbigin. Not only did the organizers suggest them as people who seemed to them to be worthy examples of "innovation in the practice of mission," but they knew me well enough to know that I had given appreciative attention to the work of each of them. These two may strike the reader, as well, as fairly obvious choices. I hardly imagine that graduate courses in missiology offered in the last couple of decades do not include some reference their work.

Faced with the need to choose a third person, which by the wise guidance of the organizers should not be another male, I reflected on many female colleagues in the missiology guild who came to mind. In the end I was drawn to consider the work of Dorothy Day. Although at the time I knew only a little about her work, I had a hunch that there would be plenty of innovation to find there. And I had a sense that her work was located squarely in "the practice of mission," even though I had not seen that expressed directly by her or by folks in the missiology guild.[1] To put that in another way, I hardly imagine that contemporary courses in missiology *do* make reference to Dorothy Day or the *Catholic Worker*. My sense is that she has not been on the radar of the mission studies academy as making a substantial contribution. Nor has her particular form of life and work seemed to count for much as "mission." In fact, I suspect she might have been hesitant to have her work described by that label. Or, at least surprised. In any case, these facts served to heighten my interest in choosing her as the third Innovator. It also set me on a considerable reading adventure for the span of several months.

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The idea of innovation

First, I should indicate what I take the word "innovation" to mean. The *Collins English Dictionary* may be a place to start, and its definition has companionship with others offered in both dictionaries and academic treatments of the idea. Innovation is described as "the introduction of new ideas, methods, or things."[2] I will proceed in the light of this definition, as further nuanced in the following ways:

- It has to do with something "new." American sociologist Everett Rogers puts it this way: "An idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption."[3]
- Dan McClure offers "A Simple, Utilitarian Definition of 'Innovation'" in an essay dated March 15, 2015. "But simply being new is not enough. People care about innovation because it offers important answers to critical business challenges. Innovation must be more than clever; it must be useful in a

1. For example, Dorothy Day is nowhere mentioned in Angelyn Dries' highly regarded work, *The Missionary Movement in American Catholic History* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998). The guild has tended to account for mission agencies and efforts emanating *from* the West, rather than movements of mission *within* the West.

2. Collins Dictionary, "Innovation," https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/innovation. Accessed 9/20/2021.

3. Quoted at https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/study-social-needs-strategic-tool/14682. Accessed 9/20/2021.

meaningful way."[4]

- An innovation either has been or is being "introduced." It is not merely an idea, but is something injected, infused into a system of thought or activity. It is put into the field of ideas, methods, or things that are the area of concern. It implies diffusion, adoption, and implementation.
- It is not very likely that anyone ever sets out to think up something new. So, if anyone is interested in becoming an innovator, they should know that it generally comes about within a long journey similar to the journeys of the three to whom we are giving attention. Innovation happens within the disciplines of a community of practice, and it arrives as a discovery on the way.

Based on these understandings of the term, I will argue that each of these three has been an innovator in the practice of mission. Space is not available to deal with the innovation of each in its full dimensions, so a brief sketch will have to suffice. I will rely on any previous familiarity the reader has with them and their work, and on the curiosity of the reader to explore their stories further. Here, I will trace very briefly what I take to be a substantial innovation in the practice of mission that each one has introduced.

Lamin Sanneh: Translatability

Lamin Sanneh's innovation in the practice of mission can be captured in a single word: "translatability." To move from the term "translate" to "translatable" to "translatability" is no great leap within the lexicon of the English language. So, Sanneh's term "translatability" would not exactly be considered a neologism. However, within the tradition of mission studies and theory, the term, rightly understood, becomes nearly that. The way he infuses it with meaning is a pace-setting innovation that transforms imagination and practice.

In the *Concise Dictionary of the Christian World Mission* (1971, ed. Neill et al.), there are entries for "translation" and "Bible translations and versions" but not for "translatability." In the *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (2000, ed. Moreau et al.), there are expanded entries for "Bible translation," "translation," and "translation theory," plus a new addition to the lexicon, a brief one on "translatability." And as luck would have it, when I re-visited the entry lately, I discovered that I am the one who authored it! So, I will quote myself. I began with this tightly packed dictionary-style definition:

> A concept introduced and explored by Lamin Sanneh, the notion of translatability indicates the process by which the Christian message shows its capacity to enter each cultural idiom, and commence there a challenging and enduring dialogue. This deepens the notion of translation to something more than merely substituting words or grammar from one language for words and structures from another. It suggests there is something in the Christian faith, evident from the New Testament onwards, that renders it compatible with all cultures. The genius of the Christian religion is its ability "to adopt each culture as its natural destination and as a necessity of its life."[5]

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I went on to note two important implications or consequences of that view. One is "that every culture is relativized. None may be justifiably absolutized as the final form of Christian faith and life. The missionary church has no monopoly on the form of faith required in the receptor culture." The second implication is "that every culture is revitalized by its hearing of the gospel in its vernacular. It is destigmatized. It is treated not as inferior or untouchable but as the proper instrument for the expression of the divine message."[6]

In the mid-1990s, I had a front row seat watching a student from Singapore encounter Sanneh's ground-breaking notion of translatability. Both Paul Satari and his wife, Pauline, were of Malay Muslim descent and rearing, and had become Christ-followers in their early adult life. Paul was at that time on the pastoral staff of Trinity Methodist Church in Singapore, with responsibility for the coordination and facilitation of relationships with numerous missionaries who had gone out from that church to places across South and Southeastern Asia. He came for advanced studies in Western Theological Seminary's Master of Theology degree program, which by then had been refocused to give special attention to local, contextual theologizing. For his Th.M. thesis, Paul explored Sanneh's work, arguing that "Sanneh's notion of translatability...is a powerful model for 'doing' theology in Singapore. It is a powerful model which can clarify complex

4. Dan McClure, "A Simple, Utilitarian Definition of 'Innovation'," https://www.thoughtworks.com/insights/blog/what-innovation-simple-definition. Accessed 9/20/2021.

5. George R. Hunsberger, "Translatability," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions,* ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 2000), 966-967.

6. Hunsberger, "Translatability," 966-967.

theological realities, help analyze and interpret history, and enhance various forms of contextual theology."[7]

From where I sat as Paul's advisor, I was intrigued by the resonance between Sanneh's notion and Paul's context in Southeast Asia. It confirmed for me that Sanneh's perspective, while it developed within the African context, had such a resounding fit with other parts of the globe as well. It is not just an African thing, as some have accused. It confirmed that what I now am calling an "innovation" was being embraced. Paul's embrace highlighted a dimension of Sanneh's view that had not yet struck me with its full force. It was not only about the translatability of Christianity, it was also about the residue of colonialism and the relationship between mission and colonialism. Paul's background in Islam, paralleling Sanneh's, and his location in a multicultural, multilingual place in the former Empire, made the connections close and personal. Sanneh interpreted his context for him. An innovation introduced and received.[8]

Sanneh is not merely stating the obvious. Yes, the Christian scriptures are texts just like other texts that bear the quality of translatability, that is, they can be translated into a different language from their original writing. Able translators of any text know that the process is much more intricate than a simple, straightforward word equivalence, or word order. A studied deftness on the part of the translator will make the difference between an effective translation and a deficient one. At least one of the goals is that the translation be doubly *true*—true to the original language and true to the one into which its message enters.

Sanneh's assertion about translatability is about something more. It is not about the texts so much as it is about the Christianity for which particular texts are its origin and mooring. Christianity itself not only welcomes but begs for its sacred texts to be articulated in every human vernacular. Something innate to the character of Christianity anticipates taking up residence in every vernacular as its natural and authentic home. The opening paragraph in his influential book, *Translating the Message*, shows this dynamic as present from the outset:

> The central thesis of this book is that, from its origins, Christianity identified itself with the need to translate out of Aramaic and Hebrew, and from that position came to exert a dual force in its historical development. One part of that was the resolve to relativize its Jewish roots, with the consequence that it promoted significant aspects of those roots. The other part was the destigmatization of Gentile culture by adopting that culture as a natural extension of the life of the new religion. This action to destigmatize complemented the other action to relativize.[9]

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Extending the destigmatizing effect on every culture and the de-absolutizing effect on all cultures, Sanneh emphasizes both inclusion and change as the consequences of vernacular translation. He explains:

> Two general ideas stem from this description. The first is the inclusive principle whereby no culture is excluded from the Christian dispensation or even judged solely or ultimately by Western cultural criteria. The second is the ethical principle of change as a check on cultural chauvinism.[10]

Sanneh cuts to the chase: "Translation is the church's birthmark as well as its missionary benchmark: the church would be unrecognizable or unsustainable without it."[11]

Sanneh's personal background in Islam as well as his studied appreciation of its core character alerts him to differences between Islam and Christianity in this regard. Itself a globe-spanning missionary faith, Islam nonetheless holds that its sacred text, the Qur'an, is non-translatable. Its Arabic language of origin remains essential to its identity as the book of Allah, the sacred book of Islam. There are today renderings of the Qur'an, "translations" of it we might be tempted to say, in many other languages. But to Islam, these are not the Qur'an but are considered interpretations of it, attempts to understand the message of the book of Allah. This is in sharp contrast to Christianity's fundamental translatability.

Recognizing the translatability of Christianity provides a lens by which Sanneh can give an accounting of Christianity's history. His book *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity* is an example.[12] It also enables a clearer interpretation of the flourishing

7. Paul Satari, "Lamin Sanneh's Translatability Model as a Proposed Approach for 'Doing' Theology in Singapore," Master of Theology Thesis, Western Theological Seminary, 1994, p. iii. https://repository.westernsem.edu/xmlui/handle/1866/1748.

8. Satari's clear explication of Sanneh's notion of "translatability" in the first chapter of his thesis was published in the volume of essays of the Gospel and Our Culture Network titled *The Church Between Gospel and Culture,* eds. George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 270-283.

9. Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture,* Revised and Expanded. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2009 [first edition 1989]), 1.

10. Sanneh, *Translating,* 251.

11. Sanneh, *Translating*, first edition, 97.

12. Lamin Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

of Christianity's presence and growth across the world today in places beyond the West. The key lies in a fundamental shift of perspective, away from "missionary heroism and unilateral transmission to indigenous appropriation and mutual solidarity."[13]

There are language issues when we choose (or assume) how to talk about the recent explosion of Christianity in the non-Western world. Sanneh decidedly prefers the language of World Christianity over the language of Global Christianity. The latter refers, he claims, to "the faithful replication of Christian forms and patterns developed in Europe." World Christianity, on the other hand, refers to "the movement of Christianity as it takes form and shape in societies that previously were not Christian," where "Christianity was received and expressed through cultures, customs, and traditions of the people affected."[14] "Christianities" might be the proper word, for "there is a radical pluralism associated with vernacular translation, wherein all languages and cultures are in principle equal in expressing the word of God.[15]

Then there is the dilemma akin to the one that European-origin peoples in the Americas are now facing: Who discovered whom? In this case, Sanneh commends a reversal in our thinking by speaking of "the indigenous discovery of Christianity rather than the Christian discovery of indigenous societies."[16] It matters who you think is the subject of the action of discovery.

By these moves, Sanneh calls into place a post-colonial way of framing World Christianity and with it shifts our models of mission to correspond. Both are works in progress for the churches of the West whose thinking he calls into question. His is an innovation introduced into the academy and the structures of missionary enterprise, pressing for further change.

Lesslie Newbigin: The Gospel and Western Culture

The idea that there might be something new, innovative, in Newbigin's work of a lifetime got me stumbling at first. He said a lot of things that were fresh, maybe somewhat new. My book on his "theology of cultural plurality" notes a few of those, including his missionary sense of election, for example. But would any of those rise to the significance of an innovation in the practice of mission? And if so, which would I choose to commend as such?

Struggling to find the new and innovative in Newbigin, I came across an old issue of *The Gospel and Our Culture (N.A.)* newsletter, the one which honored Newbigin just after his death in 1998. I read again what I had heard Dan Beeby, his close companion, say at his funeral. And there it was:

> Lesslie never touched anything that he did not adorn, illuminate and advance. His influence before 1983 was enormous but with *The Other Side of 1984* and its successors, I believe there was something totally new, long roots but new. A new mission for a new cultural situation. A new analysis, new eyes for us to see with, an old faith renewed and a new and proper confidence born. In a faltering age with hope run low, he swung the lamp of resurrection over increasing gloom.[17]

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This turn did not happen immediately upon his 1974 retirement from decades of service in India and his return to his native homeland, England. He quickly was immersed in a variety of avenues of work: teaching mission at Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham, where he and Helen had settled in; reading for the first time Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics,* all the way through and from back to front!; summing up his mission theology in *The Open Secret*; preparing a commentary on the gospel of John (*The Light Has Come*); writing an autobiography (*Unfinished Agenda*); engaging in debates about the local syllabus for the teaching of religion in the public schools.

Then came 1983. In his updated autobiography (*Unfinished Agenda,* 1993) a single final chapter was added to the original 1985 edition, titled simply "Postscript 1982-1992." There he chronicles the origins of this "something entirely new," as Beeby called it, this major "innovation in the practice of mission," as I am calling it.

A gathering of "distinguished Christians" came together for a day to reflect on the state of society and church in Britain. At the end of the day, it was decided to host a conference about the issues being discussed. It was to be held the following year, 1984, evoking, of course, the shadow of George Orwell's novel by that name! A committee was appointed to prepare the conference, and Newbigin was to be included on the committee. He missed the first meeting, but arriving at the second meeting a month later he was dismayed that there was already a draft programme for the conference ready to be discussed. He writes, "I was very unhappy about it, as I did not think it began to deal with the underlying issues. I did not have the courage at that moment to question it but when I went home, I phoned another member of the committee… and told him of my feelings. He encouraged me to challenge the proposed programme and at the next meeting…I did." Basically,

13. Lamin Sanneh, "Should Christianity be Missionary? An Appraisal and an Agenda," in *dialog: A Journal of Theology*, Vol. 40, No 2, Summer 2001, 91.

14. Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 22.

15. Sanneh, *Translating,* 251.

16. Sanneh, *Whose Religion*, 10.

17. *The Gospel and Our Culture*, Special Edition, April 1998, 3.

Newbigin suggested an alternative plan, to focus the issues with some written pamphlet, commence a multiyear study programme, and then host a conference to take up the fruit of the study process. Newbigin again: "The committee was generous enough to accept my suggestion, agreed to postpone the conference and instructed me to write a pamphlet raising the questions that needed to be discussed. Three weeks later I sent the results of my scribbling to Philip Morgan (the convenor of the committee)." Together the two of them sought comments and suggestions for improvement from 25-30 people, and after making some revisions, it was published as *The Other Side of 1984: Questions for the Churches* (1983), first by the British Council of Churches (BCC) (under whose auspices the committee was functioning), and then by the World Council of Churches with appropriate caveats about its distinctly British context and focus. The latter quickly sold 20,000 copies.[18]

The process began to move forward as the "1984 Project" of the BCC, a team of leaders for the project was recruited (including recently retired Dan Beeby as parttime coordinator), a study process was designed and commenced, and a date was set for the conference (1992). Once they got rolling, they changed the name to "The Gospel and Our Culture," a programme of the BCC (later, Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland). Shortly after getting under way, the British and Foreign Bible Society approached the leadership and offered to partner with personal and financial resources, which had otherwise been in short supply. All of this plan was completed on schedule.

In many ways, the vision called forth as he wrote *The Other Side of 1984* would fully occupy the remaining fifteen years of Newbigin's life. His gaze had now been turned in a new—and to him, compelling—direction, the "specific application of that missionary angle of reflection he had so clearly developed, and now turned upon the Western culture which was his own culture of origin and his home in retirement."[19]

Having been invited to deliver the March 1984 Warfield Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary, Newbigin "decided to use this invitation as an opportunity to develop more fully the message" of *The Other Side of 1984*.[20] The lectures, published in 1986 as *Foolishness to the Greeks*, did just that. Here the vision and agenda were carefully and deliberately played out. This book was, and still stands as, the determinative declaration of the missionary encounter he envisioned, and thus a clarion call to the churches throughout the West to join themselves to it. All else, I suggest, flows from it.

A doctoral student at Princeton at the time, it was my privilege to be present for the lectures. I marveled as I listened to the first lecture (chapter 1), as he succinctly, in a few moments, and on a few lines of text, introduced the heart and soul of the vocation of cross-cultural mission, in which field I had been reading for a couple of decades by then. His simply-stated exposition was true to what I had come to recognize in the discipline (even if relying on the Random House dictionary to define "culture"!). In those moments, he was turning our mission vision on its head: He was describing what cross-cultural missionaries from the West do when they work in other parts of the world, in order to turn it back on ourselves. He was inviting us (too weak a word) to welcome that same kind of "missionary encounter" of the gospel with our own, Western culture. If I might rudely paraphrase Jesus for a moment: "Do not missionize, lest you be missionized yourself with that missionizing with which you have missionized others! Why do you see the syncretism in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the logjam of syncretism in your own eye?" A fair summary of his point.

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One of his opening gambits drives home what is at stake:

> Neither at the beginning, nor at any subsequent time, is there or can there be a gospel that is not embodied in a culturally conditioned form of words. The idea that one can or could at any time separate out by some process of distillation a pure gospel unadulterated by any cultural accretions is an illusion. It is, in fact, an abandonment of the gospel, for the gospel is about the word made flesh. Every statement of the gospel in words is conditioned by the culture of which those words are a part, and every style of life that claims to embody the truth of the gospel is a culturally conditioned style of life. There can never be a culture-free gospel.[21]

18. Lesslie Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda: An Updated Autobiography* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1993), 251-252.

19. George R. Hunsberger, "Renewing Faith during the Post-modern Transition," in *TransMission* Tribute to Lesslie Newbigin (British and Foreign Bible Society, 1998), 10.

20. Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks (*Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), iv.

21. Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 4.

On this premise, all that follows in the book either stands or falls.

Newbigin's next major contribution to the conversation was *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society.*[22] This is important as a sequel to *Foolishness to the Greeks*, but may in fact have become for many people the dominant port of entry into Newbigin himself, and into his Gospel and Western Culture encounter. Accessibility is one factor. But beyond that, I believe it is because here Newbigin is *doing* what *Foolishness to the Greeks* was calling for. Here he is gathering a lifetime of missiological insights and using them to help people do the actual engagement with post-Enlightenment culture. The reader is taken on that journey with him.

Shortly after finishing my doctoral dissertation (which focused on Newbigin), I was participating in an American eight-day Ecumenical Mission Consultation on Common Witness, one of 110 Roman Catholic, conciliar Protestant, and independent evangelical participants seeking greater partnership in mission. One of the themes identified for the consultation was "Faith in the context of modern society." Because of that, the organizers had invited Newbigin and his companion Dan Beeby to be at the consultation and to speak to that theme. The conversations on that issue and on the Gospel and Our Culture initiative in the UK were very brisk. But on the last day of the consultation, Lesslie and Dan took six or seven of us to a back room. They said to us, "We sense that you Americans like to talk about this issue. But what are you going to do about it on this side of the Atlantic?" We gave a collective "Uh, well, umm, we don't know" response. In the end all we could agree to do was to stay in touch with each other about it. I went home with the job of putting out a simple newsletter to any who wished to receive it. We shamelessly took the name of the British programme, and the *Gospel and Our Culture* newsletter was born—and with it a North American Network began to gather around the agenda. (Thus I was commissioned to become a servant of the grand innovation on this side of the pond.)

Dorothy Day: The *Catholic Worker*

For four or five months last summer, I immersed myself in all things Dorothy, reading things written about her and by her. I am still finding my way in, finding my way "on pilgrimage" with her, as she might say. Some readers will know her much better than I do. For our purposes here, I will touch on some of the features of her vision and work that suggest she has introduced an important innovation in the practice of mission.

I will allow Pope Francis to have the first word.

On his 2015 visit to the USA, Pope Francis was invited to address a joint session of the U.S. Congress. His intention, he said to them, was to "present some of the richness of your cultural heritage, of the spirit of the American people." And he wanted to express his desire that "this spirit continue to develop and grow." He organized his remarks around several Americans whom he considered to be exemplars of our cultural heritage. "I would like to mention four of these Americans: Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King [, Jr.], Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton."

Taking them up one at a time, he noted what they contributed to our cultural heritage and the ways that enables us to meet the present hour and its challenges. When he came to Dorothy Day, he added,

> In these times when social concerns are so important, I cannot fail to mention the Servant of God Dorothy Day, who founded the Catholic Worker Movement. 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.

In conclusion, he said:

> Three sons and a daughter of this land, four individuals and four dreams: Lincoln, liberty; Martin Luther King, liberty in plurality and non-exclusion; Dorothy Day, social justice and the rights of persons; and Thomas Merton, the capacity for dialogue and openness to God.
>
> Four representatives of the American people.
>
> A nation can be considered great when it defends liberty as Lincoln did, when it fosters a culture which enables people to "dream" of full rights for all their brothers and sisters, as Martin Luther King sought to do; when it strives for justice and the cause of the oppressed, as Dorothy Day did by her tireless work, the fruit of a faith which becomes dialogue and sows peace in the contemplative style of Thomas Merton.[23]

Dorothy Day did not know what to make of the French peasant who had suddenly appeared in her living room, a soapbox philosopher and visionary for reordering modern industrial society. Without introduction Peter Maurin had shown up unannounced at her apartment door, guided there by several people who suggested he should talk to her. His coat pockets stuffed with articles and books, he was ready to be the teacher of anyone who would listen. A bit hesitant at first, Dorothy listened, and as the next weeks and months unfolded, she welcomed his teaching as it filled a void for her, connecting the Church's tradition, and particularly its social teaching, to her deep-seated compassion for the poor. Just earlier, we are told by her granddaughter-biographer Kate Hennessy, she had visited the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception (in Washington, D.C.) at a time when she felt at a loss about what she should be doing with her life and found herself praying to the Blessed Mother, *Here I am—what would you have me do?* Within days Peter had shown up at her door and the conversations had begun. "The Blessed Mother, Dorothy believed,

22. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

23. Pope Francis, "Address of the Holy Father to the Joint Session of the U.S. Congress," 24 Sep 2015, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150924_usa-us-congress.html. Accessed 9/21/21.

sent her a teacher, and those days of waiting and wandering were coming to an end."[24]

Within a few months, what would become a life-long vocation was coming to birth. The *Catholic Worker* was about to be born. In the midst of their conversations, Peter uttered (often, it appears) his program for the social reordering he envisioned. It had three components: roundtable discussions where there would be "clarification of thought"; the establishment of houses of hospitality—he thought there should be one in every parish; and out of those houses there should emerge farming communes, "agronomic universities."[25] It was when Dorothy asked the question, "How do we begin?" that Peter's answer came back characteristically curt, "The way to start is to start," he replied. "Let's start a newspaper." Dorothy's granddaughter Kate Hennessy is quick to add, "Or, at least that's what she heard him say. He hadn't a newspaper in mind at all, but broadsheets and pamphlets he could hand out while talking in Union Square."[26] That verdict matches Dorothy's own comment about Peter's "protest" after seeing the first issue she had created, which was filled "with articles about labor, strikes, unemployment, factual accounts, columns, features, in addition to half a dozen of Peter's 'Easy Essays'"[27] Day's longstanding, semi-submerged journalistic instincts and talents had just flowered to life.

That first issue of the newspaper, the *Catholic Worker*, appeared in May 1933. The newspaper was sold for a penny a copy (which remains true today). Issues followed on a monthly basis, with one month off each year. The four-room apartment where Dorothy and her daughter Tamar lived served also as the headquarters for the editorial work of the paper. Day the journalist was not only the paper's creator and editor, but she was its regular writer. Her columns were the sustaining heart of the paper, and the movement it nourished. In them she was doing a variety of things: chronicling the invisible lives of the poor, and of the worker—employed or unemployed; chronicling the events of the day that affected them, for good or for ill; and nurturing a Catholic Christian faith fitted for the industrial age.[28] In all, Day navigated onto the streets over 500 issues of the paper before her death in 1980.

The Day apartment, having already done double duty as the editorial headquarters for the *Catholic Worker* newspaper, would soon also become a house of hospitality, without pre-design, it would appear. A knock at the door, a simple response to a presenting need, and before long, an early morning bread and coffee line stretched for blocks, meals were prepared and shared, donated clothing dispensed, and bedding squeezed in here and

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there. As Day reflected later: "So many come that it is impossible to give personal attention to each one; we can only give what we have, in the name of Jesus. Thank God for directing our vocation. We did not choose this work. He sent it to us."[29] That is the way hospitality happens.

Hospitality, for Day and the *Catholic Worker*, was as simple and profound as doing what Jesus says. The foundation for their ethical vision and response lies in "the expressed and implied teachings of Christ."[30] Day summarized the clarity such a vision brings:

> Christ commanded his followers to perform what Christians have come to call the Works of Mercy: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, sheltering the harborless, visiting the sick and the prisoner, and burying the dead. Surely a simple program for direct action, and one enjoined on all of us…. And how opposite a program this is to the works of war….[31]

If that isn't the practice of mission, then I can't imagine what would be.

Pause for a moment on that phrase, "sheltering the harborless." The poor on the streets are not merely "homeless," lacking things like a roof, a bed, and a blanket. They are without harbor. Day instinctively, I believe, uses here a warmer, more feeling image to depict the full range of emotional and spiritual experience of someone on the street and the needs they carry as they knock on the door. No safe harbor. No mooring against the winds and

24. Kate Hennessy, *Dorothy Day: The World Will Be Saved by Beauty* (New York: Scribner, 2017), 65-66.
25. Hennessy, *Dorothy*, 71-73.
26. Hennessy, *Dorothy*, 73.
27. Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness: The Autobiography of Dorothy Day* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952), 174.
28. Following Day's death in 1980, the Rev. John Hugo, a longtime associate, self-published a small pamphlet titled, *Dorothy Day: Apostle of the Industrial Age* (circa 1981, archived in the *Catholic Worker* Collection, Dorothy Day Papers, D8, Box 1).
29. Dorothy Day, "Poverty is the Pearl of Great Price," in *The Catholic Worker*, Jul-Aug 1953.
30. Robert Ellsberg, "Introduction," in Dorothy Day, *By Little and By Little: The Selected Writings of Dorothy Day*, edited by Robert Ellsberg (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1983), xvi.
31. Dorothy Day, "We Go on Record: CW Refuses Tax Exemption," in *The Catholic Worker*, May 1972.

the currents. No rest from the day's journey. No one to share the journey with. No harbor from which to set out fresh the next day. The word "harborless" itself expresses a depth of empathy born of Day's lifetime of voluntary poverty—with and for the poor.

Notice also Day's footnote on the Matthew 25 works of mercy. "How opposite a program this is to the works of war." Here is a clue to her long contention against making war and using violence. At the very moment the United States was entering World War II, she would declare: "We are still pacifists. Our manifesto is the Sermon on the Mount, which means that we will try to be peacemakers."[32]

Clearly, something greater than the initial sketch of a plan for action had emerged through it all. Day says in 1960:

> We are publishing a paper in which ideas are discussed and clarified, and illustrated by act. So we are not just a newspaper. We are a revolution, a movement, as Peter Maurin used to say. We are propagandists of the faith. We are the Church. We are members of the Mystical Body. We all must try to function healthily. We do not all have the same function, but we all have a vocation, a calling.[33]

There is in these words an implicit ecclesiology and missiology at work. The laity *is* the Church, they are its "propagandists of the faith," they have a vocation, a calling. Day elsewhere affirms this sense:

> The voluntary apostolate was for the unwilling celibate and for the unemployed as well as for the men and women, willing celibates, who felt that running hospices, performing the works of mercy, working on farms, was their vocation, just as definitely a vocation as that of the professed religious.[34]

Or, again in another of her columns: "How can [the communists] hear unless we take seriously our lay apostolate and answer them when they speak to us?"[35] The *Catholic Worker* has served to animate the lay apostolate, fulfilling the teaching of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* that "the laity are made to share in the priestly, prophetical, and kingly office of Christ; they have therefore, in the Church and in the world, their own assignment in the mission of the whole People of God."[36]

Through the years, the goal of the Catholic Worker movement remained steady: "to realize in the individual and society the expressed and implied teachings of Christ."[37] And its fundamental means were these, said Day: "voluntary poverty and manual labor, a spirit of detachment from all things, a sense of the primacy of the spiritual, which makes the rest easy. 'His praise should be ever in our mouth.'"[38]

> Pause for a moment on that phrase, "sheltering the harborless." The poor on the streets are not merely "homeless," lacking things like a roof, a bed, and a blanket. They are without harbor.

Certainly, there were others who joined Day in this innovation in the practice of mission called the Catholic Worker. Even the catalytic role of Peter Maurin, however, does not deter observers from seeing its genesis and genius as Day's. Mel Piehl finds it inescapable that "The Catholic Worker—and therefore American Catholic radicalism—was Dorothy Day's invention, and she pervaded its history…."[39] And Day's granddaughter-biographer doesn't hesitate to call it "…my grandmother's creation, the *Catholic Worker*, this physical manifestation of the Mystical Body of Christ…."[40]

Three innovators

Sanneh, Newbigin, and Day. Hopefully, through brief sketches of their stories something of the unique innovation of each can be seen, enlivening vision and action in the practice of mission. And equally hoped, it will be observable that their innovations are not so far afield from each other. The three together probe pathways that open to us a sense of the call of God in the contemporary world, for the present moment. These innovations, forged in the crucible of their respective experiences, can become for all of us well-worn paths allowing us to contribute our own improvisation to their music in service to our Lord Christ.

32. Dorothy Day, "Our Country Passes from Undeclared War to Declared War; We Continue Our Christian Pacifist Stand," in *The Catholic Worker*, January 1942.
33. Dorothy Day, "On Pilgrimage: Translating the Idea," in *The Catholic Worker,* November 1960.
34. Day, *Long Loneliness*, 187.
35. Dorothy Day, "Our Brothers, the Communists," in *The Catholic Worker,* November 1949.
36. Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Second Edition English Translation (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000), paragraph 873; cf. paragraphs 863-864 and the section on the Lay Faithful, 897-913. Accessed at https://www.scborromeo2.org/catechism-of-the-catholic-church on 9/21/21.
37. Ellsberg, "Introduction," xvi.
38. Day, "Poverty".
39. Mel Piehl, *Breaking Bread: The Catholic Worker and the Origin of Catholic Radicalism in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), x.
40. Hennessy, *Dorothy* Day, 67.