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As World War II approached, *The Catholic Worker* continued to oppose war and the preparations for war. In 1940 Dorothy Day testified before Congress against the introduction of the peacetime draft. Catholic Workers organized the Association of Catholic Conscientious Objectors that set up and ran Catholic Civilian Public Service Camps during the war. Articles on the Just War Theory became fewer and, by the time the war ended, had completely disappeared from the paper.

Following World War II, the Catholic Worker movement strengthened its pacifist stand and developed a pacifist theology. Catholic Workers participated in the Civil Defense Drill protests of the fifties and the draft card burnings in the sixties. Catholic Worker pacifism and the commitment to nonviolent direct action begun in the thirties formed the basis for these later actions and became the fountainhead of Catholic pacifism in the United States.

DOROTHY DAY AND THE MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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The Mystical Body of Christ was all the rage in Catholic theology in the first half of this century, most especially in the 1930s and 40s. The image penetrated not only academic circles but more popular lay Catholicism as well, being especially prevalent in Catholic Action. The Mystical Body was also central to Dorothy Day's vision of the Catholic Worker movement. What I hope to display in this paper is that Dorothy—as she had such a gift for doing—shared a common vision of the doctrine with others in Catholic circles during World War II, but drew out more profound implications for Christian action. My argument in short is this: While most saw the Mystical Body as that which united Christians in spirit above the battle lines which pitted Christians in Europe against one another, Dorothy interpreted the Mystical Body as that which made Christian participation in the conflict simply inconceivable. The Mystical Body does not hover above the national borders which divide us; it dissolves them.

I will examine the first approach as exemplified in Pius XII's encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi*, then look at Dorothy Day's approach, and suggest that she reappropriated an older tradition of the Mystical Body rooted in the thought of the early Church Fathers.

A Distinction of Planes

As one commentator has written of the period between the wars, "Few other phrases in theology occasioned so much passion and spilled ink during these years as did the Pauline description of the church as
the 'Body of Christ.'” (Walden 1975: 63) The movement would begin around World War I, reach its zenith with Mystici Corporis in 1943, and not subside until the Second Vatican Council put the phrase “People of God” front and center. The popularity of the image of the Mystical Body after World War I is largely explained as an attempt to counterbalance the emphasis on the juridical, institutional nature of the Church which had been the cornerstone of seminary education on the Church since Robert Bellarmine’s definition of the Church as a societas perfecta analogous to the Kingdom of France. After World War I accelerated the crumbling of what remained of Constantinian church-state relations in Europe, Bellarmine’s institutional definition of the Church became increasingly difficult to square with reality. The term Mystical Body seemed to capture a new feeling that the Church was more than an institution, a semi-divine bureaucracy, but rather a communion that united in spirit Catholics of all nations despite the irrevocable disappearance of a united Christendom (Walden 1975: 44-45, 52-53, 67-69; Dulles 1987: 47-55).

The popes of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had, for the most part, clung tenaciously to a certain nostalgia for that Christendom as a way to resist the decay brought on by the liberal state. After his election in 1922, however, Pope Pius XI took a different course. Europe was in a volatile situation of new nation-states and dictatorships, rabid anticlericalism and social upheaval on both left and right. Pius XI decided that the most prudent course under such circumstances would be for the Church to stop fighting the separation of Church and state, which had consumed so much of the Church’s energies in the previous two decades. The Church would also withdraw support from Catholic political parties, and remove the Church as much as possible from the political sphere. As the British ambassador to the Vatican put it, “Pius XI wishes to withdraw the Church as far as possible from politics, so that Catholics may unite on a religious and moral basis.” (Russell in Rhodes 1973: 15) The Mystical Body of Christ was the key image employed by Pius XI in Benedictine Monks of Solesmes 1961: 347-348, 383, 401. It was not that Pius XI wanted to retreat into a purely privatized version of Christianity; rather, he wanted to new to a distinction between the political and the social. The Church would stay out of attempts to influence the state directly, and would instead concentrate on being a moral and religious influence within civil society. Pius XI dissolved Catholic political parties opposed to Mussolini in Italy in 1924, and Hitler in Germany in 1933, in exchange for assurances that Catholic Action groups could continue their religious and educational activities unhindered in the social sphere. Both Mussolini and Hitler took advantage of the Church’s withdrawal from politics to consolidate their power, and then turned on the Church’s religious and social activities, directly attacking Catholic Action and harrassing Catholic schools (Rhodes 1973: 11-52, 103-111, 173-210).

As Pius XI’s nuncio in Germany and later secretary of state, Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, the future Pius XII, would have a key role to play in the Church’s strategy of withdrawal from the political, a strategy he would continue as Pope following the outbreak of World War II. The Mystical Body of Christ played a key role in Pius XII’s approach to the war and hopes for peace. During the darkest days of the war, in June 1943, Pius XII issued his famous encyclical on the Mystical Body with the expressed purpose of uniting in spirit those divided by politics. As he writes, “towns and fertile fields are strewn with massive ruins and defiled with the blood of brothers”; these tragedies “naturally lift souls above the passing things of earth to those of heaven that abide forever.” (Pius XII in Carlen 1990: para. 4) In such a situation the world turns to the Church for a glimmer of hope, for while nations are rent with violence, the Mystical Body of Christ retains a “divinely-given unity”, even those outside the Church “will be forced to admire this fellowship in charity, and with the guidance and assistance of divine grace will long to share in the same union and charity.” (Pius XII para. 5) The war itself has necessitated the proclamation of the doctrine of the Mystical Body:

We have had the great consolation of witnessing something that has made the image of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ stand out most clearly before the whole world. Though a long and deadly war has pitilessly broken the bond of brotherly union between nations, We have seen Our children in Christ, in whatever part of the world they happened to be, one in will and affection, lift up their hearts to the common Father, who, carrying in his own heart the cares and anxieties of all, is guiding the barque of the Catholic Church in the teeth of a raging tempest. This is a testimony to the wonderful union existing among Christians: but it also proves that, as Our paternal love embraces all peoples, whatever their nationality and race, so Catholics the world over, though their countries may have drawn the sword against each other, look to the Vicar of Jesus
Christ as to the loving Father of them all, who, with absolute impartiality and incorruptible judgment, rising above the conflicting gales of human passions, takes upon himself with all his strength the defence of truth, justice and charity. (Pius XII para. 6)

There has been much debate concerning Pius XII’s silence—especially concerning the Holocaust—during World War II. He has been presented as aloof and uncaring in the face of such tremendous human tragedy (Hochhuth 1964). Other scholars have painted a portrait of a man who agonized over the war and worked behind the scenes to give refuge to thousands of Italian Jews (Conway 1994: 105-120). Regardless of how he is judged, Pius XII’s personal failings and virtues are just one facet of a much broader failure of the Church in Europe. This failure was theorized as a distinction between the spiritual or moral and the political. Pius XII saw the Church as Mystical Body, an overarching source of unity which could inspire peace through strict political impartiality. Though individual Catholics needed to serve their own particular countries through military service and other means on the political plane, on the spiritual plane they should unite and listen to the moral guidance of the Pope urging them to find peaceful means of settling their differences. Pius XII tried desperately, and almost completely unsuccessfully, to broker peace among the warring nation-states through diplomatic channels, offering the Church to serve as an impartial forum above the political fray (Conway 1994: 107-110; Garzia 1994: 121-136). He did not, however, seriously call into question the political loyalty of the individual Christian to the nation-state, that being beyond the scope of the Church’s spiritual authority. As Pius XII’s secretary of state Giovanni Montini, the future Paul VI, understood it, “while from a moral stance the Vatican could only be in favor of good against evil, and of the law against force, from a political viewpoint ‘it could only be an impartial witness to the war.’” (Garzia : 127)

The practical effect of such distinctions was to allow the possibility of being a good Catholic and a good Nazi at the same time; Austrian peasant Franz Jagerstatter’s questioning of that possibility was met with incredulity and indignation by laity, clergy, and bishops alike (Zahn 1964: 160-179). Pius XII’s intent was to offer the image of the Mystical Body of Christ as a symbol of unity to a world rent by conflict. Nevertheless, one’s membership in the Mystical Body did not seem to override one’s loyalty to the state. To know that the person shooting at you is a fellow member of the Mystical Body of Christ would be slight comfort indeed.

**Dorothy Day and the Mystical Body**

In Dorothy Day’s America, the Catholic Church hierarchy and laity largely supported the American effort in the war. It is important to see, however, that the Church in America obeyed the same distinction between the spiritual and the political as put forth by Pius XII. It was assumed that the nation-state was the supreme authority in political matters, of which war was the most prominent. Thus even the official Catholic peace organization, the Catholic Association for International Peace, refused to support conscientious objection and continued to assume that the nation-state, as the supreme political authority, was the arbiter of war and peace (McNeal 1996: 33-44). Dorothy Day, on the other hand, consistently drew upon the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ to oppose any Catholic participation in the war. For Dorothy, this was not a matter of direct opposition to any official Church positions; she often quoted Pius XII in *The Catholic Worker* in his repeated denunciations of the war (CW 12/1943: 2; CW 6/1943: 1,10). Dorothy shared the common Catholic sensibility of the mystical union of Christ in his Body, supremely effected in the Eucharist. But Dorothy, with the authority of Scripture and the Church Fathers behind her, resolutely drew out the consistent implications of this doctrine for human action, refusing to segregate the spiritual from the rest of life and death, and refusing to acknowledge a separate sphere of hegemony for the nation-state. Quoting St. Cyprian, Dorothy said that war was “the rending of the Mystical Body of Christ.” (CW 11/1949: 2; www.catholic worker.org/dorothyday) It is such because, as Dorothy repeatedly reminded her readers in the words of St. Paul, paraphrasing I Cor. 12:26, “We are all members, one of another. Where the health of one member suffers, the health of the entire body is lowered.” (CW 7-8/1962: 7) She quoted Pope St. Clement of Rome: “Why do the Members of Christ tear one another, why do we rise up against our own body in such madness...?” (CW 10/1934: 3) War, in this view, is a triple offense. First, it is an attack on the body of another. Second, it is an attack on one’s own body. Third, it is an attack on Christ, who bleeds anew from these fresh wounds. In the writings of Dorothy Day, the emphasis in the phrase “Mystical Body” is put rather more on “body” than “mystical,” if mystical is taken to mean something
beyond the realm of the physical. Dorothy conveys a very concrete and sacramental sense that war is about the destruction of real bodies, the ripping and bleeding of flesh, which even the noncombatant feels in her own flesh. There can be no unity in spirit when we attack one another in body.

What the Mystical Body of Christ produces in Dorothy’s thought is a radical effacing of the difference between us and them. As she repeatedly emphasized, citing St. Augustine, “we are all members or potential members of the body of Christ.”(CW 10/1934: 3) At the height of the Cold War, she added to this reminder “And since there is no time with God, this includes Chinese, Russians, Cubans, and yes, even those who profess Marxism-Leninism.”(CW 7-8/1962: 7)

There can be no question, therefore, of a religious provincialism which made it impossible to kill fellow Christians, but not-so-impossible to kill those of other faiths. Even less is it possible to privilege the category of nationality over one’s participation or potential participation in Christ’s very Body. To kill members of Christ on behalf of nation-states of whatever stripe is to obey a rival god. The Mystical Body, therefore, does not merely transcend the borders of nation-states; it radically denies their very legitimacy, especially when the nation-state claims the power to force its citizens to kill and die for it. As Robert Ludlow wrote in *The Catholic Worker* in 1948, “As the ideals of Christianity are realized, as they become exteriorized in society, so will national states wither away as being impediments to the realization of human brotherhood. And so will war be outlawed as rendering asunder the mystical body of Christ.”(Ludlow in Cornell et al. 1995: 65)

It is absolutely essential to note that this radical effacing of the difference between me and you, and us and them, is not simply a sentimental belief in the inherent goodness of all, but rather calls us to acknowledge the guilt of all and therefore our own complicity in the structures that produce war. Dorothy’s approach to war was resolutely penitential, as a logical consequence of her belief in the Mystical Body. As she wrote in *From Union Square to Rome*, “We are bowed down with [Christ] under the weight of not only our own sins but the sins of each other, of the whole world. We are those who are sinned against and those who are sinning. We are identified with Him, one with Him. We are members of His Mystical Body.”(Day 1938: 12) It was therefore possible and necessary for a 1939 editorial in *The Catholic Worker* to be entitled “We Are to Blame for New War in Europe.” Nationalism and materialism, in which Americans manifestly shared, were listed as the primary causes of the war (CW 12/1939: 1, 4). This sharing of blame was invoked not to elicit resignation but penance among Catholics. What was necessary was to heal the Mystical Body through concrete, direct, and personal action. One must begin with conscientious objection, the simple refusal to participate in the killing. One must also give up any job which directly or indirectly contributed to the war effort (Coy 1996: 49). Peace is not the effect of political negotiations among nation-states, but is rather brought about by the simple refusal to divide the Body of Christ through loyalty to Caesar.

Dorothy Day’s understanding of the Mystical Body of Christ depended on her very keen and almost instinctual sense that the soul is not to be separated from the body, and the spiritual is not to be separated from the political. She was by no means a materialist. As she wrote in 1940, “This work of ours toward a new heaven and a new earth shows a correlation between the material and the spiritual, and, of course, recognizes the primacy of the spiritual... Hence the leaders of the work, and as many as we can induce to join us, must go daily to Mass, to receive food for the soul.”(CW 2/1940: 7) It is Christ in the Eucharist, after all, who builds His Mystical Body; we can only witness to what Christ is doing in His Body. The Body of Christ is therefore “mystical” in the sense that the work is accomplished not by human effort but by the grace of Christ whose Spirit works within us. The Body of Christ is not mystical in the common twentieth-century usage of the word, in which it has come to mean an essentially individual spiritual experience transcending space and time. For Dorothy Day, the Mystical Body of Christ did not hover above history either as a purely interior spiritual experience or as an experience of communion after death. The Mystical Body of Christ was a real, concrete communion of human bodies which directly challenged other, violent attempts to organize human bodies to do one another harm, specifically the configuration of the nation-state. Dorothy refused therefore to claim the soul for Christ and hand the body over to the state, or claim that we could be “mystically” united in spirit while our bodies fought and bled.

In this construal of the Mystical Body of Christ, Dorothy Day was in fact close to the more traditional usage of the term *corpus mysticum* in Eucharistic theology. As Henri de Lubac’s classic study *Corpus Mysticum* showed, in the early Church the term “mystical
body” referred not primarily to the Church but to the Eucharistic elements. The term corpus verum, or real body, referred to the Church. Christians and their actions are the real body of Christ, and the Eucharist is where the Church mystically comes to be. The term “mystical” indicated the “mystery” of the Eucharist, its hiddenness from ordinary sense experience, which nevertheless assumed the real presence of Christ in the Eucharistic elements. De Lubac documents a gradual inversion of meaning, however, beginning in the late middle ages, in which the Church exclusively has come to be identified as the corpus mysticum and the Eucharistic elements are the corpus verum. The shift in terminology is significant because it occurs at a time when the Church is becoming increasingly institutionalized and the spiritual life is becoming increasingly individualized. The Eucharist is less an ecclesial action and more an extrinsic miracle which invites individual devotion (Lubac 1949). The danger is that the real life of grace in the Church will now be seen as “mystical,” with “mystical” redefined as that which is hidden in the recesses of the individual heart, or that which can be realized only outside of history. The true life of Christian charity realized in the Eucharist is then potentially relegated to a “spiritual” realm cordoned off from the “political,” the business of the world.

Although Dorothy Day was one with the Catholics of her age in speaking of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ, she in fact was closer to the patristic and early medieval theologians who saw the Church as the corpus verum, the true body of Christ. Here was a sacramental sensibility which felt the Body of Christ as an almost physical reality. The strained sinews, the open wounds, the contorted face, the purplish blood of the crucifixes adorning Catholic Churches were reflected and manifested in a very real sense in the broken and torn bodies which were appearing both on the doorsteps of the Catholic Worker houses and in far greater magnitude on the battlefields of Europe. For Dorothy, in Christ there was no separation of his Body and the Spirit that gave it life. The political and the spiritual were therefore inseparably one, and the peace of Christ should be embodied not only in the hearts of people, but in their tortured limbs as well.

“We ARE STILL PACIFISTS”:
DOROTHY DAY’S PACIFISM DURING WORLD WAR II

Sandra Yocum Mize

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We are still pacifists. Our manifesto is the Sermon on the Mount, which means that we will try to be peacemakers. (Day 1983: 262)

This declaration announcing the Catholic Worker’s commitment to an absolute pacifism appeared in the January 1942 edition of the New York Catholic Worker. The author was the newspaper’s editor, Dorothy Day. Despite her use of “we,” Day indicated that “there will be great differences of opinion even among our own groups as to how much collaboration we can have with the government in times like these.” (Day 1983: 263)

In retrospect, the differences of opinion were far greater than the matter-of-fact tone of the statement indicates. Day’s uncompromising position on non-cooperation with the war effort against Nazi and Japanese militarism cost the movement dearly. Subscriptions declined by nearly 75%, from a high of 190,000 in 1938 to 50,500 by 1945. Similarly, the number of houses of hospitality declined from 32 to 10, at least in part because of Day’s unyielding commitment to pacifism during World War II. No other occasion rivals this 1942 declaration against warfare for bringing into stark relief the radical posture encountered in Day’s pacifism. The dropping of two atomic bombs at the end of this global conflagration to some extent obscures the position. Activism on behalf of peace in a post-nuclear world appears far more sensible than a refusal in 1942 to cooperate in any way with military efforts to stop the real threats posed by the Axis powers.

Noting here the startling nature of Day’s 1942 declaration of peace should not be interpreted as a claim that members of the Catholic