

“EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED”: DOROTHY DAY, FLANNERY O’CONNOR
AND POPE FRANCIS ON WORK – SELECTED SESSION

Topic: “Everything is Connected”: Dorothy Day, Flannery O’Connor and Pope Francis on Work
 Convener: Daniel Cosacchi, Marywood University
 Moderator: Mark DeMott, Fordham University
 Presenters: Daniel Cosacchi, Marywood University
 Brent Little, Sacred Heart University

In his paper, “Pope Francis, Dorothy Day, and Activism Today: An Unlikely Connection,” Daniel Cosacchi addressed the relationship between Pope Francis on Dorothy Day on the issue of labor and workers’ rights. In highlighting the fact that Francis named Day as one of his four “great Americans” during his 2015 address to the joint session of Congress, Cosacchi argued that Day’s approach to workers’ rights is a model in understanding how to embody Francis’s own teachings on this topic. Both figures, Cosacchi argued, can be placed squarely within the Catholic social tradition on this issue at least as far back as *Rerum Novarum*. In the most substantial section of his paper, Cosacchi argued that Day’s activism could be seen as a model for the church today in bringing about Francis’s vision for a renewed emphasis on human rights for workers. Cosacchi then presented three concrete steps of ecclesial activism that can bring forth what Francis calls a “bold cultural revolution”: widespread education in Catholic social thought throughout parishes, dioceses, and universities; official hierarchical support for striking workers, such as the US bishops provided for César Chávez and the United Farm Workers (UFW) in 1972; and active civil disobedience like Day participated in with the UFW. Finally, Cosacchi proposed Day as a patron saint of workers in the conclusion of the paper.

In his paper, “The Subversion of Work: The Disruption of American Whiteness in O’Connor’s ‘The Displaced Person,’” Brent Little examined Flannery O’Connor’s 1954 short story, “The Displaced Person,” to reflect upon how “the question of work...is inevitably rooted in our country’s history of racism.” Little explained that O’Connor’s critique of American whiteness in the text is limited only to Protestant whiteness, whereas there is no such critique of Catholic whiteness. In fact, as Little made clear in his presentation, O’Connor almost never critiques Catholicism in her writing. Following a brief synopsis of some salient points from the short story itself, Little showed how O’Connor’s characters were a microcosm of American society where “landowners would deliberately drive a wedge between economically marginalized Blacks and whites.” The result of such an arrangement of utilitarian economics is that even Christ becomes “disposable before the idolatry of white supremacy.” The short story shows that the communal nature of work has both positive and negative elements to it. While it can engender a familial bond between colleagues, it can also contribute to the throwaway culture by disposing of certain individuals. Because of the nature of Little’s argument linking racism and work, he paid attention to a recent debate that has emerged on race in O’Connor’s work. Because of O’Connor’s own racist language and her reticence to critique the church, Little

counsels those in academia to reconsider how we utilize not only O'Connor but all influential Catholic figures in our teaching and research.

Unfortunately, the individual who was scheduled to respond to the presenters' papers was not able to attend. In lieu of a formal response, Mark DeMott moderated a vigorous discussion amongst the members present for the session. Before doing so, however, DeMott reminded all present of the title of the session and highlighted areas in which both papers emphasized the interrelated nature of various social injustices, and asked the question: "How do we challenge the status quo?" The discussion that followed prompted both presenters to move beyond their points. One question asked Cosacchi to consider further the relationship between Day and the US bishops today who seek to advance her cause of canonization. Other questions noted that immigration and environmental ecology were two other areas in which Day's own ethical outlook could be connected to her views on work. A further question noted the theme of "boundaries" that arose in both papers and wondered where the boundaries were between work and the rest of our lives. A further question noted that both papers dealt with women and encouraged both presenters to consider addressing the issue of gender as closely connected with the other issues mentioned.

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