

FEATURE

Movie true to Dorothy Day's faith, commitments

By Henry Herx
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — A woman journalist turns from writing about injustice to actively combatting it in "Entertaining Angels: The Dorothy Day Story" (Paulist Pictures).

Many know of Dorothy Day (1897-1980) as the founder of the Catholic Worker movement, which still carries on the work of feeding the hungry and sheltering the homeless she started in the 1930s.

Rather than recount the remarkable achievements of her later years, the movie centers on the young Dorothy Day as she struggled to understand herself and what she should do with her life.

In this sense, it's a universal story about a person's quest for self-discovery, which for Dorothy was a spiritual journey leading to religious faith and commitment to helping the poor.

Because much of the conflict is interior, the drama's success depends largely on Moira Kelly's performance in the title role, and she puts it over in fresh, winning fashion.

Up to the mark also is John Wells' script, which opens with Dorothy having some fun joining in a suffragette parade in 1917 New York City.

The dramatization introduces Dorothy as a novice newspaper reporter whose idealistic views on social reform make her welcome among the circle of writers, editors, bohemian artists and social activists holding forth nightly in the bars of Greenwich Village.

Though Dorothy remains uncommitted to any particular party or ideology, these lively discussions sharpened her own notions of social reform.

Along the way, however, she falls in love with a brilliant editor, becomes pregnant and, at his insistence, has an abortion, after which he cruelly abandons her.

In pain and outrage over this traumatic experience, Dorothy breaks with her

old associations and moves to an isolated cottage on Staten Island to heal her psychic wounds and regain some perspective.

The second portion of the movie deals with this period of withdrawal, a lonely time in which Dorothy is befriended by a cheerful nun who runs a community kitchen for the island's hungry.

But Dorothy also meets a writer with whom she gradually falls in love. The two live together without being married, and have a baby girl they name Tamar.

It is a happy time for Dorothy as her friendship with the nun deepens her own spiritual yearnings and quest for total commitment.

These reflections finally bring Dorothy to insist the writer marry her and, after he refuses as a matter of principle, she and her child are baptized as members of the Catholic faith.

In the movie's final segment, Dorothy returns to Manhattan with Tamar.

It is 1933 and Dorothy feels compelled to do more than simply write about the disruptions of a deepening Depression, but is overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of homeless and hungry on the city's streets.

At this critical juncture in her life, the charismatic figure of Peter Maurin (Martin Sheen) turns up, tells her it is time for action and presents a plan to open a house of hospitality for the poor.

Maurin is a Frenchman whose ideas of social reform are based on the Bible, church teachings and his own experiences as a former Christian Brother, teacher and Canadian homesteader.

Dorothy finds Maurin's ideas persuasive, and so do many others who join her in putting them into practice.

Based on voluntary poverty and the dignity of each individual, the ideals of the Catholic Worker demand a strength of character not all possess.

The movie does not sentimentalize poverty or physical and emotional needs of the poor. The result may challenge viewers but it is true to Dorothy's faith and uncon-



Paulist Pictures/CNS
Moira Kelly (right) stars as Dorothy Day with Martin Sheen (left) as Peter Maurin in the Paulist Pictures production, "Entertaining Angels: The Dorothy Day Story."

tional commitment to each person in need.

Produced by Paulist Father Ellwood Kieser and directed by Michael Ray Rhodes, the movie is deeply religious in a broad sense, though entirely Catholic in the specific details of Dorothy's faith.

Kelly portrays Dorothy Day as a bright, feisty young woman who agonizes about the poor and takes her love affairs seriously.

It's a great role and Kelly does as well with it as Susan Sarandon did with her

performance as Sister Helen Prejean in "Dead Man Walking."

Because of its stylized treatment of love affairs, an abortion and a suicide, and some coarse language, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — some material may be inappropriate for children under 13. It is to be released in Rochester and Buffalo Nov. 1.

Rochester writer unearths stories beneath Bible tales

When he was a boy, Rochester attorney Peter Lovenheim wondered about the ram who was sacrificed by Abraham in place of Isaac. Somehow, he thought, the events in the Bible story seemed unfair to the ram.

But 10 years ago, Lovenheim, continuing to mull over the Genesis story, realized the death would make sense if the ram chose to sacrifice himself as part of a bargain with God to help provide protection for his fellow animals.

Lovenheim wrote a brief story, "The Ram at Moriah," to tell this story behind the Bible story.

"I didn't know what I had written," Lovenheim acknowledged. But then he contacted a childhood friend, David A. Katz, now the rabbi of Temple Israel, Reform Congregation of Staten Island, N.Y. "Rabbi Katz explained to me this is a

midrash," Lovenheim said.

The lawyer pointed out that a midrash is a story based on a biblical character and episode. The intent of a midrash is to help reflect on a Bible story and to help emphasize the ethical and moral message of that story.

That experiment in creating his own midrash led Lovenheim to work with Rabbi Katz to contact noted writers and storytellers to uncover contemporary midrashim dealing with the first five books of the Bible.

The result is *Reading Between the Lines: New Stories from the Bible*. The collection of 50 modern midrashim came out in June, and is already in a second printing.

Rabbi Katz is returning to Rochester Sunday, Oct. 13, to join Lovenheim for 2 p.m. talk and book signing at Barnes and Nobles, Pittsford Plaza.

The collection includes not only Lovenheim's story of the ram, but also such stories and poems as "The Flood: A Dove's Tale" (by noted Rochester storyteller Rafe Martin); "A New Yorker's Guide to Eden"; "The First Hamburger"; and "Aaron's Rap."

Lovenheim said the book can help people to gain a new perspective on the biblical stories. Thus, he noted, the tales could be useful for preachers and religious educators. The stories may even inspire people to create their own stories.

In fact, he observed, in light of the success of the book — and the number of stories still coming in — he and Rabbi Katz are discussing a second collection, one with a more Christian slant. He noted he is also considering working with Christian storytellers to collect New Testament-based tales.

"People," he concluded, "are rediscovering this ancient literary form."

—Lee Strong

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