A TRANSCRIPT OF WNET/13's

BILL MOYERS' JOURNAL

"STILL A REBEL"

FROM: WNET/13, 10 Columbus Circle, New York, New York 10019

NOTE: This transcript is to be used for news and review purposes only. It has been edited to eliminate interruptions and garbled speech.

FOR RELEASE: IMMEDIATE

BROADCAST TIME: Tuesday, February 20, 1973 at 8:30 p.m. EST

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: Jerome Toobin

BILL MOYERS' JOURNAL
"STILL A REBEL"

MOYERS:
This is Dorothy Day. She was born before the turn of the turn of the century and has lived her adult life among the wounded and poor of the earth. She's been called the most influential lay-person in the history of American Catholicism, as much a symbol of Catholicism in the United States as any single individual.

Such tributes annoy her because although she has obeyed a magnificient call to help transfigure this stricken world, Dorothy Day considers herself merely a pilgrim on a lonely spiritual adventure. A pilgrim and a subversive. At 75 Dorothy Day is still a rebel.

TITLES:

MOYERS:
The idea for this show occurred when Dorothy Day recently celebrated her 75th birthday. There have been moments since when I regretted it. Trying to capture the meaning of her life, the power of her personality, the importance of the Catholic Worker movement to which she's given herself, well, it's like an amateur photographer trying with a Brownie camera to capture the grandeur of the Rockies -- it's a sweeping subject.

The influencial Catholic magazine, America, recently wrote, "If one had to choose a single individual to symbolize the best in the aspiration and action of the American Catholic community during the last 40 years, that one person would surely be Dorothy Day. And yet, she was born into an Episcopal home, a nominal one at that. As a young woman, she ruthlessly cut religion out of her life altogether, flurting for a while with agnosticism, Socialism and Marxism, as she set out to be a journalist. Then two events occurred that were forever to change Dorothy Day's life. She had a child which in some way never fully explained, led to her conversion to Catholism. And she met a remarkable, eccentric, peripetic visionary named, Peter Moran. Together they were to become the founders of the Catholic Worker movement, perhaps, the most important social movement within the church in America in this century.

The strength of the movement grew from the Catholic Worker, a monthly paper, from the practice of voluntary poverty and from service to the poor with no strings attached, and from dedication with great force and clarity to the essentials of the Christian faith.

Since 1933, disciples of the movement have put out their paper, given coffee, bread, soup and a place to rest to thousands of bereft human beings. They fought for the

MOYERS: (continued)
rights of workers and end to racial prejudice and they've called within the church for a more personal liturgy.

But its purest strength lies not in what the movement has done for the poor or in its challenge to the social order. It lies instead in simple sustained loyalty to the most radical idea of all -- the freedom of man's life in the spirit and the possibilities such freedom holds for a new society. We can't in this half-hour do justice to the whole scope of the Catholic Worker movement. We can simply report something of what we felt in meeting Dorothy Day and her friends. For 40 years their work has centered here on the Bowery in the midst of human suffering.

MUSIC: "SUSANNE"

DOROTHY DAY:
The great city of New York just a short month ago came into our door on First Street with a poor, little woman who was covered with lice from head to foot from sleeping out in filth in broken-down buildings, with some loathsome sores and to be very indelicate, a prolapsed rectum, covered with filth, excrement, urine and head-lice and body-lice and they sent her to us--the police, the Brooklyn Police.

This is how extreme we can get, this happens over and over again in the history of the Catholic Worker. And why not take her into the Woman's Municipal Lodging House? They have 45 beds; there is no room. Why not take her to Belview Hospital with her physical condition? It's a cronic case. She's registered in a clinic and she can come back, but she has no place to live, of course. St. Vincent's Hospital? A woman was released with tumor on the brain after an unsuccessful operation although she lived a long time after it and there was no place for her to go.

And I smell places. I don't know how over the years you can accumulate such a tremendous saga of rescue; but in the City of New York, the greatest, richest city in the world we have to bring in this woman from the streets.

MAN:
Most of them are good men, I would describe them, good men. Men who have worked hard all their lives. These are the men who did hard construction labor, who worked in the time when there was no Social Security or Unions and they reached the age where they no longer could do physical labor and they've been thrown off and discarded by society. And so, they depend upon groups like the Catholic Worker for their meals.

WOMAN:
All you can do with someone who's down and out or who's been missed over is be with him. And we provide certain physical things that people may need around here and beyond that and I think, much more important, and I think in a lot of ways more important to the men who come in on the soup line, than the soup, is just that we're here and we're going to continue to be here and it's a place where they get called 'sir' instead of being called, 'hey, you bum!' And it's a place where we hope we don't kick people around and it's a place where we hope we're not arbitrary, but we try to treat people with some respect...and some kind of mutual respect.

MAN:
I start off with beans and then I put in carrots, onions, celery, rice and green peppers....

MAN:
We have our soup line everyday and that fluctuates greatly everyday. It sometimes goes as low as 50 or 60 people and sometimes goes up to a couple of hundred or sometimes more. So that's a daily thing. And of course, we have our family which averages for supper time about 50 or 60 people -- people who are here now working on the paper and some of our neighbors. Whatever we have left over after we have had our meal, we give to any people that come along.

MOYERS:
How do you get the food?

MAN:
We buy some basic staples all the time and periodically when we have a truck which we rent a couple of times a month, when we're working on the paper and need it to take the paper to the post office, we go to the market at Hunts Point...some of the people do...and beg for food and if we're totally unsuccessful on a given day that we go to the market, then we have to buy things at the market. But generally we always get something. Sometimes we get a goodly load and sometimes not so good. At Thanksgiving and Christmas things are pretty good.

MUSIC: "SUSANNE"

MOYERS:
Dorothy Day now spends most of her time at the Catholic Worker farm at Tivoli one hundred miles from New York City on the Hudson River. Life at Tivoli reflects the variety of the movement's 40 year history. It's a place for music, for the planting and harvesting of food, for meditation, but always by young and old alike for ministering unto anyone who comes. Tivoli is the home for some of the remaining veterans of the Catholic Movement, people like Marge Hughes, who with Dorothy Day somehow keeps it all together:

MARGE HUGHES:
Is your back better today? Is your back better today?

MAN:
Yeah. I have a pain over here though. Last night I didn't sleep good at all.

MARGE HUGHES:
Hans went to sea on a sailing ship when he was 14 years old.

MOYERS:
How long has he been here?

MARGE HUGHES:
Oh, for years.

MOYERS:
How did he find his way here? How did he arrive?

HUGHES:
Oh, he had broken his leg at some point in New York City and he came up to the Catholic Worker which was then on Mott Street, out of curiosity and stayed around a while. And he was invited to go out with the firemen and the first morning he was out there, we saw some girls stirring up drop biscuits for a crowd of 50 or 60 people, some inexperienced girls, and he couldn't stand it. He took over and he's been with us ever since.

MOYERS:
Some people think that by coming here to this beautiful mountain beside the Hudson the Catholic Workers are retreating from the world, rather than trying to change the world. Is that a valid criticism or fear?

HUGHES:
I think it might be a valid fear because it would be in some senses easy to retreat here, but in another way it's not valid because I think we are a sort of microcosim of the world outside. There's scarcely any major problem you can mention in society at large that we don't have here or haven't had here at one time or another. There's a great deal of suffering that goes on here, mental, emotional physical.

MOYERS:
What are some of the problems?

HUGHES:
Well, some of the problems are that with all this freedom things get very inefficient, sometime we're ankle-deep in dirt. But then, someone sweeps it up. And there are differences of opinion about just about everything. It's very much... except that it's on a larger scale...it's very much the way a normal family functions. Some people...although in a group this size usually everyone can find a friend, everyone can find someone that understands him or her at any given time. There are disputes over what to eat and if the lights should be on or off and making noise at night -- all kinds of things. But it's exactly the kinds of things that goes on in a family and there's a tremendous amount of unity too. Once you find out where there's an emergency or if anyone has a great sorrow of some kind, there's a perceptable feeling of unity and support and you get really fond of people you don't like. You might be quarrelling, but there's a bond almost like a flesh and blood bond.

MOYERS:
And there are people who don't like each other?

HUGHES:
Oh, of course...without doubt. Loud and clear.
And many visitors who come to the New York place also come up here. We have discussion groups and classes in social and economic things, languages. And we have a continual stream of visitors from all over the world.

MOYERS:
So many of the battles that you and Dorothy Day have fought over the years have now been won. What happens now? Is the Catholic Worker Movement an anachronism?

HUGHES:
Not at all. In the first place that's one of the great lies in this society. We have all this welfare and high wages and affluence. Some people have it, but it's all based on a competitive ability to win it. And I've worked in lots of jobs around the country and I know the working men are not making high wages. A few well-paid unions perhaps are, but the bulk of working people are not. Most people with children have to have two wage holders. And as for Social Security and Unemployment, those things are a big hassell What about a 75 year old man that gets $42.50 a month to live on from his Social Security? And that's part of the big lie that we're being told, that the country is prosperous and that our social legislation takes care of everybody. It just isn't true. There's never a day here that we don't have phone calls and letters and the most heart-rending appeals for people, families, single people, people that don't fit into any of the neat little slots.

If men treated each other like...Peter Moran used to say, "If everyone took less, then everyone would have more."

MOYERS:
Stanley Vishsnefsky was there in the beginning, a young activist taking time to sell the Catholic Worker on the street for a penny. He remains Dorothy Day's friend and collegue:

STANLEY VISHSCHNEFSKY
I think the Catholic Worker has had a terrific influence on the thinking of this country in sort of an indirect way... cause I'll never forget back in the Great Depression when John Kennedy was the President of the United States and came down to visit us while we were down on Mott Street in the heart of Chinatown.

MOYERS:
He must have been very young then.

VISHSCHNEFSKY:
He was very young then. In fact he was going to college then and he came down with his brother, Joe Kennedy, and they spent the day with us there. And of course, they were just the Kennedy's to us, just young people that we thought were coming slumming. And they spent an afternoon with us just looking around the place and I remember distinctly how bewildered he was at the sight of the poverty and the misery of the place.

And then Dorothy came in and she talked to him and then Dorothy said, "Come and have supper with us." And Kennedy looked at her a little startled and says, "No, come out and have dinner with us instead." And Dorothy and Joe and myself

VISHSCHNEFSKY: (continued)
we went out to a little place around the corner and we had a wonderful conversation...

MOYERS:
And you think that the paper and the people who have been involved in the Movement, and Dorothy have touched people like that?

VISHSCHNEFSKY:
I think that the influence of that day at the Catholic Worker when he saw another side of life for him and then when Michael Harrington spent two years with us and wrote his book on "The Other America", and this book came to the attention of John Kennedy, I believed Kennedy realized the poverty because he knew from the Catholic Worker what poverty really was. And I have a feeling that the Catholic Worker in a way was the seed that planted the idea of the Poverty Program, that brought the idea of the poor to the attention of the people. Because Dorothy tells me that she goes around lecturing to people and people say, "Well, what do you need the Catholic Worker for, there's no longer any poor." And she says Michael Harrington's book is the answer to that -- that there are the poor, but the poor are isolated in pockets here and there, all around us, and we don't see them.

MUSIC: "SUSANNE"

MOYERS:
So many people have written so many generous comments about you in the last few years that I would adulation would become a problem for you.

DOROTHY DAY:
Well, in a way it makes you feel like an awful failure. You feel that somehow you've made some terrible mistakes along the way, you know. But I think it's the failure of the American people who insist upon having a figurehead and I suppose it's because I'm a woman journalist who writes personally because I was taught to write personally.

We started writing newspapers when I was 10 years old in the family. I was taught that a woman had to write sob stuff and whenever I tried to write serious things, like the revolution in Mexico when I was living down there in 1929, and the closing of the churches and the martyrdom of Catholics and so on, these stories would be rejected and the stories that would be accepted would be the stories of the wanderings of myself and my four-year-old daughter around Mexico, a travel-log. And as a matter of fact the readers of the Commonweal got to like these stories so much that when I

DAY: (continued)
didn't write a story for 6 months, they'd write. One woman said, "Is she dead?", meaning the child, and would demand more stories of this sort. During the crisis of the '30's when anti-Semitism was beginning to bloom, you might say, in Brooklyn. Somewhere around Borough Hall they had meetings where the swastika was very much in evidence and there was a great deal of anti-Semitism, meetings were held in halls with bands and people, speaking about Hitler's great work in overcoming Communism, Jews being synonamous with Communism. We would go over there with the paper and distribute it and have it torn up and thrown in our faces and when I wrote stories about that, they were rejected. And I would get sweet polite letters from the editor saying, "Dear Dorothy: Why don't you keep to your delightful, informal essay style?"... and leave these issues to greater minds, I suppose.

But I think things have changed to a certain extent so that you can write about profound issues like injustice, the suffering of the needy, and the groaning of the poor.

MOYERS:
Are you sympathetic to any extent to what women are trying to do today in reaching for their rights and their individuality?

DAY:
Yes. I think a great many areas are necessary, but I would say local politics, if I stayed long enough in one place, instead of traveling around between New York and Tivoli and visiting various groups of Catholic Workers throughout the country, I would be more interested in local politics and I think that's very necessary. I think that when it comes down to it, I think that Martin Buber had the right idea when he said, "The state should be a community of communities..." I don't think you can legislate the rights of individuals. I think that has to spring out of the....man's realization of what St. Paul called the mystical body of Christ, that we're all members of one another.

MOYERS:
Let me ask you about what appears to be something of an irony in the relationship between the Catholic Worker Movement, yourself and the Church. You've fought racism all of your life, you've fought the war, you've fought poverty. And yet, there are within the Church as well as in other parts of society resistance now to integration in middle-class neighborhoods, hawkish support for the war from these people, and some resistance to doing something about the poor. What about these contradictions?

DAY:
Some resistance? Plenty of resistance. You look at these estates up and down the Hudson there owned by the Church and various Orders and you think to yourself, it's a crime crying to heaven for vengence. And I think this kind of vengence is going on now.

MOYERS:
How come?

DAY:
They are emptying, they don't have the postulates to come. The buildings stand empty, this great big Jesuit Seminary down there is now a cooking school. The Christian Brothers are leasing their property to the city. I think to myself there used to be great liberators come to liberate it from its investments. And I think that's going to be a very difficult thing, very difficult thing for people themselves to liberate themselves from the whole concept of interest on money. You know, in dealing with insurance companies we have to go ahead and deal with interest on mortgages and so on and so forth cause you can't buy a piece of property without having a mortgage, so we're all involved in this whole money scheme, just as the Church is.

MOYERS:
Well, do you see these as the chief priorities?

DAY:
Chesterson says that interest and war were the two great problems of the day, two of the greatest problems of the day. And when the Church puts its money out, money lending interest and gets involved with war industries, and what isn't involved. Anybody who owns any kind of investments...if you put your money in the bank, the bank puts it out. If you put it in mutual funds, they put it out. So that in a way we're all guilty, every single one of us. And that's why I say that when we're dealing with these issues and arguing about this, we're not arguing about this from any height of virtue, it's just something that we as an American people are involved in. And I think when Cardinal Spellman said, "My country, right or wrong.", I thought to myself, yes, it's true; it is our country. And every single one of us are involved in the right and the wrong. And he meant it one way perhaps and at the same time who can judge how he meant it.

MOYERS:
You once wrote that if the Chancery ordered you to stop publishing the Catholic Worker tomorrow, you would. Isn't that accepting someone else's definition of your freedom?

DAY:
When I say I would obey Cardinal Spellman or...there's many times a great weiriness in work of this kind and you think to yourself how pleasant it would be if I could just drop all responsibilities and all authority, the authority which comes you know, from the fact you've taken it upon yourself to do something...and you have to do it. And somebody saying 'stop' and my conscience, I think, in looking around me and seeing the tremendous growth of the Catholic Worker around the country in all these small ways, these very small ways, made me realize that I could immediately obey the Cardinal and nothing could stop the Catholic Worker. I must say that I first became a Catholic because I felt that the Catholic Church was the church of the poor and I still think it is the church of the poor. I think it's the church of all immigrant populations that came over or brought over for prosperous puritan, money-making, developers of this country, ravishers of it, you might say. The very words used in connection with them, 'guineas', 'da-gos', 'wops', 'micks', Irish weren't allowed to own property in Massachusettes.

But the Church itself misunderstood, as I say, in many many ways. There's the freedom in the Church which is something that nobody understands. I believe in miracles, of course; I believe that perhaps someday there may be mutinies large enough to bring an end to war. Who knows what will happen?

When my mother died, she said to me...she said, "Dorothy, don't pray that I live. I've been through two World Wars, the San Francisco earthquake and a Florida hurricane and I really feel that I've had enough." In other words she'd lived through them and endured them and she was a woman of a happy disposition, but she felt that her life was full and that she was ready to go and she could have this beautiful acceptance. But we're living in these times -- a time of tremendous failure.

MOYERS:
Of what?

DAY:
Of man's sense of responsibility for what he is doing. He relinquished it to the state. He's not obedient to his own promptings of conscience. We were talking about obedience before and the various meanings of it. It's a very important word and it seems to me that if the Catholic Worker arouses the conscience by a constant portrial of man's needs, a constant failure of government, the constant failure of but this taking upon one's self, even though it doesn't bring the satisfaction of any immediate accomplishment.

DAY: (continued)
I suppose everybody thinks that what they do is just a drop in the bucket, but this quotation from William James that one of our readers sent to us. We've reprinted it on cards and have sent it out certainly to everyone who writes to us: "I am done with great things and big things, great institutions and big success; and I am for those tiny, invisible, molecular, moral forces that work from individual to individual, creeping through the crannies of the world like so many rootlets or like the capillary oozing of water, yet which if you give them time, will rend the hardest monuments of man's pride.

MOYERS:
Dorothy Day remains an enigma; a radical and yet, an adherent, a journalist who is also an activist, a believer and still a rebel. And so this small, unashamed tribute has to end with the one mystery which has long attended people like Dorothy Day -- that God has always chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise.
I'm Bill Moyers.

MUSIC: "SUSANNE"

* * *