

# Sainthood as Rebuke: The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Strategic Canonization of Dorothy Day

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*The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops is pursuing an unpopular campaign to discipline American nuns who supported the Obama administration's healthcare initiative. The campaign has boosted the nuns' popularity and further damaged the Catholic hierarchy's public image. In response, the bishops have adopted Dorothy Day's sainthood cause as a means of regaining authority and of criticizing disobedient Catholics safely. The bishops shift the focus from present difficulties to their official role in the making of saints to bolster their authority. To persuade Catholics to support their campaign against birth control they reconfigure Dorothy Day as an exemplar of orthodox belief.*

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Three days after the 2012 presidential election—the results of which were described by conservative Catholic sources as “mostly disappointing”<sup>1</sup>—the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB] announced that they were moving forward with the canonization of Dorothy Day, the co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement.<sup>2</sup> The USCCB's support of Day is somewhat surprising given that Day is a figure generally associated with the Catholic Left's social justice concerns and the American Catholic bishops are, as a group, generally seen as supportive of the concerns of the Catholic Right. The timing of the announcement is also significant. This move comes at a time when the bishops' political influence is waning, their moral authority is compromised, and they are in the midst of an unpopular campaign to discipline women religious, particularly nuns involved in social justice.

The bishops are faced with a difficult rhetorical problem: they must persuade Catholics to adhere to doctrine but cannot be seen to argue. To argue would be to tacitly admit that there is uncertainty about their position and that the office of bishop is dependent upon its audience for its power.<sup>3</sup> The appearance of uncertainty about matters of doctrine—

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<sup>1</sup> Jason Adkins, “Catholic Spirit: Elections and the Culture—What We Learned in 2012,” Minnesota Catholic Conference, November 20, 2012, <http://www.mncc.org/catholic-spirit-elections-and-the-culture-what-we-learned-in-2012/>.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Pattinson, “US Bishops Endorse Sainthood Cause of Catholic Worker's Dorothy Day,” *Catholic News Services*, November 13, 2012, <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1204800.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> See Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1969), 4; Frans H. van Eemeren, Rob Grootendorst,

such as the Catholic Church's stance on birth control and abortion—is obviously unacceptable. Equally objectionable is the notion that bishops gain their power from the laity rather than as a function of apostolic succession. On one level this is a question, not of public relations, but of the status of the office of bishop within the Catholic Church. On another level, it is a serious public relations problem. The bishops cannot allow those within the Catholic Church, such as women religious, to continue to defy their authority. As a result of these rhetorical constraints and demands, the bishops must adopt strategies of persuasion that do not look like direct argument.

This essay examines the ways in which the American Catholic hierarchy negotiates the rhetorical problem of arguing without seeming to argue. In this case they do so, I contend, by adopting Day's canonization cause as a platform for indirect argument. This indirect argument is structured around two primary strategies. In one strategy, the bishops use Day as an exemplar, a kind of figured speech that allows the USCCB to safely criticize disobedient Catholics. The USCCB presents a carefully managed portrait of Day as a model of obedience and orthodoxy in her position on abortion as a means of reprimanding lay people and, more pointedly, the women religious who have publicly supported the Obama administration's healthcare plan.<sup>4</sup> In the other major strategy, the USCCB capitalizes on the authority of the processes of canonization. The bureaucracy of the canonization process itself is used to align the bishops with those aspects of the Catholic Church untainted by recent scandal. Put simply, the bishops adopt the voice of bureaucratic authority in the context of the procedures for canonization, and the character of Dorothy Day as an indirect means of criticism for disobedient Catholics.

These intertwined strategies work to deflect attention from the bishops themselves. The authority of bureaucracy, or, as Hannah Arendt defines it, "the rule by an intricate system of bureaus,"<sup>5</sup> is never lodged in a person but rather in processes, and in the case of the Catholic hierarchy there is power in the making of saints.<sup>6</sup> From the authoritative stance of gatekeepers of canonization, the bishops present Day as a sinner who had an abortion, a woman obedient to the church, and an American hostile to government. The decision to use Day's example (as construed by the USCCB) as a figure of argument minimizes the possibility of outright defiance as well as distancing the bishops from their own argument. Simply presenting Day as a candidate for sainthood makes the point that this is a figure to emulate but does not put the bishops in a position of having to directly argue for compliance. Day's idealized portrait allows the bishops to shift the focus away from their own compromised authority while providing a particular model of Catholic action the bishops want to see emulated: a model that begins in opposition to abortion,

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Ralph H. Johnson, Christian Plantin, and Charles A. Willard, *Fundamentals of Argumentation Theory: A Handbook of Historical Backgrounds and Contemporary Developments* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum 1996), 3-5.

<sup>4</sup> Sister Carol Keehan, president of the Catholic Health Association of the United States, and Sister Simone Campbell, executive director of the Network lobbying group, both publicly supported the HHS mandate. See Helen Cooper and Laurie Goodstein, "Rule Shift on Birth Control Is Concession to Obama Allies," *New York Times*, February 10, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/11/health/policy/obama-to-offer-accommodation-on-birth-control-rule-officials-say.html?pagewanted=all>.

<sup>5</sup> Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1970), 38.

<sup>6</sup> The cult of saints was reintroduced to popular culture, Oliver Bennet argues, through John Paul II's policy of "strategic canonization" which was part of his overall program of "popular sanctity" which had wide appeal. See Oliver Bennet, "Strategic Canonisation: Sanctity, Popular Culture and the Catholic Church," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 17, no. 4 (2011): 438-455.

includes obedience to the Catholic Church, and results in resistance to the Obama administration's Health and Human Services mandate on contraception.

### Why Dorothy Day?

When the bishops announced their endorsement of Day's canonization cause, there was surprise and puzzlement among many Catholics and these reactions included speculation that the USCCB was exploiting Day's legacy for political gain.<sup>7</sup> As the founder of the Catholic Worker movement, Dorothy Day is generally known for her commitment to the poor and her unrelenting resistance to institutionalized injustice. Her commitment to social justice has been seen by some as at odds with the USCCB's overriding concern with reproductive ethics.<sup>8</sup> It is certainly true that Day had a contentious relationship with authorities of all sorts and that she focused her work on serving the poor rather than making public statements about abortion and birth control,<sup>9</sup> but she also was, in some ways, quite traditional with regard to Catholic doctrine. Day is a complex figure with a complicated legacy and arguments have been made by both the left and the right that she can be understood as both a radical and radically orthodox in her beliefs and practices.<sup>10</sup> There is, however, broad consensus that her primary contribution to twentieth-century Catholicism has been in her understanding of and commitment to social justice.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, the bishops have chosen to give less attention to Day's work with the poor and, instead, emphasize her personal life and her religious transformation brought about by conversion. This emphasis has been present from the beginning of the canonization cause when Cardinal John J. O'Connor, the Archbishop of New York from 1984 until 2000, initiated Day's cause in 2000. There are, however, key differences in the cause as configured in 2000 and the USCCB's current campaign.

Unlike the USCCB, which has called attention to Day's resistance to government, O'Connor, in both his public statements and his letter to the Vatican initiating Day's canonization, downplays Day's defiance to institutional oppression and emphasizes her role as "a model . . . for women who have had or are considering abortions."<sup>12</sup> O'Connor continues, saying that Day "regretted" having had an abortion (prior to her conversion to Ca-

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<sup>7</sup> "Conservative Bishops Embrace Hero of Catholic Left for Sainthood." Narrated by Robin Young. Here & Now. 90.9 WBUR, Boston, <http://hereandnow.wbur.org/2012/11/30/dorothy-day-saint>.

<sup>8</sup> Sharon Otterman, "In Hero of the Catholic Left, a Conservative Cardinal Sees a Saint," *New York Times*, November 26, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/27/nyregion/sainthood-for-dorothy-day-has-unexpected-champion-in-cardinal-timothy-dolan.html?hp>.

<sup>9</sup> See Sheila Webb, "Dorothy Day and the Early Years of the 'Catholic Worker': Social Action through the Pages of the Press," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 21, no. 3 (2003): 84.

<sup>10</sup> John Allen, a veteran reporter on Vatican issues, remarks that "for quite a while, the church at the grass roots in the United States has been fairly badly splintered to a kind of peace-and-justice crowd on the left and pro-life crowd on the right . . . and Day is one of those few figures who has traction in both those groups." Quoted in Otterman, "In Hero of the Catholic Left."

<sup>11</sup> See Sandra Yocum Mize, "Unsentimental Hagiography: Studies on Dorothy Day and the Soul of American Catholicism," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 16, no. 4 (1998): 36-57; Kenneth L. Woodward, *Making Saints: How the Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes a Saint, Who Doesn't, and Why* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 31.

<sup>12</sup> "Dorothy Day's Sainthood Cause Begins," Canonization: The Catholic Worker Movement, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/canonizationtext.cfm?Number=82>.

tholicism) “every day of her life.”<sup>13</sup> He goes on to assure the Vatican that although she may have consorted with “communists, socialists, and anarchists” before she converted, afterward, in her total commitment to Catholicism, her politics all but disappeared: “so much were her ‘politics’ based on an ideology of nonviolence that they may be said to be apolitical.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, for O’Connor, it is Day’s status as a “woman who sinned . . . gravely”<sup>15</sup> and his construal of her idealistic and even naïve understanding of politics that make her a good candidate for sainthood.<sup>16</sup>

The Vatican affirmed Day as a “Servant of God” and declared there was no obstacle (*nihil obstat*) to the cause of canonization<sup>17</sup> shortly after O’Connor submitted his letter to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. There had, however, been little movement in the process until Timothy Dolan took on the cause. Dolan quoted Day in his first address as president of the USCCB<sup>18</sup> and has been a zealous supporter of her canonization, giving out Dorothy Day prayer cards and sending politicians her biography as gifts for Christmas.<sup>19</sup> Dolan’s support of Dorothy Day is, like O’Connor’s, in part due to her contrition about having had an abortion and her obedience as a “devoted daughter of the Church,” especially in regard to the Church’s stance on birth control—a fact emphasized by conservative Catholics.<sup>20</sup> In contrast to O’Connor, however, Dolan and the USCCB praise her political convictions, characterizing her as a “political activist” and highlighting her role in protest marches. Other members of the bishops’ conference, such as the archbishop of Chicago, Francis E. George, have linked Dorothy Day’s attitude toward government to the bishops’ resistance to the Obama administration’s health care initiative.<sup>21</sup>

Day was well known for her opposition to various government actions and was arrested a number of times for civil disobedience; she was under surveillance by the FBI during the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>22</sup> Although her presence in protest marches is perhaps better

<sup>13</sup> “Dorothy Day’s Sainthood Cause Begins.”

<sup>14</sup> “Dorothy Day’s Sainthood Cause Begins.”

<sup>15</sup> “Dorothy Day’s Sainthood Cause Begins.”

<sup>16</sup> This view of Day is not unusual among Catholic clerics and her political stance has been characterized as a function of gender. For example, H. A. Reinhold, a priest and well known liturgist, remarks that Day “is simply unable to see ‘communists’ or ‘anarchists’ as the FBI, or Joe McCarthy, or Louis Budenz, or Walter Reuther see them: she is so thoroughly a woman, a mother and a sister that she sees only persons, wretched lives and human failures.” Reinhold, H. A., “The Long Loneliness of Dorothy Day,” *Commonweal* 55 (29 February 1952): 521-522.

<sup>17</sup> The title “Servant of God” is given when a local bishop has agreed to hold a tribunal on a sainthood cause. If the bishop determines that the facts support the idea that “a candidate has a solid reputation for holiness or martyrdom,” then the file is sent to the Vatican who decides whether the candidate’s public declarations and writings reflect orthodoxy; if so, they issue the *nihil obstat* declaration. Woodward, *Making Saints*, 81.

<sup>18</sup> “USCCB 2011 November General Assembly Presidential Address,” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, <http://www.usccb.org/about/leadership/usccb-general-assembly/2011-november-meeting/usccb-2011-november-general-assembly-presidential-address.cfm>.

<sup>19</sup> Otterman, “In Hero of the Catholic Left.”

<sup>20</sup> Leslie Fain, “Dorothy Day: A Saint to Transcend Partisan Politics,” *The Catholic World Report*, January 3, 2013, [http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Item/1860/dorothy\\_day\\_a\\_saint\\_to\\_transcend\\_partisan\\_politics.aspx](http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Item/1860/dorothy_day_a_saint_to_transcend_partisan_politics.aspx).

<sup>21</sup> George states, “As we struggle at this opportune moment to try to show how we are losing our freedoms in the name of individual rights, Dorothy Day is a very good woman to have on our side.” See Otterman, “In Hero of the Catholic Left.”

<sup>22</sup> Nancy L. Roberts, *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker* (Albany: State University of New York Press 1984), 144-149.

known, she also resisted state control in other ways. For example, she refused to participate in state mandated air-raid drills and, as a result, was convicted of violating the New York State Defense Emergency Act.<sup>23</sup> Day's opposition to state actions was considered problematic at the time by the Church hierarchy, which emphasized obedience to "legitimate public authority."<sup>24</sup> The United States government's authority was considered legitimate by US bishops and, as a result, Day was reprimanded by the New York diocese for her actions against the state. Indeed, Day had trouble with various bishops. A member of the Catholic Worker Movement remarked that during much of her early religious career Day was "really a persona non grata in the Church" and she was forbidden to speak in some dioceses.<sup>25</sup> It is important to note, however, that while she rarely consulted the Church hierarchy before taking action, Day never defied a direct order from a bishop.<sup>26</sup> Following the Vatican II reforms with their emphasis on engagement with the world and on the social mission of the Church, Day had a smoother relationship with the Church hierarchy, although not with the United States government. In the mid 1970s, the IRS filed suit against her for non-payment of income tax and launched an investigation of the Catholic Worker organization because Day, as a matter of principle, had never registered it as a non-profit institution.<sup>27</sup>

Day is widely admired by the Catholic left and has acquired a "quasi-mythic stature in Catholic culture" more generally.<sup>28</sup> In addition to being held in high regard, certain features of Dorothy Day's life work well for advancing the current goals—resistance to government, obedience to the Catholic Church, and opposition to abortion—of the USCCB as well as easing some of their constraints. Throughout her life, Day resisted government interference in her religious work.<sup>29</sup> She considered herself a Catholic traditionalist and in her later years was described by Catholic sources as "the obedient but angry daughter of the Holy Church."<sup>30</sup> She is a woman who had an abortion and was truly contrite about it and thus her story has a salience and immediacy not otherwise accessible to celibate male clergy. Finally, Day's work with the poor was carried out outside of the auspices of the Catholic hierarchy and she has never been seen as part of the institutional offices of the American Catholic Church.<sup>31</sup> While this state of affairs had previously been seen as an obstacle to canonization, in that no religious order or diocese would be willing to oversee her sainthood cause, it has now become an asset in that Day is not connected to disobedient religious orders nor does she have any association with the present scandals besetting the American Catholic hierarchy.

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<sup>23</sup> Roberts, *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker*, 150.

<sup>24</sup> "Legitimate Defense," *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), section 2266.

<sup>25</sup> Roberts, *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker*, 106.

<sup>26</sup> Roberts, *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker*, 105.

<sup>27</sup> Roberts, *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker*, 166.

<sup>28</sup> Mize, "Unsentimental Hagiography," 51.

<sup>29</sup> This resistance has been characterized by more fiscally-conservative Catholics as indicative of her opposition to government-sponsored programs to help the poor. William Donohue, speaking for the conservative Catholic League claims "she was not, like many liberal Catholics today, a welfare state enthusiast." See Otterman, "In Hero of the Catholic Left."

<sup>30</sup> Herbert W. Rogers, "The Obedient but Angry Daughter of the Holy Church," *America* 127 no. 15 (1972): 389, 390, as quoted by Mize, "Unsentimental Hagiography."

<sup>31</sup> Woodward, *Making Saints*, 31.

## The Bishops' Rhetorical Situation

The fact that Day has never been seen as part of the hierarchy while at the same time has also not been seen as part of contemporary resistance to the hierarchy, make her a safe source of moral authority, something the bishops need. As a result of the revelations of sexual abuse as well as the hierarchy's role in protecting the abusers, the American Catholic Church's status as the source of authoritative moral teachings has never been lower.<sup>32</sup> Even in the midst of the unfolding sexual abuse scandals, however, the USCCB has continued to weigh in on political issues. The bishops issued a voting guide for the 2012 presidential election—a standard practice for every presidential election since the *Roe v. Wade* decision—and orchestrated a public campaign against the Obama administration's mandate that insurance companies provide contraception coverage.<sup>33</sup>

Although there has been a significant decline in the role of the Catholic Church's influence over Catholic citizens' political decisions,<sup>34</sup> recent studies show that acceptance of the Catholic hierarchy as the "final moral authority" on issues like divorce, contraception, abortion, homosexuality has declined further and faster since the sexual abuse scandals began to surface.<sup>35</sup> The American Catholic bishops are well aware of this state of affairs. A Fordham study commissioned by the USCCB on the reception of the 2008 USCCB voting guide showed that of those Catholics familiar with the guide, 74% said that "the document had 'no influence at all' on the way in which they made their political choices in 2008."<sup>36</sup> This trend was borne out in the 2012 presidential election, which showed a majority of Catholics voting for Obama,<sup>37</sup> who supports abortion rights, which according to the USCCB's voting guide is "never morally acceptable and must always be opposed" and gay marriage which, the bishops explain, undermines the foundation of

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<sup>32</sup> William D'Antonio, James D. Davidson, Dean R. Hoge, and Mary L. Gautier, *American Catholics Today: New Realities of Their Faith and Their Church* (Lanham MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 2007), 286-289.

<sup>33</sup> The 2012 voting guide was a reissue of the 2008 guide. While the voting guides do recycle a good deal of the text from previous guides, this is the first time a voting guide was reissued in its entirety. This is perhaps because the 2008 guide was supported nearly unanimously, with 97.3% of bishops voting favor of it. Additionally, the 2008 voting guide generated far less negative reactions than the 2004 guide, which was condemned by conservative Catholics as "purposely watered down" and "confusing" to the point of evasion. See "U.S. Bishops move to help form consciences as 2008 election draws near," *Catholic News Agency*, November 4, 2007, <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/new.php?n=10979>; Amy Uelmen, "'It's Hard Work': Reflections on Conscience and Citizenship in the Catholic Tradition," *Journal of Catholic Legal Studies* 47, no. 2 (2008): 317-342.

<sup>34</sup> See Mark Gray and Mary Bendyna, "Between Church, Party, and Conscience: Attitudes Concerning Protecting Life and Promoting Social Justice among U.S. Catholics," in *Catholics and Politics*, ed. Michael Genovese, Mark J. Rozell, and Kristen Heyer, 75-92 (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2008); D'Antonio et al. *American Catholics Today*; Gregory Smith, "The Influence of Priests on the Political Attitudes of Roman Catholics," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44, no. 3 (2005): 291-306.

<sup>35</sup> D'Antonio et al., *American Catholics Today*, 286-289.

<sup>36</sup> Mark Gray, "CARA Catholic Poll 2011: Fordham Center on Religion and Culture Questions," Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, Georgetown University, Washington, DC (2011), [http://www.fordham.edu/academics/programs\\_at\\_fordham\\_/center\\_on\\_religion\\_a/events\\_calendar/sept\\_6\\_2011\\_74507.asp](http://www.fordham.edu/academics/programs_at_fordham_/center_on_religion_a/events_calendar/sept_6_2011_74507.asp).

<sup>37</sup> A Reuters/Ipsos poll showed 51% of Catholics favoring Obama and 48% for Romney; see Mary Wisniewski, "Most Catholics vote for Obama, but Latinos and Whites Divided," *Reuters*, November 8, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/08/us-usa-campaign-religion-idUSBRE8A71M420121108>.

“Catholic moral teaching” and the “good of society.”<sup>38</sup> One might imagine that conservative Catholics look to the USCCB voting guide for help in making decision but the numbers do not support that claim. In the 2008 election, while over 39% of Catholics identified as Republican,<sup>39</sup> only 4% of Catholics overall cited the voting guide as a “major influence” in making political decisions and, as mentioned above, among those who were familiar with the voting guides a large majority said it had “no influence” whatsoever.<sup>40</sup>

### **The “Nuns on the Bus”**

While the bishops and priests have lost public regard, American nuns have had a year of unprecedented attention and support, mostly as a result of being targeted for discipline by the Church hierarchy. The Catholic Church’s public criticism of the nuns came as a result of the nuns’ public endorsement of Obama’s healthcare plan.<sup>41</sup> The Vatican’s first major statement on the topic came in April 2012 when Cardinal William J. Levada, the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (the position Joseph Ratzinger held prior to becoming Pope Benedict XVI), issued an assessment that stated that the Leadership Conference of Women Religious [LCWR]<sup>42</sup> and “the organizations associated with [it] . . . namely Network” had “serious doctrinal problems”<sup>43</sup> and that they had “made occasional public statements . . . that disagree with or challenge positions taken by the bishops, who are the Church’s authentic teachers of faith and morals.”<sup>44</sup> The nuns in LCWR were also chastised for “promoting . . . social justice” while remaining “silent” on issues of “crucial importance” such as the “right to life” and “the Church’s Biblical view of family life and human sexuality.”<sup>45</sup>

In response, Sister Simone Campbell, the executive director of Network and a member of LCWR, organized the “Nuns on the Bus” tour, a nine-state bus trip from June 17, 2012 to July 2, 2012 that was designed to bring attention to “all who live in poverty” and “confront injustice and systems that cause suffering”: in other words, to promote social justice.<sup>46</sup> Abortion, gay marriage, and sexuality are not mentioned in “Nuns on the Bus” promotional materials. Not coincidentally, the tour overlapped with the USCCB’s “Fortnight for Freedom” campaign (June 21 to July 4), which characterized the Health and

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<sup>38</sup> “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States” (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007), sections 64, 38, 46.

<sup>39</sup> “Trends in Party Identification of Religious Groups,” The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, February 2, 2012, <http://www.pewforum.org/Politics-and-Elections/Trends-in-Party-Identification-of-Religious-Groups.aspx?src=prc-headline>.

<sup>40</sup> Gray, “CARA Catholic Poll 2011,” 10.

<sup>41</sup> “Catholic Sisters’ Letter in Support of Healthcare Reform Bill,” Network, <http://www.networklobby.org/legislation/catholic-sisters-letter-support-healthcare-reform-bill>.

<sup>42</sup> A majority (80%) of American women religious belong to the LCWR: “About us,” Leadership Conference of Women Religious, <https://lcsr.org/about>.

<sup>43</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Doctrinal Assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious,” Vatican, April 18, 2012, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20120418\\_assessment-lcwr\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20120418_assessment-lcwr_en.html).

<sup>44</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Doctrinal Assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious.”

<sup>45</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Doctrinal Assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious.”

<sup>46</sup> Nuns on the Bus, “About,” <http://nunsonthebus.com/about/>.

Human Services contraceptive mandate as an issue of religious liberty and sought to link the Obama administration's actions to other abuses against the right to religious belief.<sup>47</sup> The political focus of the bishops' campaign and the accusation that the Obama administration had taken "the first step to deny religious liberty"<sup>48</sup> did not sit well with many Catholics, nor did the perception that the bishops were endorsing Mitt Romney.<sup>49</sup> Coverage of the bishops' statements on the 2012 election tended to be somewhat negative in the popular press.<sup>50</sup>

In contrast, the "nuns on the bus" tour captured far more media attention, much of it positive.<sup>51</sup> There were dozens of editorials in both the Catholic press and mainstream news sources supporting the nuns, and there was even a congressional resolution sponsored by sixty-two members of the House of Representatives that praised the work of American women religious, particularly that of LCWR and the associated lobbying organization Network, stating that these organizations "make our nation stronger and deserve our deepest appreciation."<sup>52</sup> The Catholic hierarchy's attempts to discipline women religious were far less effective than planned.

Even Archbishop Timothy Dolan considered targeting nuns a bad public relations move, remarking that such efforts (although prompted by "legitimate worries" about the doctrinal fidelity of women religious) can be "counterproductive" because they appear "heavy handed and punitive" and could therefore "backfire" on the Church hierarchy.<sup>53</sup> Dolan's concerns have been borne out not just by the coverage of the "nuns on the bus" but also by other recent events. For example, the Vatican's condemnation of a book by Sister Margaret Farley, a theologian at Yale Divinity School, sparked both interest in the book and resistance to the Vatican's position.<sup>54</sup> The Vatican declared that the book showed "defective understanding of the objective nature of natural moral law" and its

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<sup>47</sup> "Help Save Our Religious Freedom," Church Bulletin Insert, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/religious-liberty/fortnight-for-freedom/upload/Fortnight-for-Freedom-bulletin-insert-revised-72012.pdf>.

<sup>48</sup> Barbara Bradley Hagerty, "Bishops Launch 2-Week Campaign Against Health Law," *NPR.org*, June 20, 2012, <http://www.npr.org/2012/06/20/155421644/bishops-launch-2-week-campaign-against-health-law>.

<sup>49</sup> For example, Bishop Daniels Jenky seemed to endorse Mitt Romney by characterizing support for Obama as a "grave sin"; see Manya A. Brachear, "Peoria Catholic bishop assails Obama on abortion," *Chicago Tribune*, November 1, 2012, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/religion/ct-met-anti-obama-bishops-20121101,0,7847154.story>.

<sup>50</sup> See Charles B. Pierce, "The Worst Bishop of 2012," *Esquire*, November 1, 2012, <http://www.esquire.com/blogs/politics/bishop-daniel-jenky-14328505>; "Jenky should issue formal apology," Editorial, *Notre Dame Observer*, April 27, 2012, <http://www.ndsmcobserver.com/viewpoint/jenky-should-issue-formal-apology-1.2862167#.UQ2ka-ioeeY>; A.M. Harrison, "Catholic Bishops are Election Day's Biggest Losers," *The Baltimore Sun*, November 17, 2012, [http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2012-11-17/news/bs-ed-bishops-election-letter-20121117\\_1\\_catholic-bishops-natural-law-biggest-loser](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2012-11-17/news/bs-ed-bishops-election-letter-20121117_1_catholic-bishops-natural-law-biggest-loser).

<sup>51</sup> See Thomas C. Fox, "Lobbyist Sister Finds Celebrity After Democratic Convention," *National Catholic Reporter*, October 9, 2012, <http://ncronline.org/news/women-religious/lobbyist-sister-finds-celebrity-after-democratic-convention>.

<sup>52</sup> Joshua J. McElwee, "Proposed Congressional Resolution Gives 'Deepest Appreciation' for LCWR," *National Catholic Reporter*, June 26, 2012, <http://ncronline.org/node/31018>.

<sup>53</sup> John L. Allen Jr., *A People of Hope: Archbishop Timothy Dolan in Conversation with John L. Allen Jr.* (New York: Image Books, 2012), 59.

<sup>54</sup> Laurie Goodstein and Rachel Donadio, "Vatican Scolds Nun for Book on Sexuality," *New York Times*, June 4, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/05/us/sister-margaret-farley-denounced-by-vatican.html>.



content carried the risk of “grave harm” to the faithful.<sup>55</sup> In the twenty-four hour period following the condemnation, the book, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*, went from being ranked 142,982 in Amazon sales to number one in religious books and number sixteen overall.<sup>56</sup> This turn of events shows broad support not only for the nuns’ social justice mission but also for their theological stances. In terms of political influence, the nuns are playing a larger, and seemingly more popular role, than the USCCB. As a result of organizing the “Nuns on the Bus” campaign, Campbell was invited to appear on a number of news programs as well as being asked to speak at the Democratic National Convention.<sup>57</sup>

### Criticizing the Bishops

Both Campbell’s public statements and those of other prominent members of the LCWR have taken a rhetorical stance in which they refuse to comply with the recommendation of the Vatican assessment while, at the same time, emphasizing their devotion to the Church.<sup>58</sup> Campbell, in her Democratic National Convention address, characterized her support for the Obama administration’s health care plan as “part of my pro-life stance and the right thing to do” but prefaced this statement with an assurance that “we [the Nuns on the Bus] agree with our bishops.”<sup>59</sup> For Campbell, however, agreeing with the bishops means helping those living in poverty through providing food and healthcare, in other words, by fulfilling a social justice mission.<sup>60</sup> The only reference to abortion is the pro-life quote above which recontextualizes the term into a broader social justice agenda.

While Campbell did not publicly criticize the bishops in her DNC speech, in internal discourse, such as the speeches given at the annual LCWR assembly, criticism of the Church hierarchy has been more pointed. Pat Farrell, the president of the LCWR, does not directly accuse the bishops and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith of abusing their power but she does make her opinions clear. She asks, “Is this doctrinal assessment process an expression of concern or an attempt to control?” and follows this question with the following definition: “Concern is based in love and invites unity. Control through fear and intimidation would be an abuse of power.”<sup>61</sup> Sandra Schneiders, the recipient of the LCWR leadership award, is also quite critical, remarking that Church

<sup>55</sup> “Vatican critical of US nun’s book on sexual ethics,” BBC News, June 4, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-18321830>.

<sup>56</sup> Lisa Cahill, “Vatican dogma v Margaret Farley’s *Just Love*,” *The Guardian*, June 18, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/jun/18/vatican-dogma-v-magaret-farley-just-love>.

<sup>57</sup> Some of the highlights include a BBC program on the Vatican assessment, *Hardball* with Chris Matthews, the *Colbert Report*, and the *Daily Show* with Jon Stewart, to name a few. For a complete list see the Network Media page, <http://www.networklobby.org/news-media/network-news>.

<sup>58</sup> See Pat Farrell, “Navigating the Shifts,” Leadership Conference of Women Religious, [https://lcwr.org/sites/default/files/calendar/attachments/pat\\_farrell\\_osf\\_-\\_lcwr\\_presidential\\_address\\_2012-\\_final.pdf](https://lcwr.org/sites/default/files/calendar/attachments/pat_farrell_osf_-_lcwr_presidential_address_2012-_final.pdf); Sandra Schneiders, “LCWR Leadership Award Acceptance Speech,” Leadership Conference of Women Religious, [https://lcwr.org/sites/default/files/calendar/attachments/sandra\\_schneiders\\_ihm\\_-\\_august\\_10\\_2012.pdf](https://lcwr.org/sites/default/files/calendar/attachments/sandra_schneiders_ihm_-_august_10_2012.pdf).

<sup>59</sup> Thomas C. Fox, “At DNC, Simone Campbell Echoes Bishops: ‘Ryan Budget Fails Moral Test,’” *National Catholic Reporter*, September 5, 2012, <http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/dnc-simone-campbell-echoes-bishops-ryan-budget-fails-moral-test>.

<sup>60</sup> Fox, “At DNC, Simone Campbell Echoes Bishops.”

<sup>61</sup> Pat Farrell, “Navigating the Shift.”

leaders “are not called or empowered or sent to dominate or lord it over the community, to take the first place in the assembly or dress in finery or give themselves honorific titles or demand obsequious marks of respect,” nor should leaders “abuse or dominate the members of the community.”<sup>62</sup> While both Farrell and Schneiders are critical of the Church hierarchy, they both emphasize their commitment to the Church; Schneiders through a call to a community bound by service and humility and Farrell through “responsible obedience” that calls for “communal discernment.” In other words, for these women, obedience is not an abrogation of moral responsibility. Through drawing attention to the faults of the Church leadership and reconfiguring the notion of obedience as a function of responsibility and humility, the nuns put the bishops in a problematic position. The nuns’ invocation of humility and responsibility draws attention to the bishops’ denial of responsibility for the sexual abuse scandals and their refusal to make a meaningful apology to the victims. Further, the denunciation of the arbitrary exercise of power makes it difficult for the bishops to invoke their ecclesiastical authority in matters of doctrine without seeming to prove the nuns right.

More generally, effective exercise of power or authority requires prior—and generally unspoken—assent. The contemporary American hierarchy seems to have lost that necessary assent. Even those who show an extraordinary level of devotion to Catholicism, such as women religious, do not seem to accept the bishops’ authority. While the doctrine of the Church affirms the leadership role of bishops, in the contemporary United States there is little in the way of unquestioning obedience to them.

### **Authority and Legitimacy**

Hannah Arendt, in her influential work *On Violence*, points out that “power needs no justification . . . what it does need is legitimacy” in the form of the assent of the community.<sup>63</sup> So while authority can reside in a person or an office, the power that legitimates it is an attribute of the group; it “corresponds to the human ability . . . to act in concert.”<sup>64</sup> Arendt goes on to say that in institutions such as a monarchy, the support of the people is even more important than in a representative democracy because the authority of the institution is vested in a single figure and, unlike systems with plebiscites, there are few explicit and quantifiable demonstrations of support in unelected hierarchies.<sup>65</sup> Power is granted and authority is stable when either the monarch has sufficient personal authority or when there is a perception of inherent authority in the office of monarch itself. In some cases, this inherent authority can be almost wholly subsumed in the institutional office. The example Arendt gives is of the office of priest, which is marked by the “unquestioning recognition” that authority does not need “coercion or persuasion.”<sup>66</sup> It is important to note, as Arendt does, that in the case of the priest, his character is immaterial; it is the office that commands respect. According to Arendt, authority is effective only as long as it is not questioned. It is not, however, simply the defiance of authority that destroys it, ra-

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<sup>62</sup> Sandra Schneiders, “Acceptance Speech.”

<sup>63</sup> Arendt, *On Violence*, 52.

<sup>64</sup> Arendt, *On Violence*, 44.

<sup>65</sup> Arendt, *On Violence*, 41.

<sup>66</sup> Arendt, *On Violence*, 45.

ther, it is in a large part the response of those in authority to such noncompliance that determines whether the authority is still viable.<sup>67</sup>

Along these lines, Arendt points out that one way authority can be easily, and irrevocably, lost is when a figure of authority argues with those he or she is meant to rule over. This is because argument implies a kind of equality with the recalcitrant person.<sup>68</sup> Arendt's understanding of authority makes the nuns' reaction to the Vatican assessment especially interesting. In response to the Vatican's criticisms, the nuns have insisted upon "an open and honest dialogue" with "mutual respect" and "careful listening"<sup>69</sup> on both sides, and after the initial meeting issued a terse press release stating that "the discussion was open and cordial."<sup>70</sup> In these statements, it is clear that the LCWR has adopted a stance of equality with the bishops who have been given authority by the Vatican to oversee the nuns' compliance with the doctrinal assessment's recommendations.

This presumption of equality is problematic in two ways. First, as discussed above, admitting to equality can endanger institutional authority. Second, the USCCB does not seem to know how to engage with public criticism.<sup>71</sup> Institutionally, there is little discursive precedent for productive engagement with dissent. The hierarchical nature of the Catholic Church means that the leaders gain their power from above rather than from those they have authority over. This is especially true of the current roster of U.S. bishops who have not only been thoroughly vetted for orthodoxy on sexual and reproductive ethics, they have also been chosen for their "loyalty and docility to the Holy Father."<sup>72</sup> In other words, these leaders are chosen for their understanding and assent to the structure of Church hierarchy and thus are disinclined to listen to those who defy it because of both personal predisposition and the larger institutional configuration. In general, as Claude Lefort observes, hierarchical organizations have difficulty managing dissent because unlike democracies, which have accepted practices for dealing with disagreement, the discourse of hierarchies has little precedent for managing opposition, aside from censure, demotion, and silencing, strategies which require a recognition of the authority in order to enforce these penalties, a state of affairs which does not seem to apply to the bishops' relationship to the LCWR.<sup>73</sup>

The presumption of equality is a problem organizationally but can also be understood as a theological problem. The office of bishop is one of "authority and sacred power" "endowed with the authority of Christ" and for some members of the hierarchy, particu-

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<sup>67</sup> Arendt, *On Violence*, 45-6.

<sup>68</sup> Arendt, *On Violence*, 45.

<sup>69</sup> "LCWR Statement on Meeting with Archbishop Sartain," Press Release, Leadership Conference of Women Religious, August 13, 2012, <https://lwr.org/media/lwr-statement-meeting-archbishop-sartain>.

<sup>70</sup> "Statement from Archbishop J. Peter Sartain and Florence Deacon, OSF," Press Release, Leadership Conference of Women Religious, November 12, 2012, <https://lwr.org/media/statement-archbishop-j-peter-sartain-and-florence-deacon-osf>

<sup>71</sup> Or as one Catholic columnist memorably put it, the American Catholic bishops' approach to "communication and public relations seems to be purchasing thousands of gallons of kerosene to pour on the flames they themselves ignited"; see Bryan Cahill, "If the Bishops Want to Lead, They Must First Listen," *National Catholic Reporter*, September 12, 2012, <http://ncronline.org/news/people/if-bishops-want-lead-they-must-first-listen>.

<sup>72</sup> Thomas J. Reese, *A Flock of Shepherds: The National Conference of Catholic Bishops*, (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1992), 7.

<sup>73</sup> Claude Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism*, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), 97, 236.

larly those who take a more conservative view, the nuns' presumption of equality is seen as a rejection of pastoral authority.<sup>74</sup> Thus, to seem to rely on human assent for authority must necessarily detract from the relationship to the divine expressed in the office of bishop. To explicitly invoke the power of the office, however, is to risk its total rejection and irrevocably damage the remaining authority of the Church. As Cardinal Archbishop Dolan has noted in his discussion of the disciplining of women religious, one ought not to play the Church's "trump cards" when it is possible they will not win the hand.<sup>75</sup>

### **The Authority of Bureaucracy**

The bishops have few avenues of persuasion left open to them at this point. They cannot be seen to argue because this would either imply equality with the audience, or it would indicate that they need the assent of the laity to give their office authority. An argument strategy that makes rejection difficult and that makes use of untainted sources of authority is needed. The adoption of Dorothy Day's canonization cause can be seen as an effective solution for two main reasons: her credibility with Catholics involved in social justice, and the authority still vested in the canonization process. Day has credibility as an advocate for the poor, and proposing that "a modern day devoted daughter of the Church" be canonized allows the bishops to use the more explicitly sacred functions of their office.<sup>76</sup> Church processes such as canonization and beatification still retain some authority, and sainthood causes have proved popular even in the United States.<sup>77</sup> This acceptance and popularity allow the bishops to sidestep their own problems with public regard while implicitly rebuking those who are not behaving as dutiful daughters of the Church ought to do.

The press release issued by the USCCB on the canonization cause for Dorothy Day is structured to give precedence to bureaucratic processes. The religious aspects of canonization—the holiness of Day, the possibility of miracles—might seem as if they would be the most important topic in a press release, but these are not much in evidence in the documents issued by the USCCB. In fact, explanation of bureaucratic processes not only takes up a good deal of space, it appears before any discussion of Day herself. The opening paragraphs of the press release each detail a different step of the canonization process: the first states that the bishops "endorsed the sainthood cause of Dorothy Day"; the second explains that this occurred as part of the "canonically required consultation"; the third describes the bishops' actions as obeying the procedures outlined in Vatican document "Sanctorum Mater"; the fourth and fifth contextualize the canonization process as part of the responsibility of bishops.<sup>78</sup> The sixth recounts that Dolan and the other bishops agree that Day's "sainthood cause" is "an opportune moment in the life of the U.S. Church."<sup>79</sup> It is only in the seventh paragraph that Day appears as a figure in her own right and not as the object of a set of bureaucratic tasks. Giving precedence to the role of bishops in making saints is an oblique reminder that, while the bishops may have be-

<sup>74</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, "The Hierarchical Constitution of the Church," Sections 893, 888.

<sup>75</sup> Allen, *People of Hope*, 59.

<sup>76</sup> "Dorothy Day's Sainthood Cause Begins."

<sup>77</sup> Bennet, "Strategic Canonisation," 446.

<sup>78</sup> Pattinson, "US bishops Endorse Sainthood Cause."

<sup>79</sup> Pattinson, "US bishops Endorse Sainthood Cause."

haved badly as persons, they are part of a larger and more prestigious process in which persons barely appear.

The procedures for making saints are at once bureaucratic and miraculous. Bureaucratic, in that the contemporary process—instituted in 1983—carried out by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints is lengthy, formal, laborious, and involves canon lawyers, historiographers, and uses a set of standard criteria for evaluating cases and an ordered process of routing cases through the system of beatification and canonization.<sup>80</sup> It is miraculous, in that what these bureaucratic processes are determining is, among other things, the existence of documented miracles that occurred as a result of the intercession of the candidate. As a bureaucratic process, however, it has much in common with other bureaucratic systems: it is fairly autonomous and is constituted through the “elimination of personal relations and subordination of . . . activities to the application of a norm linked to an objective goal,” the goal in this case being the canonization of saints.<sup>81</sup>

Under John Paul II’s 1983 reforms, the sainthood process became far more bureaucratic than it had been previously. The original juridical approach which used a trial system with a “devil’s advocate” arguing against the candidate’s canonization, was changed to a system where the procedures were more administrative than adversarial, thus changing the process from one of confrontation and argument to the management of discrete tasks.<sup>82</sup> More generally, the contemporary Catholic Church functions as a “textbook Weberian bureaucracy,”<sup>83</sup> in that tasks are defined, limited and recorded and are completed by trained staff. A key feature of such a bureaucracy is that individually each task performed is meaningless; such tasks only gain coherence as part of a systematic set of activities oriented to a particular set of goals.<sup>84</sup> Thus, bureaucracy is an authority of form and administrative structure without the complications and problems of persons. It is, according to Arendt, a system that is one of the most difficult to resist because it functions as an independent set of practices that assume compliance and give no point of entry to opposition.<sup>85</sup> Thus, for the bishops, shifting authority to a bureaucratic process that gives little traction for opposition and that carries numinous overtones carries certain advantages in terms of diminishing the resistance of the audience.

### “Safe Criticism”

The bishops’ use of Dorothy Day as a figure of instruction is simultaneously an act of religious authority and a means of obscuring attention from that authority by making Dorothy Day’s actions, as presented by the bishops, the focus of attention. In terms of argument structure itself, the bishops make use of an inherently conservative strategy. They reconfigure “the acts or opinions of a person . . . as a means of proof in support of a thesis,” a technique that Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca categorize as part of what are known as “prestige arguments” or “arguments from authority.”<sup>86</sup> This shift in the focus of authority is, I argue, a capitulation to the reality of the bishops’ diminished authority.

<sup>80</sup> Woodward, *Making Saints*, 99-106.

<sup>81</sup> Lefort, *Political Forms of Modern Society*, 98.

<sup>82</sup> Bennet, “Strategic Canonisation,” 443; Woodward, *Making Saints*, 91.

<sup>83</sup> Ferrero, “Competition for Sainthood and the Millennial Church,” *Kyklos* 55, no. 3 (2002): 338.

<sup>84</sup> Lefort, *Political Forms of Modern Society*, 112.

<sup>85</sup> Arendt, *On Violence*, 38.

<sup>86</sup> Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 305.

While capitalizing on the authority of a separate bureaucratic department does mark a kind of retreat, it is the use of the character of Day that most clearly illustrates a new timidity on the part of the bishops. The bishops' treatment of Day can be seen as a kind of *prosopopoeia*, or speaking to the audience as or through another person, and, as such, looks very much like what Ahl has described as "safe criticism"<sup>87</sup> and what Carlos describes as the rhetoric of indirection,<sup>88</sup> both argument strategies primarily used to criticize the powerful while minimizing the risk of reprisal.

While the pre-existing structures of authority do provide a certain amount of ethos for the bishops, the work of persuading Catholics to support their political stance requires more than just passive acceptance. In the case of the inner workings of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, few American Catholics are equipped or interested in challenging the organization's processes. This lack of resistance does not, however, translate into active support for the Catholic hierarchy's political goals. Persuading Catholics to adhere to the bishops' political vision requires rhetorical work. To paraphrase Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, support for the bishops' political goals necessitates increasing adherence to a particular understanding of right action, to be undertaken when the opportunity presents itself.<sup>89</sup> The bishops attempt to model this right action through the figure of Dorothy Day. In order to do so, the bishops must somehow reconfigure Day's actions in order to refine and highlight the lessons Day's life is meant to impart. In other words, they must link Day's acts to Day's essence, as they understand it.

If we consider the structure and characteristics of arguments from authority that involve persons and their acts as a technique, some interesting dynamics emerge. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca contend that the relationship between a person and his or her acts is malleable, in life and in death.<sup>90</sup> As public opinion changes, some acts associated with a person are minimized and others brought to the forefront in what Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca call the "essence" of a person.<sup>91</sup> This essence is presented as stable even though it is comprised of the "structured aggregate" of a person's "known acts," which can be re-structured in order to be integrated into new arguments.<sup>92</sup> In terms of authority, prestige arguments involving persons and acts make use of common assumptions of what qualifies as authoritative and are often a means of accessing tradition as a means of shoring up present claims. Put more simply, person/act arguments use the audience's agreement that the figure is important, good, ethical, and so on and extend that agreement into new ways of understanding the figure. The audience's agreement is based on not just the action of a particular person but also on a shared tradition of revering certain kinds of figures in particular ways.

In the USCCB press release, Archbishop Dolan is quoted as describing Day's life as "Augustinian" because of her "sexual immorality" prior to her conversion, a "saint for our time" because of her abortion, and characterizes her conversion as akin to Paul being

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<sup>87</sup> Frederick Ahl, "The Art of Safe Criticism in Greece and Rome," *American Journal of Philology* 105, no. 2 (1984): 174-208.

<sup>88</sup> Claudia M. Carlos, "Techniques of Bold Speaking, Safely, in Bossuet's 'Sermon sur la Prédication Évangélique,'" *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 28, no. 2 (2010): 197-221.

<sup>89</sup> Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 45.

<sup>90</sup> Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 296.

<sup>91</sup> Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 296-7.

<sup>92</sup> Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 296.

struck down on the road to Damascus.<sup>93</sup> With this statement, Dolan is not simply using the figure of Day, he is grafting her onto the lineage of one of the most influential saints, Augustine of Hippo, and creating an apostolic narrative of fundamental transformation in the figure of Paul of Tarsus. In terms of narrative convention, Augustine's *Confessions* is considered the prototype for the Christian spiritual autobiography, and through likening Day's dissolute past to Augustine's Dolan is invoking a powerful sense of a shared tradition and an accepted narrative of configuring sinful activity.

Dolan does not simply reconfigure Day's sexual sin as a source of authenticity and authority through an association with Augustine, he also emphasizes the possibility of radical change by linking her experience of conversion to that of the apostle Paul, saying that "like Saul on the way to Damascus, she was radically changed."<sup>94</sup> It is not incidental that Dolan chooses to use Paul's conversion rather than Augustine's in his characterization of Day's experience. Augustine converts when, in the midst of "tears and lamentations," he hears the voice of a child saying "pick up and read, pick up and read" and picks up the Bible and begins to read it and is brought to belief and peace.<sup>95</sup> Paul, on the other hand, is struck down by the hand of God while on the road to Damascus. In contrast to Augustine's conversion, which involves solitary contemplation and acceptance of salvation, Paul is rebuked for opposing God's will and forcibly put upon the path of righteousness. Dolan is eager to emphasize the complete change of orientation—from persecuting Christians to obeying God—by Paul, in order to draw attention to the authority of the divine. When Dolan calls Day a "saint for our time," he means that the "essence" that he presents as Day's character as one of a modern, sinful, and disobedient woman called to obedience and contrition by the divine.

The cluttering of Day's legacy with other authoritative figures may seem excessive, but Dolan's choices make a certain amount of sense if viewed as a method of "safe criticism" as part of a "rhetoric of indirection." Carlos, in her discussion of the French preacher Bossuet's sermons to the court of Louis XIV, describes the rhetoric of indirection as a series of techniques through "which a preacher can deliver criticism prudently and effectively."<sup>96</sup> One of the more prominent methods for delivering criticism to an audience with considerable power over the speaker is using the voice of another to criticize, the rhetorical figure *prosopopoeia*.<sup>97</sup> In the imperfect form (*prosopopée imparfaite*), to paraphrase Carlos, the speaker or writer presents a narrative in which a character expresses the criticism the speaker wants to convey.<sup>98</sup> While Dolan does not actually adopt the voice of Day, he does use the moral character—the "inner person" or "essence" (to use Perlman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's term)—as means of criticizing contemporary Catholics.

This kind of indirect criticism, or figured speech, can be effective where blunt speech can fail. Figured speech, such as *prosopopoeia*, provides some rhetorical cover from criticism as well as a measure of plausible deniability.<sup>99</sup> It does so through involving the au-

<sup>93</sup> Pattinson, "US bishops Endorse Sainthood Cause."

<sup>94</sup> Pattinson, "US bishops Endorse Sainthood Cause."

<sup>95</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 8.12.29.

<sup>96</sup> Carlos, "Techniques of Bold Speaking," 200.

<sup>97</sup> Carlos, "Techniques of Bold Speaking," 205.

<sup>98</sup> Carlos, "Techniques of Bold Speaking," 206.

<sup>99</sup> As Ahl explains, "He [the speaker or writer] is safe because the critical links in thought must be established by his reader or listener: the text is incomplete until the audience completes the meaning." Ahl, "Art of Safe Criticism," 187.

dience in the mechanics of persuasion. The bishops present the person of Day and highlight those acts that fall in line with the current concerns of the Church, particularly in the areas of abortion and obedience. They declare her “a saint for our time,” thus implying that those acts mentioned are especially relevant to current controversy. They never actually insist that anyone emulate her; they allow the category of saint to do that work for them. The Catholic audience, familiar with the role of saints as models of behavior, supplies the purpose for the argument. The attenuated quality of the kinds of authority used by the bishops is a means of avoiding the appearance of needing assent from the audience. The authority of saints emanates from past experiences and remote Vatican offices distant from the bishops. Authority has been relocated and the bishops have absented themselves from the argument. The decline of the authority of Church offices as well as suspicion of individual clergy members make an appeal to past practices—whether traditional, bureaucratic, or both—especially useful for the USCCB.<sup>100</sup>

## Conclusion

Oblique argument and “safe criticism” are tools used by those unsure of their authority and those who have something to fear from their audience. As Carlos has argued, using historical figures to criticize the powerful (i.e. *prosopopoeia*) was a common technique for speakers and writers at the mercy of absolute monarchs. Ahl makes a similar point in his discussion of “safe criticism,” that figured speech was an absolute necessity in the Roman imperial period. The fact that the USCCB uses these techniques indicates a certain awareness on the part of the bishops of their public decline and, ironically, communicates exactly the impression that the bishops most want to avoid; that they have little or no power over women religious or the laity and that they are afraid of them.

In a more general context, the rhetorical strategies of the bishops provide an interesting case study in the rhetoric of traditional institutions and organizations that have experienced a loss of authority. While there are few institutions that have experienced the level of public outrage that the sexual abuse scandals have generated, with the accompanying loss of moral authority, there has been a decline in the influence of religious organizations in politics more generally. The recent presidential election functioned, in many ways, as a public referendum on conservative religious ideology. The effects of the election are rippling through the Republican Party’s religious supporters and candidates and it is likely that we will see some changes in public religious rhetoric on political issues. It will be interesting to see how the change in public regard will manifest in new rhetorical appeals crafted by religious figures and groups. Understanding the role of figured speech in “safe criticism” and how rhetorics of indirection work will be valuable in assessing these new rhetorical appeals.

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<sup>100</sup> As Giddens explains, intact traditions (like bureaucratic processes) tend not to be lodged in persons or even specific offices but rather are diffused throughout the behaviors and norms of community life. Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 145.