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SUBJECT: mp67 The life you save could be your own....

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mp67 The life you save could be your own... 2.26.14

The title of one of Flannery O'Connor's short story is the title for a book by Paul Eli (I heard him interviewed by Krista Tippet on NPR's On Being this week 2-23-14). It is a joint biography of four catholic American figures of the 20th Century: Thomas Merton, Walker Percy, Flannery O'Connor, and Dorothy Day. My own life is influenced by the first and last in their contrasting responses to Spiritual consciousness. Merton retreated from the cosmopolitan life of wealthy Manhattan to a monastery in the hills of rural Kentucky. Day took her radical nature to live with the poor and create the beloved community in New York's Bowery rather than just talk about future social change like many of her radical activists friends in Greenwich Village. But they also have a lot in like. Merton's passion for the holy resembles Day's zeal "to make the world a little easier to be good."

I subscribed to the Catholic worker in college (I attended Mississippi College a Baptist Liberal Arts College) and Day captivated me with is vision of Christian community living arm and arm with the poor. The defining moment in her lift was at 8 she lived through the San Francisco 1908 Earthquake. She was people helping strangers and wondered why could they not help others just like that every day (not just during a major crisis). She came to see that someone is having a personal earthquake every day. So we should be there for them too. She said we should not only serve the needs of the poor, but create community with them. This creation of community is a manifestation of Gods Love. We are created by God for Love. War and poverty are perversions of the human spirit. Our drive for love is our natural created state.

Walker Percy was a a man who struggled with depression and family filled with suicide and death (Father, mother, grandfather). He used his art to pull himself out of a state of self obsession. He wrote about people different from himself as a way to connect with others. Christianity for him was a way to go beyond self absorption and unite with humanity. Which is how he used his narrators as well.

Dorothy Day said faith in the modern world must wrestle with unbelief, because modernity comes with unbelief. Out of unbelief comes modern faith. For her and Percy there are story's of pilgrimage from self to other. Their art exhibits the essence of Catholicism.

Thomas Merton began life as a modern intellectual and gave it up to seek religion, separatism and monasticism. But as he aged he became more aware of the need for integration of the self with others.

I am struck by how closely this drive from self to other parallels the eastern conception of self-nonsel. The religious journey east and west is about this path of escaping the ego with different conceptual tools used to guide the journey. The goal is similar even though the language seems to contradict each other (West conceptualizes a journey from self to unity with the true other/God, while East (Buddhism in particular) conceptualizes a journey from self to non-self or true self).

Both ends with the separate self or ego eclipsed by a greater reality of wholeness.

Dorothy Day quote reminded me of my early romanticization of communal living. She say that her goal along with her cofounding partner Phillip Moran was to create a community that would make it "a little easier to be good." I have found my 12 step groups and the Buddhist sangha at Bastrop to be those kinds of communities. I will continue to find those pockets of humanity to sustain my recovery in the future.

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