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Responses to senator who called Day 'a woman of loathsome character'

Megan Fincher | Jan. 27, 2014 NCR Today

State Sen. Richard Black, R-Va., wrote to Pope Benedict XVI in January 2013 about Dorothy Day?s canonization cause. In his letter, Black referred to Dorothy Day as ?a woman of loathsome character? and a communist sympathizer (see blog post here [1]). In response to Black?s accusations, Phil Runkel, archivist at Marquette University, wrote the following email Jan. 18:

> *Dear Senator Black:*
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> *People are welcome to consult Dorothy Day's papers in the Marquette University Archives and judge for themselves how "loathsome" she was. I've looked at thousands of letters to and from Day and her associates, as well as her diaries and manuscripts, in the course of processing her papers, and come to a very different conclusion. (I can assure you that no unflattering documents have been expunged from the record during the 35 years I have served as curator of the Dorothy Day-Catholic Worker Collection.) The FBI agents who compiled her dossier were relying on informants, who have been known to have had axes to grind or to have been just plain mistaken. While some of her occasional references to Communist dictators may have been insufficiently critical, I am aware of no credible evidence that she supported their regimes, or remained a Marxist after her conversion in 1927. Dorothy Day was a pacifist, unalterably opposed to the ?violent extermination? of anyone.*
>
> *Peace,*
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> *Phil Runkel, Archivist*
>
> *Department of Special Collections and University Archives*
> *Raynor Memorial Libraries*
> *Marquette University*

As well, in hopes of speaking with Black face-to-face about his letter to Benedict, constituent John Downing scheduled a meeting with the senator Jan. 22. Downing sent *NCR* the following correspondence after his meeting:

I arrived for my appointment and Senator Black was still in a committee meeting. I met with his Legislative Aide who got a large grin when I mentioned the letter concerning Dorothy Day. He said that "he remembered printing and mailing the letter when it went out, but knew nothing more about it." He did note that they had received a number of e-mails about the letter and that he would relay my thoughts to Senator Black. I gave him a copy of Dorothy Day's Selected Writings and several Dorothy Day prayer cards. He said that he would read some of the book as he was very interested to learn more about her and wanted to know why Senator Black disliked her so much. When I said that the accusations that she was a "communist" were outlandish and uncalled for, he agreed that "the Cold War ended 25 years ago."

And, yes, as you noted in your article, later that day Black announced his withdrawal from the Congressional race. There were several factors that influenced Black's decision to drop out of the race, and I highly doubt my visit to his office had an impact, but who knows?

I intend to return and try to bring the matter up with him in person.

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Links:
[1] http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/senator-calls-dorothy-day-woman-loathsome-character