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## Dorothy L. Sayers and the Passionate Intellect

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# **INKLINGS FOREVER, Volume I**

A Collection of Essays Presented at

The First

FRANCES WHITE EWBANK COLLOQUIUM

ON

**C.S. LEWIS & FRIENDS**

Taylor University 1997

Upland, Indiana

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## **Dorothy L. Sayers and the Passionate Intellect**

Roger Phillips  
Taylor University

## Dorothy L. Sayers and the Passionate Intellect

by Roger Phillips

Dorothy Sayers writes:

[W]here the intellect is dominant it becomes the channel of all the other feelings. The 'passionate intellect' is really passionate. It is the only point at which ecstasy can enter. I do not know whether we can be saved through the intellect, but I do know that I can be saved by nothing else. I know that, if there is judgement, I shall have to be able to say: "This alone, Lord, in Thee and in me have I never betrayed, and may it suffice to know and love and choose Thee after this manner, for I have no other love, or knowledge, or choice in me. (Coomes 206)

The phrase "passionate intellect" has an immediate attraction to it. Biographers and reviewers have been drawn to it. Barbara Reynolds uses it as the main title for her work on Dorothy L. Sayers and Dante (*The Passionate Intellect: Dorothy L. Sayers' Encounter with Dante*). David Coomes entitles one of his chapters "The Passionate Intellect" in *Dorothy L. Sayers: A Careless Rage for Life* and "Mysteries of a Passionate Intellect," the title of a review of his work, focuses on this phrase. (Maitland) But does this phrase have real content or is it merely a

catchy phrase that came readily to hand from Dorothy's years with Benson's advertising agency? Even though Barbara Reynolds uses the phrase as the title for her book, the last sentence of the book expresses a reluctance to appropriate it as valid.

What is certain is that Dorothy Sayers' encounter with Dante the poet was an affair of the heart, or, as she would have preferred, of the passionate intellect. (Reynolds, *Passionate* 220)

It seems that Barbara Reynolds would merely equate "passionate intellect" with "an affair of the heart." E. L. Mascal, on the other hand, uses the phrase to enlarge on the sensibilities of the intellect,

She is absolutely right in insisting that the intellect can be passionate, that through it we can be in love and that it can be the point at which ecstasy enters. This can be true on the purely natural level, as every pure mathematician knows; it can be true on the supernatural level as well. (Mascal 11)

Dorothy's Peter Wimsey and Harriet Vane have the following discussion in *Gaudy Night*:

"Should the people with brains sit tight and let the people with hearts look after

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them?"

"They frequently do."

"So they do. But what are you going to do about the people who are cursed with both hearts and brains?"

"Well, that's just the problem, isn't it? I'm beginning to believe they've got to choose."

"Not compromise?"

"I don't think the compromise works."

"Compromise is in my blood. However. Should you catalogue me as a heart or a brain?"

"Nobody," said Harriet, "could deny your brain."

"Who denies it? And you may deny my heart, but I'm damned if you shall deny its existence." (Sayers *Gaudy* 66)

Is the phrase "passionate intellect" one that does away with the curse of having both heart and brains by denying that one has a heart? In her mature years Dorothy stated "I am quite incapable of religious emotion. But the lack of religious emotion in me makes me impatient of it in other people, and makes me appear cold and unsympathetic and impersonal. This is true. I am." (Brabazon 262) The context is important here so that too much is not read into these statements. If an interviewer from the BBC were to approach Dorothy saying that they had heard she was "cold and unsympathetic and impersonal," I think that Dorothy would be offended. On the other hand, if an enthusiastic worshiper had just finished a third lap around the church in one of the more exuberant worship services and said, "You appear cold and unsympathetic and impersonal," I would expect Dorothy to say, "This is true. I am."

Scripture instructs us to love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength. (Deut. 6:5, Mt. 22:37, Mk. 12:30, Lk. 10:27.

Deuteronomy omits "mind," Matthew omits "strength" though argument could be made that these are subsumed by the other terms.) Though we as persons are one, it is sometimes convenient to think of ourselves in parts. With respect to heart, soul, mind and strength individuals may manifest more of one aspect than another. A person whose only avenue to Christianity is through television may have a great heart love for God, but exhibit little of mind or strength. A theologian might have a great mind directed often to the things of God and pour out his strength in serving his Lord, but may exhibit little emotion in the process. Dorothy would have little use for emotionalism with minimal intellectual input. Likewise the theologian would come under fire were he to make Christ boring.

In some simulation games different characters are assigned various values to indicate how well they will do in different situations in the game. For example, a particular warrior may be rated on a scale of 1-5 for such attributes as courage, intelligence, strength, etc. He might be assigned a 3 for courage, a 4 for intelligence, a 1 for strength and these would indicate how he would do against a warrior of different ratings. If a similar rating could be done in actuality based on loving God with heart, soul, mind, and strength, it would find most of us with mixed ratings and with mid-range scores at best. And our daily lives would draw on one or the other of these aspects of our beings. But some activities might draw upon all aspects—singing hymns, if one thinks about the words one is singing, might be one of these activities. Dorothy L. Sayers loved singing the great hymns of the faith. She, I think, was a rare individual who in the latter part of her life ranked at the highest level in loving God with heart, soul, mind, and strength. Her literary productions and speaking engagements

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required a total commitment of her resources and these resources surpassed those of most others. It is curious that she says that she cannot come to God through her emotions. Her passionate, heart-felt defense of Christianity is evident throughout her essays, plays, translation of Dante, etc. She was not a victim of emotionalism, but that is to her credit. I expect that she would have looked cold, unsympathetic and impersonal to a church I attended where the members ran through the aisles and shouted, but where there was neither decorum nor message. I don't expect that Dorothy spoke in tongues, but would she have played a tambourine? She had the exuberance to carry it off.

Sara Maitland stated that plausibly, "she gave up on the life of the emotions and retreated into the intellect by way of self-protection." (Maitland) Dorothy may have attempted that, but she failed. Her life and writings continually demonstrate a heart-felt love for God, his creation, and his church. Dorothy exhibits all aspects of love for God. She has her hero Peter Wimsey singing exuberantly during a low church service in *Strong Poison* and that is a reflection of her own exuberance. Dorothy states, at one point,

... I am quite without the thing known as "inner light" or "spiritual experience." I have never undergone conversion. Neither God, nor (for that matter) angel, devil, ghost or anything else speaks to me out of the depths of my psyche. (Brabazon 262)

When she says that she has "never undergone conversion" it may be that she is referring to the lack of an event in her life such as Saul's conversion on the Damascus road where at one moment he was not a Christian and the next moment the Holy Spirit had

brought about a dramatic transformation. Many people having grown up in the household of faith can attest to nothing dramatic in their lives, but conversion in Scripture refers to turning from the things of this world to the things of God, and Dorothy certainly exhibits that in most periods of her life. She goes through a period of questioning and doubt in her college years, as do many, but her letters evidence a continued love for Christ and his church during this time.

A friend of my wife's once spoke about Dorothy L. Sayers and how much she enjoyed Dorothy's detective stories, but she was rather sorry that Dorothy had become religious in her later years. It was as if she equated "becoming religious" with an affliction of the elderly on a par with Alzheimer's disease. Dorothy gives an oblique reference to such a charge against her since, as she told one interviewer: "It would be well to discourage the idea that I am a writer of mystery-fiction, who in middle age suddenly 'got religion' and started to preach the gospel. . . ; the truth is the exact contrary. I was a scholar of my college." (Harmon 4)

In another instance she wrote:

It is over twenty years since I first read the words, in some forgotten book. I remember neither the name of the author, nor that of the saint from whose meditations he was quoting. Only the statement itself has survived the accident of transmission: 'Cibus sum grandium; cresce, it manducabis Me' - "I am the food of the full-grown; become a man, and Thou shalt feed on me." . . . I am glad to think, now, that it impressed me so forcibly then, when I was still comparatively young. To protest, when one has left one's youth behind, against the prevalent assumption that there is no salvation for the middle-aged is all very

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well; but it is apt to provoke the mocking reference to the fox who lost his tail. (Hone 31)

In 1939 (the date given for this quote) she is hearkening back to a time "over twenty years ago" of spiritual vitality which was dormant in the interim. To give my wife's friend some credit, Dorothy's letters and literary productions do not bear evidence that she is a follower of Christ during this time period. Jesus in the parable of the sower speaks of seed falling among thorns - they who "are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasure, and they do not mature." But thorns can die or be rooted out, and that may be the case for Dorothy. Spiritual progress is often filled with peaks, valleys, and plateaus. That may have been true for Dorothy. She certainly expresses times of self-doubt. In 1943 when she has an established reputation as an out-spoken defender of the Christian faith with her Canterbury productions and *Man Born to be King* behind her, she responded to William Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury

. . . that she would feel happy about accepting such an honour if she were a better kind of Christian. Was she really one at all? She mused. Or was she only in love with an intellectual pattern? (Coomes 161)

In 1954 she would again refer to pattern and doubts she has a true faith in Christ:

You said that I, and the rest of us, gave people the impression of caring only for dogmatic pattern. That is quite true. I remember once saying to Charles Williams: "I do not know whether I believe in Christ or whether I am only in love with the pattern."

And Charles said, with usual prompt understanding, that he had exactly the same doubts about himself. But this you must try to accept: when we say "in love with the pattern", we mean in love. . . (Brabazon 263)

But she goes on to a rather thrilling declaration—

I know that, if there is judgement, I shall have to be able to say: "This alone, Lord, in Thee and in me, have I never betrayed, and may it suffice to know and love and choose Thee after this manner, for I have no other love, or knowledge, or choice in me." (Brabazon 263)

Sara Maitland in her review of Coomes' *Dorothy L. Sayers: A Careless Rage for Life* states:

Sayers has been portrayed as a woman whose faith was without emotional commitment, who merely enjoyed theological controversy without any real feelings. . . An equally plausible reading is that. . . she gave up on the life of the emotions and retreated into the intellect by way of self-protection. It seems worth noting, as Mr. Coomes does not, that until the birth of her child (who was raised by a cousin in Oxford), she published poetry— much of it self-revealing, if sentimental. Thereafter, however, she turned first to the detective novel and then to polemic, doctrinal theology.

Dorothy may have tried, as Peter Wimsey would not allow, to deny her heart and the phrase "passionate intellect" is both a

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testimony to and against that. By linking passion so tightly to intellect she attempts to deny that she has a heart and to vitiate any work her heart might do to trip her up. But by enlisting the word passion at all testifies to the heart. Wren-Lewis is correct that no one can approach reality wholly in terms of the intellect:

I frankly do not believe that anyone approaches reality wholly in terms of the intellect . . . I am quite sure it is the feelings and, at a later stage, the will, that are really important. (Maitland)

Tracing Dorothy's walk of faith through her literary productions and letters is instructive. When she is 13 she writes a very mature letter to her cousin Ivy Shrimpton about her father's sermon on reconciling science with the Bible and alludes to a conversation she had earlier with Ivy about creation. She took theological themes seriously at an early age, had her own opinions about them, and was willing to discourse even then, though this particular theme was not to become a major preoccupation with her.

At age 14 she responds to Ivy about a cousin of Ivy's who is contemplating becoming a Roman Catholic. She exhibits some remarkable sensitivity and insight:

I expect you will have to be very careful about what you say. Converts are usually very sensitive, and it is difficult to avoid offending them. . . . So, if your cousin should become a R.C., I should humbly advise you, if I may (I speak as a fool) to accept the position with a good grace and not to make a fuss or to make her feel uncomfortable. And, above all, don't try to argue. It never does any good,

except to sharpen the tongue and the temper. . . (Reynolds *Letters* 9)

This last sentence Dorothy echoed throughout her life. Here is another instance, written forty-seven years later: [B]ut I do loathe making the direct attack by way of argument and exhortation. It is ruinously bad for one's proper work. . . . Also it fosters an irritable and domineering spirit." (Reynolds *Life* 339)

Later in her letter at age 14 she shows mature insight and a heart tuned to Christ:

I think you are a little apt to say, in effect; 'What this man did was an offence against morality, it was therefore wrong and inexcusable. I do not care what excuse this person had. He did wrong; therefore he is a wicked person, and there is an end of it.' Dear old girl, get out of the way of thinking that. It is terribly closely allied to Pharisaism, which, you know, is the one thing Our Lord was always so down upon. And I think that this attitude towards other people will make you have fewer friends, because they will be afraid of you. I shouldn't like to feel, Ivy, that supposing some time I sinned a great sin, that I should be afraid to come to you for help, only, unless you would try to make allowances for me, I'm afraid I should. St. Paul says, as you heard this morning, 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal,' and I think one phase of charity is making allowances for other people's mistakes.

I have written all this in fear and

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trembling, and even now, I dare hardly look back at what I have written. Don't be angry. Try not. It's very difficult to say these things. If you see a person walking along on the extreme verge of a precipice, and if you screw up your courage to go and warn him off, then to one he turns round and snaps at you: 'Don't be officious.' Besides, upbraiding other people for Pharisaism, looks so unpleasantly like the same sin in one's self that it is rather like jumping into a bottomless ditch to pull another person out. I rather wish I hadn't mentioned the subject. Shall I tear up the letter? No, I think not, only, don't be angry, please, because I don't want to lose my best friend for that. Write as soon as you can, please, to tell me whether I have or not. My motives and people's words are not always the same thing.

There! It's done! I've said it, and hated saying it, if that's any satisfaction to you. And now, dear brethren, we will have a hymn. . . . (Reynolds *Letters* 10)

When Dorothy is 15 - 16 and is sent away to school she gives the impression that religious observances are a chore, but she is excited to hear something of the vitality of Christianity and that G. K. Chesterton is a Christian. She expects "that he is a very cheerful one." (Reynolds *Letters* 10) A positive heart emotion along with an intellectual commitment to Christianity were important to young Dorothy. She is confirmed at age 16. "She later said that this was against her will but there is no sign of reluctance in her letters from school. . . Her references to services in Salisbury Cathedral are enthusiastic." (Reynolds *Letters* 35) Music

was a vital part of her life. Her letters often express appreciation for a particular religious musical selection. She sang in the choir at Oxford. Singing is one of the human activities where love for God can be simultaneously expressed to the utmost in heart, soul, mind, and strength (if one thinks about the words one is singing). On the other hand, confirmation classes chiefly challenge the mind though the bumper sticker I once observed on campus could apply equally to confirmation classes, "They can send me to college, but they can't make me think." Dorothy's letters as compiled by Barbara Reynolds do not bear witness to any questions raised or issues encountered in her confirmation classes. One of her letters at this time refers to an argument in one of her university classes about the souls of animals. Perhaps school was more stimulating than confirmation class.

Dorothy had wanted her parents to come to her confirmation service, but they did not. Her letters to her parents and cousin after the service sound more like she is a spectator than a participant. Her reference to her confirmation is about the logistics, the decor, the clothes, the numbers of people there, but nothing of her personal reaction to it all. What did she feel? We do not know. A postscript on the letter to her parents says, "P.S. I never can write about my feelings - that's why I haven't." (Reynolds *Letters* 41) But her letter and writings constantly reflect her feelings. She is very much alive to the situations and people around. Joy, anger, excitement, boredom are readily expressed by Dorothy. Shortly after the previous letter she writes about the hymn " 'O God our Help' [as] something too thrilling for words." (Reynolds *Letters* 43) And I find myself singing it through in my mind to try and capture the thrill Dorothy felt in this standard hymn of the faith. Familiarity has dulled my appreciation, but



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Dorothy reawakens that with her enthusiasm. That ability continues to make her works exciting.

Dorothy's letters during her teen years evidence a person very comfortable in church and one who loves the church's musical heritage. She expresses, not surprisingly, preferences for individuals presenting the Christian message. For certain expressions of Christianity she has no tolerance whatsoever—an aunt, Eleanor Sayers, attempts to interest Dorothy in the Christian Social Union and its work in the London slums and she is subjected to Dorothy's slashing pen for her efforts. (Reynolds *Letters* 66)

Later in life Dorothy will wonder if she is a Christian or one merely in love with the pattern. An incident such as the one just referred to would seem to confirm her later pronouncement. Where is the Christian love? She later sees the aunt at church and flees from her, unrepentant of her destructive words. Dorothy has gone to church alone—an evidence of her personal devotion, but. . . On the other hand I am reminded of the Apostle Paul who authored both I Corinthians 13, the love chapter, and passages vigorously denouncing spiritual but deluded individuals:

The seeds for *Man Born to be King* were sown at Oxford as evidenced by having read two Gospels with more attention than I had ever before given to the subject, I came to the conclusion that such a set of stupid, literal, pig-headed people never existed as Christ had to do with, including the disciples. (Reynolds *Letters* 71)

Many of us would not take the time to take a hard look at the people around Jesus, but it is just that hard look at the world in which Jesus walked that brings Christ's world to life

in *Man Born to be King* and thereby brings a new vision to us of Christ.

Dorothy's letters with respect to Christian faith seem rather tepid until a letter dated April 1913 to Catherine Godfrey (Dorothy is 19). Most letters until this point as chosen by Barbara Reynolds are to family members. Dorothy may well not have written about matters of faith to them any more than I write to my children about the fact that I was born in Detroit—they already know that. But this letter shows Dorothy's power of intellect turned toward theological issues along with an impassioned indictment of the Christian Union about which she says she knows little.

Dear Tony [Catherine Godfrey]

Certainly not!

Speaking as a baptized and more or less educated member of the Catholic Church of Christ as in England by law established, certainly not! The C. U. is no more a necessary corollary of Christianity than the Inquisition. The only necessary products of Christianity are those which Christ appointed. He did not encourage misty theological discussion, but taught by authority and by example. The Early Christians did the same. They met to pray and to exhort. Thus the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages. Discussion of beliefs and dogmas came in, I suppose, with the Renaissance, but rested on the authority of the bible which had become overlaid with the authority of the Church.

The C. U. appears to me more like a product of Darwinism.

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Yes—you must aggressively save souls, but you will never do it by unprofitable argument.

I know little about the C. U. but it seems to me from all I hear of it, to begin from the wrong end. Christianity rests on Faith, not Faith on Christianity. If you have Orthodoxy you will see what I mean. . . .  
(Reynolds *Letters* 72)

Chesterton, the author of Orthodoxy, is often cited in her letters and at one point she laments, after hearing him speak in person, "He is said to have just 'gone over to Rome'. I hope not, because if so we shall have fewer books and different, I'm afraid. . . ." (Reynolds, *Letters* 89)

Chesterton's impact on Dorothy's life and thought would make an interesting study.

There is ample evidence that Dorothy applied her mind to Christian themes while at Oxford. At age 20 she is writing an allegory "distinctly Christian in tone." (Reynolds, *Letters* 77) Six months later she writes to her parents warning them that her Oxford aunts may be writing to them concerned for her soul's well-being. It is a time of questioning and evaluation of the Christianity she has received. "I'm worrying it out quietly, and whatever I get hold of will be valuable, because I've got it for myself. . . ." (Reynolds, *Letters* 85) Dorothy did not "lose her faith" by going to college, though her aunts may have feared as much. While at Oxford she begins writing the poems that are to appear in her first two publications, *Op.1* and *Catholic Tales and Christian Songs*. A vital and vibrant Christianity is portrayed in both of those volumes. The heart and mind of Dorothy L. Sayers are very much in evidence in her

poems. Dorothy begins *Catholic Tales and Christian Songs* as one who wishes to honorably serve her Lord:

And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said,  
Hail, Master; and kissed Him. And Jesus  
said until him, Friend . . .

Jesus, if, against my will,  
I have wrought Thee any ill,  
And, seeking but to do Thee grace,  
Have smitten Thee upon the face,  
If my kiss for Thee be not  
Of John, but of Iscariot,  
Prithee then, good Jesus, pardon  
As Thou once didst in the garden,  
Call me "Friend," and with my crime  
Build Thou Thy passion more sublime.

Another poem, "Christ the Companion," portrays a love and respect for Christ. The questions raised may be rhetorical expecting a "Yes" response, but the questions may have an element of genuine doubt in them, particularly the question raised in the last two lines. That poem is reproduced here:

### CHRIST THE COMPANION

When I've thrown my books aside, being  
petulant and weary,  
And have turned down the gas, and the  
firelight has sufficed.  
When my brain's too stiff for prayer, and  
too indolent for theory,  
Will You come and play with me, big  
Brother Christ?  
Will You slip behind the book-case? Will  
you stir the window curtain,  
Peeping from the shadow with Your eyes  
like flame?  
Set me staring at the alcove where the  
flicker's so uncertain,

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Then, suddenly, at my elbow, leap up,  
catch me, call my name?

Or take the great arm-chair, help me set  
the chestnuts roasting,

And tell me quiet stories, while the brown  
skins pop,

Of wayfarers and merchantmen and tramp  
of Roman hosting,

And how Joseph dwelt with Mary in the  
carpenter's shop?

When I drift away in dozing, will You  
softly light the candles

And touch the piano with Your kind,  
strong fingers,

Set stern fugues of Bach and stately  
themes of Handel's

Stalking through the corners where the last  
disquiet lingers?

And when we say good-night, and You  
kiss me on the landing,

Will You promise faithfully and make a  
solemn tryst:

You'll be just at hand if wanted, close by  
here where we are standing,

And be down in time for breakfast, big  
Brother Christ?

Dorothy's letters from this time period find her searching for a church in a new locale upon graduation from Oxford; reveling in the music and the misadventures of the organ at St. Mary's about a year later; and enjoying Bunyan's *Holy War* and *Grace Abounding*—Christian works that would be uncharted waters for most of humanity.

The day after her twenty-fifth birthday Dorothy writes her parents to thank them for a monetary gift and she comments about the soon to be published *Catholic Tales*.

I hope [my new book] won't horrify  
you, but I'd better warn you about it!  
Basil is doing it and is very keen on it.  
It is called *Catholic Tales*, and all the

poems are about Christ. Some people think it 'wonderful' and some think it 'blasphemous'. Of course, it may fall quite flat— but on the other hand, it is quite possible that some mugwumps may object to it like anything. You won't mind being the parents and aunt of a notoriety, if that should happen, will you? I can assure you that it is intended at any rate to be the expression of reverent belief— but some people find it hard to allow that faith, if lively, can be reverent - But I dare say, nobody will take any notice of it. Anyhow, it's jolly well got to be published . . . (Reynolds *Letters* 138)

Her excitement about the possibility of being controversial is evident, but it is her desire that, "it is intended to be the expression of reverent belief. . ."

The phrase "but some people find it hard to allow that faith, if lively, can be reverent" will find expression 20 some years later in essays such as "Creed or Chaos" and "The Dogma is the Drama" where "pale curates" are taken to task. As a side note, a letter to a friend (Muriel Jaeger) about her poem "Dead Pan" in *Catholic Tales* is interesting as it sets forth what will be a major theme for Charles Williams, that of archetypes, and it also expounds on one of C. S. Lewis's later themes: the enrichment of Christianity by reference to myths. (Lewis viewed myth as "spilled religion.")

In an appreciation of the heart and mind of Dorothy L. Sayers her sense of humor must be mentioned. A letter sent November 26, 1918, is signed, "Yours in love and mirth." (Reynolds *Letters* 144) The content of the letter has to do with a rather serious subject, "pre-Christian revelation to the heathen," but Dorothy has fun with it. Aspects of Dorothy's

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life would make her a candidate for a tragic figure, but her sense of humor displayed throughout her life forestalls that consideration.

Dorothy's poems in *Catholic Tales* are lively. Dorothy enjoyed having a good time with friends and ideas, but she could enjoy contemplative times as well. When she came down with German measles she seizes the chance for a spiritual retreat:

So being thus cut off from my work,  
and not wanting to be a leper, I'm  
going to seize this God-sent  
opportunity for doing what I wanted  
very much to do, and going into  
Retreat for a few days. I'm getting so  
dusty and scuffling in the spiritual  
region I really thought I'd get time for  
such a thing, but doubtless 'all is for  
the best,' as Laura Godfrey would say.  
So I shall be at the Convent of the  
Holy Name, Newlands, Malvern from  
Thursday to Tuesday, in case I'm  
urgently wanted. I'm going to cut  
clear away and have no letters sent on  
or anything, and as for my controversy  
with Theodore Maynard in the *New  
Witness*, it can stew in its own juice  
for a week. Controversy is bad for the  
spirit, however enlivening to the wits.

(Reynolds *Letters* 146)

What happened at that retreat? Dorothy's Christianity seems to be shelved after that. Neither letters nor publications bear witness to heart or mind or strength devoted to Christian endeavor until the play *Zeal Of Thy House* is produced eighteen years later. In the interim several men are part of her life, none of whom appear to be followers of Christ and only one of whom seems her intellectual peer. (Peter Wimsey makes his appearance during this time

and he might also be counted as her intellectual peer.) This is where the parable of the sower comes to mind. Dorothy "has the world by the tail." She is among the first group of women to be granted degrees by Oxford University. But in terms of her Christian walk there are some disturbing items in her letters. Letters to John Cournos are very self-denigrating, angry, and bitter. (Reynolds *Letters* 214,215,217,223) In her inner turmoil her reference to Christ is profane rather than an appeal to a person who could be of value to her in her torment. (Reynolds *Letters* 221) Her letters are extremely personal and are well-crafted expressions of her passion, but though Christ may "be just at hand if wanted," he seems an intrusion now and is not wanted. Cousin Ivy writes to Dorothy about having her son baptized. Dorothy expresses concern that the person doing the baptizing have a head as well as heart for Christianity and, "This is no longer a Christian country. The chances are that the boy will not want to be a Christian; if he does, it will be because he believes it, which is the only good reason. . ." (Reynolds *Letters* 306)

In the letters selected by Barbara Reynolds Dorothy does not display much concern for her son's spiritual well-being. At one point she writes to her son wishing him an enjoyable Christmas break, but there is nothing of the Christ of Christmas. But there may have been conversations or other letters.

Even during this dark time Dorothy indulges in a brief skirmish for biblical truth. To Eustace Barton she writes:

Anyway, this theory of yours sounds good. I rather like 'an asymmetric agent became present on the face of the globe' as a modern substitute for the 'the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters', though it seems a

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little lacking in literary charm (our scientists and religious argufiers might get a bit of fun out of this!) By the way, what inspired those old birds who wrote the bible and the other early accounts to guess that life did start from the waters? That always beats me. It was all far too far away and long ago for them to have had a racial memory of it, and it's not the kind of thing that's obvious on the face of it. And yet they got extraordinarily near the correct order of things: light first—and then water—and then earth—and then vegetable life—and then fish—and then birds—and then cattle—and then man—anybody would think they had been given elementary scientific instruction in a board-school! Perhaps the 'creeping things' have got a trifle out of place, but even so, what an amazing guess! (Reynolds *Letters* 276f)

She gives as much credit as possible to Eustace Barton, points out the parallel between his phrase and the biblical one, points out the deficiency of his phrase ("lacking in literary charm" would be criminal to Dorothy), and points out the reliability of the biblical account in spite of the writer having no knowledge of the events.

Dorothy's life during her public silence on things Christian may be that of the prodigal. She does not repudiate Christianity; she just doesn't bother with it. Her books find good triumphing over evil and there are specific instances where parsons, vicars, church services, etc. are shown in a favorable light. Lord Peter appreciates and respects the church, though he is not a part of it.

So Dorothy L. Sayers is silent on Christian matters for years—decades. As the prodigal

son is welcomed home by his running father, so is Dorothy.

Dorothy doubts she is a Christian. I look at her vibrant defense of Christianity and her avowed love and respect for Christ and say, "How can that be?" Two possibilities come to mind for me. She states that the only "inner light" she has is of "the unendearing form of judgment and conviction of son." Well, she may have looked at herself, realized that she was at times impatient, unkind, rude, easily angered—traits antithetic to Christian love—traits she displayed in some of her correspondence published in London newspapers, and decided that these are not the marks of a Christian. She was often embroiled in controversy, and, has been pointed out, she felt these to be harmful to the spirit.

Another point that may have troubled Dorothy was the deceit involved in the secrecy regarding her son. That she would give birth to an illegitimate baby would be a sin that she would confess and then get on with her life. But to have her son kept secret would be an ongoing deception that might well afflict her conscience.

I have appreciated the remarks of Sara Maitland in reviewing *Dorothy L. Sayers: A Careless Rage for Life*. I wish there were more insights from her. Maitland says, "[Dorothy] gave up on the life of emotions and retreated into the intellect by way of self-protection." I think that Dorothy tried, but her honesty to her craft and her Lord would not allow her to do this. Dorothy's poems are self-revealing. Her early detective novels are intellectual exercises. But each succeeding detective story finds more of Dorothy's heart and soul expressed in them. Dorothy states in her essay, "Gaudy Night":

Next it was necessary for my theme that the malice should be the product,

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not of intellect starved of emotion, but of emotion uncontrolled by intellect. And to knot the plot tight it must be more than this: it must be emotion revenging itself upon the intellect for some injury wrought by the intellect upon the emotions. (Sayers "Gaudy" 214)

Might Dorothy's life portray the opposite—the intellect revenging itself upon the emotions: in *Strong Poison* Harriet's lover is killed off and apt parallels have been drawn between Harriet and her lover and Dorothy and John Cournos. But beyond the detective novels, in her doctrinaire treatises, such as in the following excerpt from "The Greatest Drama Ever Staged," her heart as well as her mind are revealed:

If this is dull, then what in Heaven's name, is worthy to be called exciting? The people who hanged Christ never, to do them justice, accused Him of being a bore—on the contrary; they thought Him too dynamic to be safe. It has been left for later generations to muffle up that shattering personality and surround Him with an atmosphere of tedium. We have very efficiently pared the claws of the Lion of Judah, certified Him "meek and mild," and recommended Him as a fitting household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies. To those who knew Him, however, He in no way suggested a milk-and-water person; they objected to Him as a dangerous firebrand. True, He was tender to the unfortunate, patient with honest inquirers, and humble before Heaven; but He referred to King Herod as "that fox"; He went to parties in

disreputable company and was looked upon as a "gluttonous man and wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners"; He assaulted indignant tradesmen and threw them and their belongings out of the Temple; He drove a coach-and-horses through a number of sacrosanct and hoary regulations; He cured diseases by any means that came handy, with a shocking casualness in the matter of other people's pigs and property; he showed no proper deference for wealth or social position; when confronted with neat dialectical traps, He displayed a paradoxical humour that affronted serious-minded people, and he retorted by asking disagreeable searching questions that could not be answered by rule of thumb. He was emphatically not a dull man in His human lifetime, and if He was God, there can be nothing dull about God either.

A respect and love for Christ the person—not just a creed—radiates from the passage. This is one of many passages reflecting a love for God via heart, soul, mind, and strength. The emotion is there, the intellect is there, the craftsmanship is there - the very essence of Dorothy L. Sayers in relationship to her Lord pour from the pages. She may attempt to deny her heart in theory, but she cannot do it in fact. Her heart does betray her. Christ can be seen as the love of her life.

Dorothy's last major literary task was the translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. This work had tremendous appeal for Dorothy. It has patterns on top of patterns, it displays Dante's love for Christ and his kingdom, it is a good story—a key plus for Dorothy, and it

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provided a challenge few were equal to: how can this be put into English rhyme and be easily readable? Dorothy succeeds in bringing Dante's work to life for English readers. And her notes provide inspiration, conviction, and instruction in the Christian walk. These flow naturally from the material she is working with and from her own Christian walk. At the end of her life Dorothy has finished the first two parts of the Divine Comedy—"Hell" and "Purgatory"—and she is in the middle of "Heaven." I think that is appropriate.

But was her death that of a "passionate intellect?" If the term means simply an intellect that is not boring, Dorothy is a tremendous example of this. If it means a person devoid of heart, that does not bear up under scrutiny—Dorothy exhibits her heart constantly. If it means a person who is not always loving to people in terms of warm hugs, Dorothy could certainly be cutting to people she thought displayed shoddy workmanship or ideas. But she was dedicated to Christ's service with an energy and love for the public that few possess. Dorothy was a passionate person. Dorothy was an intelligent person. Dorothy L. Sayers refers to the "passionate intellect" and thereby combines two aspects of heart, soul, mind and strength. Could other combinations provide equally valid pairings— thoughtful heart, informed soul, passionate craftsman, heart of the maker, a working love, etc.? Might not they all refer to Dorothy?

For Dorothy "passionate intellect" may have been most appropriate as she looked at herself in relation to her world. In church settings, she had seen intellects without passion make Christ boring and she had seen mindless emotional demonstrations that were repulsive. But the term "passionate intellect" obscures more than it illuminates and it is better to continue to refer to hearts, minds,

souls, and strength. Her poems, novels, plays, essays, even her notes on Dante, display both intellect and passion. It is easier to comprehend mind and heart separately than to try and fuse them.

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