



Women in the Liberal Arts Tradition with Carrie Eben

Lecture 8: Dorothy Sayers

Outline:

Dorothy Sayers

- Bringing Christian Dogma to Life
 - Born June 13, 1893
 - Only child of older parents, Henry and Helen Sayers. Father was clergy
 - Homeschooled during grammar school years and was sent to boarding school in secondary years
 - Poll-parrot (grammar) stage
 - Pert (dialectic) stage
 - Poetic (rhetorical) stage
 - Earned Masters at Oxford University
 - Published first volume of poetry in 1919
 - Marketing copywriter for S.H. Bensons from 1922-1931
- The Triumph of Christ
 - (*Catholic Tales and Christian Songs*, 1919)
 - God met man in a narrow place,
And they scanned each other face to face.
God spoke first: "What ails you man,
That you should look so pale and wan?"
Quoth man: "You bade me conquer harm,
With no strength but this weak right arm."
"I would ride to war with glad consent
Were I as You, omnipotent."
God said: "You show but little sense;
What triumph is there for omnipotence?"
Said man, "If you think it well to be
Such a thing as I, make trial and see."
God answered him: "And if I do,
I'll prove Me a better Man than you."
God conquered man with His naked hands
And bound him fast with iron bands.
- Dorothy Sayers writing
 - Wrote first detective fiction in 1923, *Whose Body?*
 - Engaged in two life-altering affairs with men (John Cournos and Bill White)
 - Gave birth to son, Anthony in 1924



- Married "Mac" Fleming in 1926
- Last detective novel (of 15) was published in late 1930's
- More works by Dorothy Sayers
 - Gives speech, "Are Women Human?" 1938
 - Publishes *Mind of the Maker* in 1941
 - Presents *The Man Born to Be King* in 1943
 - Gives the speech "The Lost Tools of Learning" in 1947
 - Publishes a collection of essays called *Letters to the Diminished Church* in 1949
 - Begins translating Dante in 1944; the full comedy is not completely published 1962, after her death.
- Humanity: *Are Women Human?* (1938)
 - Argues that women are also part of the *Imago Dei*, not separate beings
 - Considers skill, temperament, and physical attributes regarding what all humans, including women, can do.
 - "What is repugnant to every human being is to be reckoned always as a member of a class and not as an individual person" (24).
- Creativity: *The Mind of the Maker* (1941)
 - The act of creating allows people to partake in the nature of the Trinity
 - Father is the "Idea"
 - Son is the "Energy"
 - Holy Spirit is the "Power"
 - "Perhaps the first things that he can learn from the artist is that the only way of mastering one's material is to abandon the whole conception of mastery and to co-operate with it in love: whosoever will be lord of life, let him be its servant" (142).
- *Letters to the Diminished Church: "Creed vs Chaos"* 1949
 - Christian dogma matters in relationship to Christian morality and theology.
 - Many people in Great Britain did not have a foundation in Christian dogma: "The brutal fact is that in this Christian country not one person in a hundred has the faintest notion what the Church teaches about God or man or society or the person of Jesus Christ" (45).
 - "The thing that is in danger is the whole structure of society, and it is necessary to persuade thinking men and women of the vital connection between the structure of society and the theological doctrines of Christianity" (47).
 - Two main points: Christianity is impossible to teach without Christian dogma, and there are seven main doctrinal points that are important to distinguish in order to understand Christian dogma fully (God, Man, Sin, Judgment, Matter, Work, Society)
- Incarnation: *The Man Born to be King* (1941)



- 12 stand-alone dramas (45min a piece) presenting biblical vignettes on the life of Christ
- Can be listened to (highly recommended) or read/read aloud
- Presented the truth of Christian dogma in the gospels hospitably in the English vernacular
- Historic dramatization: it was the first time Christ was allowed to be characterized (in Britain)
- Allowed the British public to empathize with the historical characters and place themselves into the greatest drama ever told
- *The Man Born to be King*: Introduction
 - “Conversely; there is no more searching test of a theology than to submit it to dramatic handling; nothing so glaringly exposes inconsistencies in a character, a story, or a philosophy as to put it upon the stage and allow it to speak for itself” (37).
 - “My main goal was to tell the story to the best of my ability, within the medium at my disposal. In short, to make as good a work of art as I could” (38).
 - "God was executed by people painfully like us, in a society very similar to our own—in the over-ripeness of the most splendid and sophisticated Empire the world has ever seen. In a nation famous for its religious genius and under a government renowned for its efficiency, He was executed by a corrupt church, a timid politician, and a fickle proletariat led by professional agitators. His executioners made vulgar jokes about Him, called Him filthy names, taunted Him, smacked Him in the face, flogged Him with the cat, and hanged Him on the common gibbet—a bloody, dusty, sweaty, and sordid business" (41).
- Herod the Great
 - “Herod the Great was no monstrous enemy of God: he was a soldier of fortune and a political genius—a savage but capable autocrat, whose jealousy and ungovernable temper had involved him in a prolonged domestic wretchedness” *A Man Born to be King*, Introduction, 41.
 - HEROD: “You cannot rule people by love. When you find your king, tell him so. Only three things will govern a people—fear and greed and the promise of security. Do I not know it? Have I not loved? I have been a stern ruler—dreaded and hated,—yet my country is prosperous and her borders at peace. But wherever I loved, I found treachery—wife, children, brother—all of them, all of them. Love is a traitor; it has betrayed me; it betrays all kings; it will betray your Christ. Give him that message from Herod, King of Jewry.” (*Play 1: Kings of Judea*, 72.)
- Judas Iscariot
 - Judas (character notes): He is infinitely the most intelligent of all the disciples, and he has the boldness and drive that belong to a



really imaginative brain. He can see the political possibilities of the Kingdom—but also, he can see at once (as none of the others can) the meaning of sin and repentance and the fearful paradox by which all human good is corrupted as soon as it comes to power. He is as yet only beginning to see it—but presently he will see it plainly and be the only disciple to grasp the necessity of the crucifixion. And seeing it as he does, only with his intellect and not with his heart, he will fall into a deeper corruption than any of the others are capable of. He has the greatest possibilities of them all for good, and therefore for evil. He is an opportunist; and he is determined that when the Kingdom comes, he shall have the chief hand in the business. He will not follow John to Jesus—when he comes, it will be because he thinks the moment has come for him to take matters in hand (*Play 2: A King's Herald*, 87)

- JUDAS: "...It was written that he must suffer—Yes! And why?—Because there are too many men in the world like me...I was in love with suffering, because I wanted to see him suffer. I wanted to believe him guilty, because I could not endure his innocence. He was greater than I, and I hated him. And now I hate myself... Do you know what hell-fire is? It is the light of God's unbearable innocence that sears and shrivels you like flame. It shows you what you are...Priest, it is a fearful thing to see one's self for a moment as one really is."(*Play 10: The Princes of this World*, 293)
- C.S. Lewis
 - Sayers was a fan of Lewis and wrote to him about his books
 - Lewis was also a fan of Sayers and considered her his most important fan
 - Lewis read *Man Born to be King* every year for Advent season
- The Makers, by Dorothy Sayers
 - The Architect stood forth and said:
"I am the master of the art:
I have a thought within my head,
I have a dream within my heart.

"Come now, good craftsman, ply your trade
With tool and stone obediently;
Behold the plan that I have made—
I am the master; serve you me."

The Craftsman answered: "Sir, I will:
Yet look to it that this your draft
Be of a sort to serve my skill—
You are not master of the craft.

"It is by me the towers grow tall,



I lay the course, I shape and hew;
You make a little inky scrawl,
And that is all that you can do.

”Account me, then, the master man,
Laying my rigid rule upon
The plan, and that which serves the plan—
The uncomplaining, helpless stone.”

The Stone made answer: “Masters mine,
Know this: that I can bless or damn
The thing that both of you design
By being but the thing I am;

“For I am granite, not gold,
For I am marble and not clay,
You may not hammer me nor mould—
I am the master of the way.

- “Yet one that mastery bestowed
Then I will suffer patiently
The cleaving steel, the crushing load,
That make a calvary of me;

“And you may carve me with your hand
To arch and buttress, roof and wall,
Until the dream rise up and stand—
Serve but the stone, the stone serves all

“Let each do well what each knows best,
Nothing refuse and nothing shirk,
Since none is master of the rest,
But all are servants of the work—

“The work not master may subject
Save He to whom the whole is known,
Being Himself the Architect,
The Craftsman and the Corner-stone.

Then, when the greatest and the least
Have finished all their labouring
And sit together at the feast,
You shall behold a wonder thing:

”The Maker of the men that make



Will stoop between the cherubim,
The towel and the basin take,
And serve the servants who serve Him.”

The Architect and Craftsman both
Agreed the Stone had spoken well;
Bound them to service by and oath
And each to his own labour fell.

- Summary of Dorothy Sayers’s important contributions to the canon:
 - With humor, skill, and a little bite, she used her skills to point Christians to the truth of Christian dogma, the cornerstone of their faith (*Letters to the Diminished Church: “Creed vs Chaos”*)
 - She reminds us that humans are more than their gender, race, or socio-economic class and are united in the Imago Dei (“Are Women Human?” and *Mind of the Maker*)
 - Using the medium of radio drama, she presents an enlightening and historic portrayal of the gospels in *The Man Born to be King* encouraging people to confront their own relationship with the fully God, fully human Jesus Christ.
 - With her essay/speech, “The Lost Tools of Learning,” she ignited classical education renewal!!