

REFLECTION ON THE LIFE OF SISTER DOROTHY JACKO

July 22, 1936—August 9, 2019



As Sister Electa Boyle once wrote, “The ideal Sister of Charity is a good religious, who is also the successful professional woman.” We celebrate our friend Sister Dorothy Jacko with pride because she personified these words. Dorothy was a good religious and a scholar.

After earning her bachelor’s degree in history from Seton Hill and a master’s degree in Asian studies from Temple University, she fulfilled her dream of earning a doctorate degree from Regis College/University of Toronto in systematic theology; her dissertation was entitled *Studying the Experience of Salvation in a Secular Society*. Her own spiritual awareness transformed abstractive scholarship into informative and formative courses at Seton Hill College, now Seton Hill University. In addition to teaching, Dorothy was active as chair or member on numerous committees ranging from curriculum development, value planning, womens’ study task force, and symposia ranging from the study of the Holocaust to Catholic Social Teachings on labor. In 1990, Dorothy published *Creation Theology as a Basis for Ecological Spirituality*. And this paper was written before Laduate Si. Before becoming a professor at Seton Hill, Dorothy acted as the director of development, raising approximately five million dollars for the University.

All this happened because on July 22, 1936, in the Pennsylvania town of Johnstown, her father, Michael, born in Czechoslovakia, and her mother, Anna Barrone, born in Johnstown, had a baby girl they named Dorothy Ann. Michael and Anna had three more children: Lawrence, who preceded Dorothy in death in 1995, and her wonderful and faithful sisters, Janet and Carol. All four children grew up in a happy home surrounded by love and fun. Dorothy attended St. Francis of Assisi Elementary School and graduated in 1954 from Johnstown Catholic High School (now Bishop McCort High School.) History says Dorothy had many friends, a great time, and graduated with highest honors in a class of 250 students, and was named the “Outstanding Woman” of her class. Her brother-in-law Tom

told me Dorothy never received a grade below an “A” in her life—the grade we all struggled to receive. After graduation Dorothy worked for five years as a secretary.

When Dorothy attended Johnstown Catholic High School, several religious communities were represented on the faculty. When she felt called to religious life, she did a study of each of the communities. Does that surprise anyone? According to her research, the Sisters of Charity won because they had an understanding of people and were willing to help with any problem presented. And Dorothy fit this pattern. So once again the Sisters of Charity reaped the harvest.

On September 8, 1959, Dorothy arrived at the Sisters of Charity Novitiate. This is a quote from Dorothy: “Although my parents are good Catholics and have a respect and regard for the religious life, they were upset by my entering. They did not feel I was the ‘type.’” But history tells us she was the perfect type. Dorothy honored both her parents by asking for her religious name to be Sister Michael Ann. She kept the name until 1967 when the sisters had the option to return to their baptismal names if they chose to do so. Once again, she honored her parents by going back to the name Dorothy, which they gave her in Baptism.

Here I quote myself: “Dorothy was the most intelligent, funny, and pleasant person I have ever known.” She was a scholar, but the irony of this is the fact that Dorothy began her religious life teaching first grade at St. Bruno School in South Greensburg. This was not a good fit. Then she taught business and social studies at St. Anselm, St. John the Baptist, and Elizabeth Seton High Schools in Pittsburgh. It was a better fit for her, but not quite right. During these years she received a Master of Arts in History at Temple University and earned a Master of Arts in Liturgy at Notre Dame.

During many years she typed, proof read, and critiqued the writings for her two closest friends: Sister Melanie DiPietro and Sister Frances Stefano. Sister Frances preceded Dorothy in death in 1992, and I am sure she is waiting to meet her as she comes home. Sister Melanie is away doing work for the Sisters of Charity in Texas this week. If they were here, one of them, not I, would be sharing Dorothy’s life with you today. It is my privilege to do so.

No memory of Sister Dorothy’s life would be complete without sharing the love and care of her two sisters Janet and Carol, their husbands Gil and Tom, their

children and grandchildren. Dorothy was so proud of all of you and loved you with her whole being. Over the years you shared your home with many of us: birthday parties, your delicious cooking, and your love. We know that wherever Janet and Carol happened to be, there was a party. And their husbands Gil and Tom were there engineering and supporting all the moving parts, which always included transportation for the Sisters of Charity. Though Gil is no longer with us, I'm sure he is still watching over all of you. In her quiet and unassuming way and with a subtle pride, she told us of the wonderful achievements of each of the children and grandchildren. She loved each of you, and never missed a chance to brag. And each of us are grateful for the times spent and the love shared by all of you.

If you recall at the beginning of this talk, I told you Dorothy was the most intelligent person I knew and I am sure you agree after hearing some of, and only some of her achievements. I want to relate one little story: In 1962 Dorothy and I took a geography class at Seton Hill. Why is still a mystery! We learned that there were and still are the four largest islands of Japan. About a month ago when visiting Dorothy, I asked her if she could still name the four largest islands of Japan. She opened her eyes and rattled them off like it was still 1962. She put me to shame. But I ask each of you: "Can you name the 4 largest islands of Japan?" That's what I thought!

"May I go to sleep now?" Dorothy asked this question of Sisters Frances and Melanie after spending many nights into the wee hours of the morning typing their papers.

Yes, Dorothy, you may sleep now in peace!

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection
Sister Dorothy Dolan
August 12, 2019*