

Catherine

A Newsletter to Promote the Cause for Canonization
of the Servant of God, **Catherine de Hueck Doherty**

No. 2 — **Winter 2001** — Combermere, Ontario, Canada



◆ From the Postulator's Desk

Dear Friends of Catherine,

The response to our first issue of *Catherine* was quite enthusiastic. Thank you for your interest in what we believe to be a work of the Lord on behalf of the whole Church.

In publicly soliciting testimonies about Catherine over the years, one of the questions I have been asking people is: "If Catherine was canonized, what would be the significance of her life for the Church today?" In official documents, the Church puts the question this way: "What is the pastoral significance of her life?" We have received many responses to this and other questions from Cardinals, Bishops, Priests, Religious and Laity. What follows is my brief summary of some of the main replies to this question which highlight the pastoral relevance of her Cause in the minds of those who knew her or about her.

Catherine was a lay person

It is well known that the present Holy Father is seeking to canonize more lay people. It has been a common criticism for many years that countless religious are canonized out of all proportion to the laity. (In the Commons for the Divine Office we don't even have an Office for a holy couple, Sts Joachim and Anne, for example.) The practical problem seems to be that lay people do not have a community behind them to do the necessary work. I think the Congregation of the



*Dorothy Day gives a kiss to
Catherine de Hueck Doherty
Rome, 1957*

Saints should somehow address itself to this abnormality. It is inconceivable that there is a lack of heroic holiness among lay people to warrant their canonization. By the grace of God, Catherine has such a community, but what about all those who do not?

The importance of canonized laity is obvious: most of the Church is lay; heroic sanctity among the laity is a reality; they need to see the Church publicly raise lay people to the heights of the altar so they can be encouraged and inspired in their Christian lay vocations. I would say that the lay character of Catherine's holiness would be the most pastorally relevant aspect for her canonization.

She was married twice, had a child, worked in the world, and tried to take the gospel into the market-places of modern cities. She was inspired to develop a spirituality that is neither monastic nor religious, but is precisely about loving God in the ordinary tasks of everyday life. Her constant theme, even before it was emphasized by Vatican II, was that holiness is possible in every walk of life. And she especially emphasized—because often not preached or taught very clearly in her day—that lay people could become holy by doing their daily tasks with great love.

Catherine and the apostolate of the laity

Lay Catholics in the post-Vatican II age are more familiar with the Church's teaching which urges them

to take up their responsibilities in the marketplaces of the world. In the early part of this century, it was not so much insisted upon. It was not strongly encouraged, and was often misunderstood, both within and outside the Church. Catherine will go down in history as one of the pioneers of the lay apostolate in the Church of the 20th century. Already in the late 20's and early 30's she was a prominent lay person, opening up soup kitchens and store fronts for the poor, and speaking out on injustices in both Church and society. It is difficult for us now to imagine how revolutionary and prophetic she was. And she paid the price for it. Her life can serve as a model of lay heroism and dedicated activity as a member of the Church in society.

Catherine was married, with a family

Catherine's married and family existence went through many stages. It's because she tried to live these stages as a Christian, and maintain her love for God, the Church, and neighbour throughout, that her married life has tremendous relevance for the people of our day.

Her first marriage was very tragic and unhappy. Her husband was unfaithful to her. She was a psychologically battered wife, and knew all the pain of a broken covenant and of trying to raise a child in such circumstances. She didn't handle every situation perfectly. Her son, especially, had wounds from a very confused family situation. She had to go through the travail of obtaining an annulment from the Church, and all the pain that entails. So many in broken marriages today would find support and consolation in her heroic struggles to remain faithful to God and the Church in such circumstances.

After more than a decade of her second marriage, she and her husband, Eddie Doherty, decided to give up their conjugal rights and live a celibate life as members of the new community of Madonna House

which the Lord was fashioning. Not to imply that this choice is to be imitated, or that it is the "culminating ideal" of married life, but it is one option recognized by the Church. Here too she can serve as a model for those called to this choice in the Lord.

Catherine had a great love for the poor and for those suffering from injustice

A love for the poor and those deprived of their rights has always been a concern of the Church. But especially in our century, the Church herself has called for a "preferential option for the poor." And Pope Paul VI has said that there can be "no real peace without justice." Often, if the people of our time do not see this concern for justice in the lives of Christians who are canonized, they do not see any particular relevance of these saints to their own lives in the contemporary situation which demands a concern for the poor.

Catherine, even as a child with her mother, was part of that movement of the Russian intelligentsia in the late 19th century called "going to the poor." The wealthy and learned would go into the villages of the poor and try to bridge the gap between wealth and poverty, ignorance and learning. When Catherine arrived in Canada in

1921 she would often meet the train loaded with refugees, and seek to help them find lodging and employment. As a member of the famous Chautauqua Circuit, and later as a member of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association in the 20's, she spoke out forcibly against the peril of Communism when few on this side of the ocean could see any real danger.

In the early 30's, during the Great Depression, she went into the poor sections of Toronto and helped those on the streets with food, clothing, and instruction in the Catholic social teachings of the Encyclicals. In 1938 she went into the heart of black



Catherine leaning over her son, George, as a young boy.

Harlem and became one of the Catholic pioneers in interracial justice in the United States. She had the courage not only to help those oppressed by such injustice, but to publicly denounce such injustice in Church and society. Nor did she simply counsel obedience and patience under the present legal system. As one imbued with the prophetic spirit, she had a vision beyond the time-bound contemporary scene. She possessed the moral courage of the gospel to say that such laws and prejudices were unjust and must be changed. We have in our archives a long report she wrote at the request of the American bishops, pointing out the racial injustice in Church and society.

Later (in 1947) she began the third phase of her work, the Madonna House Apostolate in Canada, continuing to assist the poor in countless ways such as clothing, Cooperative Movements, the first mail order book service in Canada for those in rural areas, and many other outreaches to neighbour. She had, all her life, an extraordinary love for the poor. As she requested, her grave cross has the saying, "She loved the poor."

Catherine and the union of Orthodoxy and Catholicism

Perhaps the greatest tragedy in the 2,000 year history of Christianity was the split between the Eastern and Western Churches. Our present Holy Father, John Paul II, considers the reunion of these two great churches as his first priority.

Catherine was born in Russia and baptized in the Russian Orthodox Church. But as a child she attended a Roman Catholic school in Alexandria, Egypt. Her father's mother was Polish Catholic.

Thus she grew up breathing with "the two lungs" of Orthodoxy and Catholicism, to use a phrase of the present Pope. When she fled to England she made a profession of faith in the Catholic Church.

But perhaps it was not until her return to Canada in 1947, and the Madonna House, Combermere, phase of her life, that her Eastern roots began to flower. In her own person she became a blend and a harmony of the riches of the East and the West. She has written a number of books, trying to explain to the West the treasures of Eastern spirituality. Her life is a bridge across which many can walk towards greater union and understanding between these two

"Sister Churches," as Pope Paul VI called them. The Madonna House community continues this charism. Catherine's canonization, therefore, would have great relevance for this movement of the Spirit in our time, towards the reunion of East and West.

Catherine's writings

Suffice it to say that, if she were canonized, the people of God would become more aware of

the depth and extent of her writings. Even during her lifetime her books were being translated into many languages, a proof of their universal relevance. What is already published is only a fraction of what she has written and what someday will be available to the Church. Her canonization would give the Church's approval to her writings, and they would immeasurably enrich the life of God's people.

The community Catherine founded

"By their fruits you shall know them." Catherine founded one of the new ecclesial communities in the Church. Her canonization would be a witness to the



Eddie and Catherine sitting on the front steps of Madonna House.

fact that God continues to inspire new communities in the Church in every age. The spirituality she has bequeathed to this community is, even now, a source of spiritual food and support for thousands of people. Her canonization would increase the spread of this spiritual treasure for the Church universal.

A woman of the century

Some canonized saints are known for their holiness in only a limited area of the Church's life (for example, as a cloistered nun, as a founder of a religious order, etc.) Catherine's life and experience spanned almost a whole century (1896–1985), and she was involved personally in most of the cataclysmic events of our time.

She was a nurse in the First World War and knew that terror at first hand. She was personally caught up in the Russian revolution, and lost some of her relatives in it, barely escaping with her own life. She experienced what it was to be a refugee, both in England and Canada, and to know life at the bottom of the social ladder. She knew real poverty in her life in Canada, and often did not know where the next meal would come from. She knew what it was to work for her livelihood.

She publicly fought Communism in North America. She set up some of the first soup kitchens and clothing rooms for victims of the Depression. As a journalist she personally witnessed the onslaught of Nazism in Germany and saw the horrors of civil war in Spain. With a son in the Second World War, Catherine knew the personal agony of a mother of a soldier.

She was a pioneer in racial justice in the United States. She was in the vanguard of social action in the Church in this century. She rejoiced in the Second Vatican Council. With her faith instincts she navigated her community through the turbulent waters of the post-Vatican II era, when so many lost

the essentials of their Catholic life. She came through all these 20th century events with her faith intact and still completely loyal to the Church.

She is, then, a kind of "total person." One of the reasons, among many others, that I myself trust her teaching, is that it has been tried and tested in the crucible of suffering, and in most of the cataclysmic events of the 20th century. Her canonization would be a beacon of light for others who must now go through their own historical trials in the Third Millennium. She can be a guide for the people of God in how to remain faithful to Christ and the

Church in the midst of life's vicissitudes. She would not be a "plaster of Paris" saint, unre-moved from life. Everyone would find something in her life to inspire and encourage them.



Staff Member and Catherine working at the wood stove in the Madonna House kitchen.

Testimonies

Thomas Merton

Catherine was very influential in Merton's journey towards God. Their relationship would make a book in itself. He treats extensively of his association with her in Part Three, Section 2, of *The Seven Storey Mountain*, "The Sleeping Volcano." Also, see the introduction to his *Secular Journal* and more recently his published diaries. He spent several months working with her in Harlem, and we consider him one of the pioneers of our apostolate. He includes his correspondence with her as the very first entry in his first volume of letters, *The Hidden Ground of Love*, (pp. 9-24). His own actual, personal relationship with her was not long or intimate, but they carried on an intermittent correspondence over the years. And, considering his keen perception of human nature and expertise in spirituality, his witness is especially valuable. "Catherine de Hueck is a person in every way big; and the bigness is not merely physical: it comes from the Holy Ghost dwelling constantly within her; and moving her in all that she does" (*Seven Storey Mountain*, 414).

And from his *Secular Journal*: "She was one of the most energetic and generous people I have ever met—and

one of the most simple. Everything she says and does... goes right to the heart of the issue. The Russian Revolution had made her poor, but far from resenting this, she embraced it as a marvelous grace from God. She resolved to make poverty her vocation with a vigor and directness that was thoroughly Franciscan.”

Helene Iswolsky

Helene Iswolsky was a noted author in her own right, and a personal friend of Catherine’s. Both were exiles from Communist Russia. Some of Helene’s books include *The Soul of Russia Today* and *Christ in Russia*. Her father was the Russian ambassador to France before the revolution. Her autobiography, *No Time To Grieve*, she writes of Catherine: “I had the support of a Russian woman who, like myself, was a Catholic, and deeply attached to the Eastern Catholic heritage. She was Catherine de Hueck, known to the American lay apostolate as the ‘Baroness,’ later Mrs Eddie Doherty. I had first met Catherine in Paris where she was a reporter for *Sign* magazine, but her main interest was centered in New York. She had just founded ‘Friendship House’ in Harlem, to promote a true Christian relationship between the white and black people of America. She was a pioneer in a field which in those days, with only a few exceptions, was a subject taboo in American society. She displayed great courage in defending her position” (237).



George stands with Catherine after she is made a member of the Order of Canada “for a lifetime of devoted services to the underprivileged of many nationalities, both in Canada and abroad.”

Olga Laplante

Olga Laplante, a Canadian, was only 19 years old when she became one of Catherine’s very first followers, joining her in Toronto in the early 1930’s. She became a full-time staff member of her spiritual family and remained there until 1939, when she joined Catherine in Harlem. She married in 1943, but remained a friend of Catherine’s throughout her life. She often visited Madonna House, and I was privileged to know her. I quote from testimony she gave in September, 1987.

(about Toronto) “The first impression which never changed over the years of knowing Catherine, is, this woman knows God. No doubts of mine ever raised their

heads about her faith, love and conviction in living as a follower of Christ. I finally found someone who lived her beliefs totally. That doesn’t mean she had no failings, only that she walked in Christ’s footsteps and all life was lived in relation to him. This total union was an influence that shaped my thinking and living: there was always Christ, such as she presented him.

“The shifting of the needs of self to the background, the awareness of the needs of others, was brought into strong focus by Catherine. It was so rare to hear about our own needs; always the ‘poor ones’ were in the spotlight - the hungry, homeless, sorrowing, or the victim of sin. Compassion was as much a part of us as breathing. Her ability to see others in relationship to God gave such a value to the least movement of a heart to God. Living with her, prejudice faded out. I learned to see people, not colour or ethnic groups.”

(about Harlem) “I was given working papers, so I joined Catherine in Harlem. Her spirit of service grew and the work flourished. She seemed to not know weariness, always giving of time and self. She knew no colour barriers, and those who shared her work left behind previous prejudices, seeing people not colour. Poverty was an essential part of her life, living, as she did, in the ghetto of Harlem. Never did we feel that

Catherine assumed the airs of an uppity administrator. She was one of us and most often the servant of all.”

Maisie Ward

Maisie Ward was the wife of Frank Sheed, and together they founded the Sheed & Ward Catholic Publishing House. She was one of the outstanding women of the 20th century. She was deeply interested in, and in touch with, most of the new movements in the Church at that time. She visited Harlem and knew Catherine. Here are some of her comments about Catherine from her autobiography, *Unfinished Business*.

“Catherine’s cries of despair and bursts of tears punctuated on page after page [of her books] the stories she tells of human waste and suffering, of spiritual desolation. The witness of Friendship House was its most important

act. They battered at the doors of every Catholic college, asking for opportunities for the boys and girls of Harlem. We had rejoiced in both the Catholic Worker [of Dorothy Day] and Friendship House, because they were doing so richly what the world really asks of Catholics in the social field; acting, not just theorizing—and acting with immense self-sacrifice.” (pp. 246-251, *passim*)

Father Richard John Neuhaus

Fr. Neuhaus is Editor-in-Chief of *First Things* magazine, and one of the outstanding thinkers and commentators in the Christian world today. In the December, 2000, issue of the magazine, he reflects on his first, and then a more recent visit to Madonna House.

“[Catherine’s] little book, *Dear Father: A Message of Love to Priests*, can be summed up: ‘Yes, but do you believe, do you really believe, the wonder of who Christ is and who you are for him? Show it! Live it!’ One is reminded of Chesterton’s remark that the only sin is to call a green leaf gray. Catherine railed against a world and a Church that seemed so indifferent to the luminosity of love. [*Dear Father* also contains an excerpt I had quite forgotten from Thomas Merton’s *Seven Storey Mountain*, in which he tells of Catherine’s influence on his vocation.]

“*Poustinia*, perhaps her most influential book, is a strongly moving account of a practice of silence, solitude, and prayer drawn from the Russian experience of pilgrimage and time apart in which a poustinik lives in a small hut—for days or months or years, or for a lifetime—in an isolation that is also total availability to the community. The heart of the poustinia is kenosis, joining Christ in the emptying of the self, as described by Paul in Phillipians 2. ‘I think that God calls the poustinik to a total purgation, a total self-emptying,’ writes Catherine. She cautioned against the impulse to be relevant by doing something useful as the world measures usefulness. ‘If you want to see what a “contribution” really is, look at the Man on the cross. That’s a contribution. When you are hanging on a cross you can’t do anything because you’re crucified. That is the essence of a poustinik. That is his or her contribu-

tion.’ *Poustinia* is one of the more insightful and disturbing books on prayer I have read in a long time.

“As with Dorothy Day, Catherine’s ‘cause’ has been begun. It is possible that somewhere down that path she may formally be declared a saint. Like Dorothy Day, Catherine’s faith and piety came to be viewed as ‘conservative’ because so radically orthodox. (Catherine was baptized in the Russian Orthodox Church and part of the continuing apostolate of Madonna House is reconciliation between East and West, a purpose close to the heart of John Paul II.) Both Dorothy and Catherine understood that orthodox Christianity is ever so much more radical than the radicalisms that the world regularly throws up to challenge or recruit Christian faith; and they understood that the way of high adventure is not to trim the Church’s teaching but to penetrate ever more deeply into living the mystery of Christ.

“The last half century, and especially the years of this pontificate, has witnessed an astonishing resurgence of renewal movements. Among the better known in North America are Cursillo, Opus Dei, Focolare, Legionaries of Christ, Regnum Christ, and the Neocatechumenal Way. The explosion of similar movements in Latin America and Africa is perhaps without historical precedent. These are mainly movements of lay people, married and celibate, locked in communal determination to live the gospel of Jesus Christ without compromise. The Madonna House

Apostolate is part of this remarkable phenomenon. The life of Catherine de Hueck Doherty—in both its pyrotechnical brilliance and silent deeps—begat a movement that has changed lives beyond numbering by its invitation to a disciplined adventure into a revolution of love.”



Catherine and her son George with dog on the steps of Isabella Street house.

Favours Received

I encourage anyone who believes he or she has received a favour through Catherine’s intercession to send them to the Postulator at the address found at the end of this newsletter.

“We moved my wife 200 miles to the hospital. She had three operations - the third lasted six and a half hours. At this time I appointed Catherine as my wife’s head nurse, and left her life in the hands of ‘the Head Nurse.’ Her condition changed rapidly. In about two weeks she was transferred from Special Care to Rehab. She was then released from the hospital and sent home. The doctor said in a month she will walk on her own. Catherine is now her Head Nurse.”

— JM, Tennessee, U.S.A., 7/31/2001

“I firmly believe that the intercession of Catherine has helped me through a major crisis in my life. My business had been in serious trouble for the last few years, and everything was coming to a head this year with the bank beginning to close in on me. Although working and praying very hard for the past 2 years, the solution always remained out of my grasp. As time closed in on me with liquidation and all of its consequences to my wife and children, I began praying every single day to Catherine to intercede for me. I believe that in the final 20 days that I prayed, Catherine’s intercession produced the favour that God granted me. The business has been successfully sold, avoiding bankruptcy and allowing me to continue in good, honorable employment for the new owner, with the chance to build it up again. I thank Catherine for her intercession.

— AB, Connecticut, U.S.A.

“I have suffered with arthritis for many years. Eight years ago they removed the meniscus from my two knees; also I have suffered from an insufficiency of the veins for at least 30 years. For at least 10 years I have not been able to kneel and get back up again without trying to do so 5 or 6 times. The pain was insupportable, especially at night. I began the novena to Catherine and I improved from day to day. At the end of a month I left the wheel chair and I have never needed it again. I consider that it is a great healing and it is on the advice of my spiritual director that I wrote you. Let us give thanks to the Lord, his Mother, and Catherine, for having interceded with the Father for my cure. I am infinitely grateful for this great grace received gratuitously.”

— CB, Quebec, Canada

“I wish to share with you some favours that I received through the intercession of Catherine. 1)I was suffering from a severe heart attack three months ago. Now I am very well. 2) There is a lady who was suffering from severe womb trouble; cancer was suspected. I prayed to Cathrine

on her behalf and when she had surgery she was found to be normal.”

— Fr. DJB, Sri Lanka

“I have been praying through Catherine’s intercession after my two little boys were murdered and the subsequent suicide of my wife. My grief was devastating and I could find no real relief or understanding of my loss through counseling, medication or associates. I believe Catherine interceded on my behalf, granting me an assured closure in the realization that my little sons are safe and joyful in the hands of God.”

— AJ, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

“For the past year and a half, our granddaughter has been suffering with mental illness and has needed several hospitalizations. About 2 weeks ago, when she was again an in-patient, I received the first newsletter [Catherine] and began praying to Catherine for her healing. Last Friday she was discharged and the family is amazed at the change in her. Most common is the remark, “She’s herself again.” I know that mental healings are hard to verify, but I really believe that this is due to Catherine’s prayers.”

— AT, New York, U.S.A.

Relic Available

A small, second class relic—a piece of Catherine’s clothing—is available upon request.

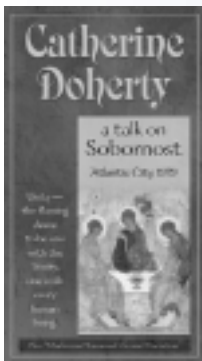
Assistants, Past and Present

As postulator, I, Fr. Wild, have needed help with the information gathering connected with Cause. I wish to publicly thank Mary Ruth, a member of Madonna House, for the enormous amount of work she has done in laying the foundations for our Cause files. She has organized the testimonies coming in, made copies of all of Catherine’s articles, helped to answer correspondence, and much more. Thank you, Mary Ruth, for this pioneering work.

For health reasons, Mary is no longer able to continue with this work. I am appointing Kathleen Janet Thompson, also a member of Madonna House, as my new assistant. For many years she was Catherine’s secretary, and has since done mountains of work in cataloging and compiling Catherine’s writings. She is exceptionally qualified for this new service. Since I am presently assigned to our house in England, Kathleen Janet helps in opening mail and editing this newsletter.

Literature and Media

Catherine's video — A Talk on Sobornost



In this, the first publicly available video recording of Catherine Doherty speaking, she introduces and explains the deep spiritual meaning of *sobornost*—the Russian word for “unity”.

The great desire of Jesus Christ is that we all be one with Himself, the Father, and the Spirit—that we form a community of love with the Trinity. In this talk from 1979, Catherine shows how this great gift of God can be incarnated among us.

A Talk on Sobornost. Doherty, Catherine.
Combermere: Madonna House Publications, 2001.
(ISBN 0-921440-66-9) — VHS Video (NTSC)

Important Books by Catherine Doherty:

Poustinia — Encountering God in Silence, Solitude and Prayer

Catherine Doherty's modern spiritual classic for those seeking the open heart and listening soul of silent contemplation. (Also available on cassette.)

Poustinia. Doherty, Catherine. Third Edition.
Combermere: Madonna House Publications, 2000.
(ISBN 0-921440-54-5 Audio ISBN 0-921440-53-7)

The Gospel Without Compromise

Touchingly simple, wise, and straight from the heart. Topics are aligned with the uncompromising message of the Gospel Christ.

Gospel Without Compromise. Doherty, Catherine.
Combermere: Madonna House Publications, 1989.
(ISBN 0-921440-15-4)

These titles and more are available from Madonna House Publications. Toll free: 1-888-703-7110.

Prayer asking for favours through the intercession of the Servant of God Catherine Doherty

All loving Father, through your beloved Son, Jesus, we have been taught to ask for what we need. And through his spouse, our Mother the Church, we have been instructed to pray for one another, and to ask the intercession of your servants, who have fallen asleep in Christ. Therefore, through the intercession of your servant, Catherine Doherty, we ask

[here mention your petition.]

We ask this for your honour and glory, and in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son Our Lord. Amen.

For private use.

Imprimatur: † J.R. Windle

Bishop of Pembroke, May 1, 1993

How to Contact Us

If you believe you have received favours through Catherine's intercession, we would be pleased to hear from you. We are also in need of financial donations to help cover the expenses of her Cause. If you would like to contact us, please write to us at:

**Postulator for the Cause
Madonna House Apostolate
2888 Dafoe Rd
Combermere ON K0J 1L0**

Fax: (613) 756-3832

E-mail: cause_catherinedoherty@webhart.net

More information about Catherine Doherty and the progress of her Cause can be found on-line at:

www.catherinedoherty.org