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Dorothy Sayers, Communication and Theology: A Lifetime of Influence in British Society

Abstract:

This paper examines the writings of Dorothy Sayers through the lens of transportation theory and feminist communication theory. Dorothy Sayers's early childhood and educational years are considered in light of their impact on her work as an adult. Her role as a writer and a lay theologian is discussed. The role of women in England during the first part of the twentieth century is considered. Attention is given to Sayers's writings across multiple literature genres and the strength this brings to her communication of theological truth.

Keywords: transportation theory, feminist communication theory, England, women, theology, creeds

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Introduction

Dorothy Sayers, an author, theologian, and playwright, moved in the same intellectual circles as C.S. Lewis and J. R. Tolkien. She was not one of the original ‘Inklings’ but she was already a successful author by the time she engaged in philosophical discussions and debates with that influential group and enjoyed their friendship (Carpenter 1979: 189). She was a gifted communicator and knew the power of narrative to teach spiritual truth. She wrote sixteen novels in her lifetime and twenty-four non-fiction books.

Sayers was known for her ability to wordsmith and was “the author of plays, letters, essays, lectures, and a highly regarded translation of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*” (Cart 2018: 12). The gospel themes evident in her work include “conscience, sin and grace, covetousness, pride, despair and hope, and much more (Cart 2018: 12). She made important contributions to the church and society through her writing, yet few, according to Simmons (2005) have explored it in depth. Simmons (2005: 17) attributes this to the huge volume of her writing and the massive variety in her writing. Her writings include poems, short stories, plays for radio and the stage, children’s books, novels, letters, literary reviews, essays (theological, political, creative commentary) and translations (most notable her translation of Dante) (Simmons 2005: 18).

Her impact as a female scholar during her lifetime, as a peer of male scholars still viewed as giants today, is significant. She not only had a place at the table, but she led the way for many women who would make their careers in the academy and in scholarship, years after her death. “By almost any measurement, Dorothy Leigh Sayers was one of the giants of the first half of the 20th Century. As a scholar, writer, and a public speaker, she excelled” (Tischler 1980: 1). She was masterful at indirect communication. As she sought to display the gospel in her writings, she wrote almost as much fiction as she did non-fiction. Similar to G.K. Chesterton, she wrote mysteries. Unquestionably, Dorothy Sayers contributed to both our understanding of theology and communication. The aim of this paper is to illustrate how Dorothy Sayers was a national leader in England and used her profound communication skills to influence British society both inside and outside the church, through her effective communication of the gospel to a nation that believed it was Christian.

Biographical Background

Dorothy Sayers was an only child, born in Oxford in 1893. Her father, Henry Sayers, was a chaplain and her mother, Helen Mary Sayers was the headmaster at Christ Church Choir School (Reynolds 1993: 1). Dorothy was taught at home, but her lessons were alternately taught by governesses, her father, and her mother (Reynolds 1993: 13). Her father taught her Latin and started her lessons when she was only six. Her parents were known for their love of theater and took her to London annually to see a production. She also was encouraged to play-act and Sayers regularly identified herself with her favorite characters in books (Reynolds 1993: 8). As she grew, she also produced plays, made costumes, props, and programs as well as authored long narrative poems, which she illustrated (Reynolds 1993: 22). An artist of her caliber, from a young age, naturally turned her everyday life experiences into art (Tischler 1980: 8).

Before she became a teenager, her parents predicted her attendance at university and chose Oxford as the best university for her (Reynolds 1993:27). They planned her high school years accordingly, choosing an elite boarding school for her preparation. She did eventually enroll at Oxford, even though at the time Oxford only admitted female students but did not confer degrees on them. In 1920, when Dorothy Sayers was 27, Oxford University “had consented to regularize the position concerning degrees for women. Up until then they had been eligible for the title to a degree that were not official graduates” (Reynolds 1993: 97). Dorothy Sayers was one of the first female graduates of Oxford University: she was awarded with B.A. and M.A degrees.

After her graduation, Dorothy Sayers went on to a lifetime of writing. Although her writings included both fiction and nonfiction there was nothing frivolous about her personality or her publications. Simmons (2005: 9) describes her as both a participant and an observer in society, which afforded her a unique perspective. She was a writer, not a formal academic, although she had advanced degrees. She was not a member of the clergy, although she wrote theologically and spoke to gatherings of clergy. She was a lay person in the church, yet she was not an average lay person; she was a creative intellectual who was masterful at communication. Sayers was a very intentional author; she sought to communicate foundational truths about God and humanity, in all of her works.

Theoretical Framework

In this paper, Dorothy Sayers' works are analyzed through the lens of two communication theories: feminist communication theory and transportation theory. Feminist communication theory has three primary characteristics. First, it is political. "Feminist communication theory assumes that the world we know is unjust and requires change" (Rako & Wackwitz 2004: 6). This theory focuses on those who have been marginalized because of gender and exists out of the need to make that marginalization stop. According to Rako and Wackwitz (2004: 6), the very nature of it being political makes it personal, as well as encouraging and producing "multiple understandings and reimagining of our world."

Secondly, feminist communication theory is explanatory. It validates experience and speaks through experience. This allows it to, "help groups and individuals make sense of their everyday lives and meanings that shape our very identities and experiences" (Rako & Wackwitz 2004: 6). Thirdly, it is polyvocal; the voices that contribute to this theory are varied, as individuals and in ideals. It speaks to and from the margins. "It allows for the exploration of individual stories, complex relationships, personal interpretations, and multiple realities" (Rako & Wackwitz 2004: 6).

Feminist communication theory gives voice. It allows women to speak, gives the respect to be heard, and access to areas previously or consistently denied to women. There are communicative forums throughout society which have historically, and some currently, which deny women voice. This denial is evident in interpersonal, group, organizational, and mediated communication. Allowing the voice of any marginalized group to come out of the margins is a primary focus for feminist theory (Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel 2017: 449).

Transportation theory was developed by Melanie Green and Timothy Brock to explain the effect of one being, "transported into the narrative world" (Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel 2017: 167). The idea of transportation in communication is when one becomes "so enmeshed in the story you are experiencing that you are swept away from your world and into the world of the story" (Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel 2017: 167). When a person experiences this, they commonly lose track of time, space, and can commonly picture themselves in the story. Interestingly, transportation frequently results in a person being unaware of events happening around him or her and experience strong emotions, both positive and negative (Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel 2017: 167).

Transportation theory depends on narrative, however fiction and non-fiction can be equally effective and the medium is not restricted to stories in print. Plays, musicals, films, story festivals, television shows, etc. can all result in transportation of the listener, reader, or observer. Essential to transportation theory is the result of the reader or viewer making a change in his or her real life, based on what he or she experiences while transported into the narrative world. According to Green and Brock (2000: 703), literature written for the popular audience, detective or romance novels, may be criticized by scholars as not being the highest class of literature, yet have proven to be particularly effective in transporting the reader. Both transportation theory and feminist communication theory are evident throughout Dorothy Sayers's writings. Her writings were also thoroughly theological, despite her protests that she was "just" a writer.

Writings and Theology

Sayers was a contemporary of Lewis and she was prolific in her writing, yet she is much less studied, and in particular rarely called a theologian (Simmons 2005: 12). Few have examined her important contribution to the church in this regard (Simmons 2005: 17). "Her vocation as a writer was a vital part of what equipped her to be an especially effective lay theologian" (Simmons 2005: 19). Her skills in communication were a gift to the church and she sought to use them to bring the church into right relationship with the God it claimed to worship.

Dorothy Sayers was not an ordained member of the clergy; she was considered an intellectual member of the laity in the church. She was regularly invited to write letters and plays to help explain Christianity and make it accessible to the common person. James Beitler (2019: 62) praises Sayers for her ability to illustrate and teach hard truths realistically through drama, which had a profound impact on the church. In 1940, Sayers had taken the clergy of England to task over their lack of ability to teach the creeds, and in some instances their lack of teaching the creeds at all, in a way that people understood them to be relevant to their everyday lives. According to Sayers, the clergy failed to view Christianity rhetorically and by doing so, made no effort to communicate to the audience in a way the audience could understand (Beitler 2019: 62). Her exasperation was expressed in her statement, "They've got the most terrific story in the world and they don't tell it" (Beitler 2019: 62). Beitler (2019: 65) brilliantly states, ". . . the stage was at first and the same time Sayers's workplace and her

pulpit.” Sayers stewarded her gifts and talents to use art to communicate spiritual truth.

Transportation of the audience was a goal for Sayers as she wrote. According to Beitler (2019: 68), her work showcases Quintilian’s concept of *energeia*. *Energeia* is the realistic depiction of an event, done with such excellence, persuasion, and emotion, the event seems real to the audience (Beitler 2019: 68). Sayers was an author and playwright who gave much time and attention to the poetics of space. For example, in her greatest mystery novel, *The Nine Tailors*, she hired an architect to draw the parish church, so she could realistically set scenes in the space through her writing. Through her dramatic works Sayers sought to connect with her audience in ways the traditional teaching in the church could not.

The central question Fred Craddock (1978), author of *Overhearing the Gospel: Preaching and Teaching the Faith to Persons who have Heard it All Before*, asked was how does one person communicate the Christian faith to another? This question was one that Dorothy Sayers asked as well, as she saw the church in England not communicating the gospel or the doctrines of the church effectively. She spent much of her career writing and speaking towards that end. Craddock stated that many an author and rhetor has had to face the truth about the Truth, “is being available does not mean it will be appropriated” (Craddock 1978: 15). “There is no lack of information in a Christian land; something else is lacking, and this is a something which the one man cannot directly communicate to the other” (Craddock 1978: 9). Even though Sayers wrote broadly and across numerous genres, she was singularly focused and committed to honoring people and the message by seeking understandable avenues of communication.

Dorothy Sayers knew her stories were theological, even though she did not attend a seminary or have an official position in the Church of England. This idea is supported by C.S. Song (2011) in his book, *In the Beginning were Songs, not Texts: Story Theology*. All people, all over the world, from all time were and are storytellers. Song (2011: 18) states, “A story worthy of its name grips you in the depths of your heart and mind, forces you to look deeply into yourself and into human nature, and compels you to examine relations between you and other human beings, between human beings and the world, nature and creation, and relations between human beings and God. If this is what story does, it is profoundly theological.” Hauerwas and Jones (1997: 5) argue the value of narrative by defining it as an invaluable conceptual category for understanding

methods of argument, “displaying the content of Christian convictions,” and articulating personal identity.

Sayers believed that creative work was of the highest order. “She discovered that the statements in the creeds concerning God the Creator were an exact description of the human mind when engaged in an act of creative imagination” (Reynolds 1993: 311). All of humanity bears the image of God, therefore all creating is in the image of the divine act of creating (Harrison 2004: 253). The doctrine of the Trinity, the three in one, represented for her the creative process as a three-fold work (Reynolds 1993: 310). This three-fold work of human creation includes idea, power, and energy (Harrison 2004: 253). Idea, power, and energy are all part of the same creative conceptualization process; they are one, like the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Beitler 2019: 83). “Idea,” analogous to the Father, is the creative concept that starts in the mind of the artist. “Energy,” analogous to the Son, is the process of making the conceptual material. “Power,” analogous to the Spirit, is the effect this materialized concept has on the audience.

Sayers’ work was all the more valuable to the church in England as she understood the myths, concerns, and questions of the society around her. She knew British culture. The process of understanding a culture or an audience involves knowing the myths present in the society. Song (2011: 18) speaks to the importance of theology being the matrix in a story, thus myths give the rhetor insight into what a community believes about the big issues of life: birth, death, creation, good, evil, right, and wrong. Through understanding the myths in a culture, the rhetor or author can craft stories with the same concerns or values, which then also communicate ultimate Truth.

Writing Genres and Theology

Dorothy Sayers’ writing in advertising, detective fiction, translation, and play-writing are the genres through which her theological voice was heard the strongest. Each of these four genres had a particular characteristic or set of characteristics which illustrated her gift for “speaking” theologically through text.

Advertising.

Her early career was in advertising. A successful advertiser must know and understand the culture he or she is selling to and must also have a writing ability which is succinct, yet meaningful. Sayers was

notable for her economy of words (Simmons 2005: 46). There were three ways her experience in advertising helped her write theologically. First, Dorothy Sayers was trained to identify unclear writing (Simmons 2005: 47). If an advertisement in the newspaper left the public wondering what it meant, the advertisement was useless. Similarly, clergy who spoke and wrote using lofty theological sentiment or antiquated language, left the public wondering what it all meant, rendering the message useless. Sayers could not tolerate this kind of ambiguous and ineffective communication. Secondly, advertisers were attentive to the details of the ordinariness of life, how people thought, and what was tolerable. Sayers wrote, *Creed or Chaos* to address the very common misunderstandings people in England had about Christianity. “In this, she took the traditional teaching of the church and put them into dialogue with the understandings and misunderstandings the average person has about Christianity” (Simmons 2005: 48). Lastly, her experience in advertising improved her own clarity of writing and the impact of her religious works (Simmons 2005: 48).

Detective Fiction.

Detective fiction was a common genre in the early 20th century. Interestingly, the skill Sayers developed in writing detective stories aided her in communicating the gospel. In a detective story, the author must map out a story with enough logical sequence so the plot is believable for the reader. Her play, *The Man Born to be King*, was an incredible artistic labor as she translated it from the original Greek and created her own synthesis of the four Gospels. She then wrote the play in such a way as to make the story coherent (Simmons 2005: 49). This play showcased her writing capacity and ability. She wrote one coherent story, to be performed as twelve radio segments with each segment capable of standing on its own, in and of itself.

Authors of detective fiction also craft arguments. The clues along the way must lead to a logical conclusion. This is evident in Sayers’ *Creed or Chaos?* In this essay, “she anticipated the responses of the uninstructed person to the various doctrinal assertions of the Christian faith” (Simmons 2005: 50). It also requires research. Crafting this type of argument or plot requires research on the part of the author to create realistic settings both architecturally and geographically, lifelike relationships between characters, historical accuracy, and attention to details of language and dialect. Sayers studied campanology, the art of bell-ringing, for two years before she wrote her novel, *The Nine Tailors*. The story of *The Nine Tailors* opens with a nine-hour pealing of the bells. Additionally in the plot, a lost

and then discovered document, which must be decoded for the mystery to be solved, required the main character to have knowledge of bell ringing and bell towers.

Finally, good detective fiction allows the author to present the same story or the same situation from the perspective of many different people. This grants the author the opportunity to gift the story both a richness and a depth (Simmons 2005: 51). Sayers was concerned with what was being proclaimed from the pulpit in the church as well as what the person in the pew heard. This dual perspective allowed her the unique position of “explaining theology from the inside out” (Simmons 2005: 51). This is evident in her novel, *The Documents in the Case*, in which the case is told from multiple perspectives. Lastly, her creativity and artistic ability in writing detective fiction employed her imagination. She created people and places, conversations and concerns, destiny and dynasties, all from within her own mind. She lived in this creative space and had no tolerance for people and institutions of influence who had a platform for proclamation yet were utterly lacking in imaginative ability to communicate with their audience (Simmons 2005: 52).

Translations and Plays.

Similarly, her work in translation helped her hone skills which were useful for communicating theologically. Translation work from antiquated language to modern language assists the public to hear a timeless message in a new light. The Church of England still used the King James Version, which although it had beautiful Shakespearean style English, was largely unrelatable to the average person in the twentieth century. When she translated the Gospels to write *The Man Born to be King*, she used modern language, which shocked and impressed her audiences (Simmons 2005: 53), the effect she hoped it would have. As traditional language had lost its meaning, her goal was to have people hear doctrine and theological truths for the first time in a way they could understand and perceive as relevant to their lives (Simmons 2005: 65).

As a playwright, Dorothy Sayers brought history and theology to life. She was convinced that a play would have more impact on society than volumes of theological texts (Simmons 2005: 56). Sayers was persuaded that the majority of the people in the church “are exceedingly surprised to discover that the creeds contain any statements that bear a practical and comprehensible meaning” (Sayers 1978: 41). She believed the incarnation was the most wonderful part of Christianity, yet tragically the incarnation

was also one of the least understood doctrines in England. Determined to address this, Sayers allowed the dogma to “speak for itself” by putting it on stage (Simmons 2005: 55). She was passionate about her plays. She read the story of Jesus’ life through the lens of great drama and it thrilled her soul (Simmons 2005: 56).

In *The Dogma is the Drama*, she chastised the church for making scripture boring: stating, “Somehow or other, and with the best intentions, we have shown the world the typical Christian in the likeness of a crashing and rather ill-natured bore – and this in the name of the One who assuredly never bored a soul in those thirty-three years during which he passed through the world like a flame” (Simmons 2005: 67). In response to hearing one of her plays on the BBC, one listener stated, “We quickly felt the wild, unruly, unfriendly atmosphere of the inn and as the play progressed and as we followed each sidelight on the environment of the little family the whole scene became amazingly vivid . . . None of us realized before how much we had just accepted the story without properly visualizing it” (Beitler 2019: 82). Audience members who attended her play, *The Man Born to be King*, responded to it with statements that included: *enthralling, deeply moving, made it come alive, better than dry as dust sermons, real humanity, the scene and people came alive, it took me back through all the ages to the cave at Bethlehem* (Beitler 2019: 82).

Women and Feminism

Dorothy Sayers was a strong, out-spoken advocate for women. She had lively debates with C.S. Lewis as to the ordination of women in the Church of England, after he initiated a dialogue with her about her thoughts on the issue in 1948 (Simmons 2005: 145). Through her life, she modeled the impact a woman could have stewarding her gifts with excellence for the building up of society and the church.

Dorothy authored, *Are Women Human?* In this text she rebuked the common rhetoric of human rights and human issues consistently attributed to men, while women’s rights were another category altogether. At this point in history, men’s choices defined human choices (Simmons 2005: 148). Women were still denied opportunity to vote and were denied access to certain careers. Although Sayers had earned her degree from Oxford and had the distinction of being one of the very first to be granted her degree, she had to wait ten years after completing her coursework before Oxford determined it was acceptable to confer degrees on women

(Tischler 1980: 61). Her graduation was an unforgettable, life-changing moment for all that it symbolized, both for her intellectual achievement but also for what the “delay said about the life of womankind” (Tischler 1980: 21). For forty years prior to Sayers enrolling at Oxford, women had been fighting for equality in opportunity, education, degrees, and professional life (Tischler 1980: 15). Women were prohibited from many professions and marriage was considered the highest goal for all women. To Sayers, this was a profound waste of human potential and resource (Tischler 1980: 61).

Sayers used her fiction writing to illuminate the tragedy of the wasted lives of women. In *Unnatural Death*, she illustrated the “right kind of feminism” as her characters were strong women, devoted to their faith, capable in their work and fulfilled (Tischler 1980: 62). Sayers insisted that work was given to humanity by their Creator, not just to men, or just to women. Conversely, God gave each person gifts and abilities; those gifted for the work, should do that particular work. Gender, according to Sayers, was not a qualification for work. “The purpose of work must be found in the value of its product, which must be of the quality that it glorifies God. As creators, people must make themselves subservient to the work for which they are best suited, in order to bring into being that which they were created to create” (Harrison 2004: 240). Humans were made to work; Her perspective was that work is not something one must do to live, but rather what one lives to do (Harrison 2004: 257). Work was not discriminatory based on gender; work was God-given (Fletcher 2013: xvii).

Sayers did not see a distinction between men and women for work or any other aspect of life. Again, from her book *Are Women Human?*, she had strong words for the “imbeciles” who asked her to speak about the topic of detective fiction, “from a woman’s perspective” (Nordlinger 2015: 28). Her response to such a question was, “Go away and don’t be silly. You might as well ask what is the female angle on an equilateral triangle” (Nordlinger 2015: 28). Her goal for all women was for them to think of themselves as human, equal, not inferior or superior, to all other humans (Nordlinger 2015: 28). *Gaudy Nights*, one of her detective novels, also illustrates this belief. In this novel, Sayers placed the main character, a woman, in a university as a leader and an intellectual, who used her intellectual skills to solve the crime (Tischler 1980: 62). This was the first novel, in the genre of detective fiction, to highlight a woman (Johnson 2015: 23).

Communication Theories

Through the above overview of themes in Sayers' writing as well as her own commitment to writing well, it is evident that transportation theory is supported by her endeavors. She painstakingly spent her career writing and creating so as to connect with her audience or readers, to open their eyes to what seemed unknowable, yet was able to be known. In her plays, she desired complete transportation, such that the experience would be all-encompassing for those in the audience yet also create real, persistent life change. This is the very definition of transportation theory. It is noted that Sayers' fiction works displayed a keen sense of space and time. The year, season, day of the week, phase of the moon, the history, the people, local customs, language, and even dialects are all evident and appropriate throughout her fiction works. "Her novels, for all their activity, are firmly rooted in immediate reality" (Tischler 1980: 36). Whether she was writing a fiction novel or a play for BBC radio, her goal remained consistent, engage and educate the general population through realistic writing.

Similarly, Dorothy Sayers was a champion of people, all people, at a time in history when women were fighting for equal rights on many levels. The reality of World War II substantially changed the role of women in society, which caused many to realize, for the first time, that women could fulfill roles outside of the home. Feminism communication theory radiates from her writings. From the time her father took great care and attention to teach her from a young age, she knew the inherent value of women. She also personally experienced the marginalization of women in her college years and professional life. According to Tischler (1980: 15), at the time Sayers was in university, no woman could attend Oxford without confronting dominant masculinity. She was confounded by the societal dance of "role by gender" and used her fiction and nonfiction writing to champion humanity, the image of God in all humanity, and the ability of all of humanity to contribute to society through meaningful, God-given work.

The Craft of Writing

If Dorothy Sayers were alive today, most certainly she would be spoken of as one who had a calling on her life to write and create. She worshiped God through her work, and as a result, could not do her work half-heartedly, sloppily, lazily, or for her own glory. Sayers, raised by her clergy father, understood the role of the church in society as well as the profound truth of the creeds of the church. She knew the church

had a primary role in educating the masses about Jesus. Through her active participation in the church as a lay person, she also knew the church was failing at the sacred task of bringing Jesus to the people. Dorothy Sayers was an author who lived in a society where many people claimed to be Christian, yet in her interactions with them she knew they did not understand what they claimed to believe. This resulted in the church and Christianity being the object of “bad press” (Sayers 2004: 1). Those who attended church were complaining of dull drama (Sayers 2004: 1).

In her book, *The Whimsical Christian: 18 essays*, she makes the profound call to the church to “Let us, in heaven’s name, drag out the living drama from under the dreadful accumulation of slipshod thinking and trashy sentiment heaped upon it, and set in on an open stage to startle the world into some sort of vigorous reaction” (Sayers 1978: 27). It was in this setting she made her famous statement, “it is the dogma that is the drama” (Sayers 1978: 27). The dogma was indeed the drama for Dorothy Sayers and she would not allow the ineffectiveness of the church to dissuade her from honing her own skill to communicate the divine message. One avenue of honing her skill was her formation of the “Mutual Admiration Society” (Tischler 1980: 19). This was a group of like-minded women she initially met at Oxford. They became lifelong friends. They met together to share ideas, collaborate on writing, and support each other as female intellectuals in a male-dominated society (Tischler 1980: 19).

She held herself to high standards, as is evident in her relentless research which informed the background of her work. She also held others to high standards. When asked to speak to clergy or to answer letters about theological questions, she was direct and frank about how the church was not communicating well and needed to view theology rhetorically, as something which must be communicated in ways the reader or listener understood (Beitler 2019: 62). Work was definitively worshipful for Sayers. She bore witness to her Creator through her work, her commitment to being faithful to her calling as an artist, and her devotion to her vocation (Beitler 2019: 62). Sayers’ commitment to excellence in her writing is evident through the fact that her mystery novels have never gone out of print (Armstrong 2005).

Lord Peter, one of Sayers’ main characters in detective fiction, was a keen observer of human behavior. Sayers developed his character as one who was convinced “people act out of their deepest religious, philosophic, and emotional commitments” (Tischler 1980: 45). Sayers, of course, held

this belief herself. Through her observation of people's behaviors, she was able to discern the worldview of her community, her readers, and her audiences. According to Sayers, the creative mind was the one most able to tell the story of God, as it was astute in both intellect and in understanding humanity" (Sayers 2004: 273). She was keenly aware England claimed to be Christian, yet the observable behavior revealed a complete lack of real understanding of what people claimed to embrace. Human behavior reveals the fundamental beliefs and values held by the individual or the community. Therefore, she took the mantle of properly communicating the gospel, the creeds, the life of Christ, and the mystery of God, in her writing. As she grew in her writing ability, she became adept at using the mode of communication and the literature genre which would best communicate her message to the masses. "Sayers the lay theologian modeled the ability and the desire to bring her faith to bear on 'week-days' as well as Sundays" (Simmons 2005: 158). She accomplished this through addressing doctrine in addition to topics such as hobbies, work, and economics (Simmons 2005: 158). She was motivated and thrilled by ideas, therefore at the core of her being she could not tolerate a church that produced wrong thinking or fuzzy logic (Tischler 1980: 10).

Transportation theory posits that to the degree a person is "absorbed into a story or transported into a narrative world, they may show effects of the story on their real-world beliefs" (Green & Brock 2000: 701). Sayers used her understanding of the real world to expertly author believable stories that transported people. She sought change in the real world, in both belief and behavior, which motivated her to write with excellence. Her detective fiction novels have been compared to Conan Doyle and found superior. She maintained the chronology of her stories for twenty years, during which time she wrote eleven novels, twenty-one short stories, and an eleven-part weekly series in a periodical (Tischler 1980: 36).

Feminist communication theory gives voice to the marginalized, particularly women. Sayers had a powerful voice during her lifetime and used it to speak for herself and on behalf of others who were marginalized. Importantly, her perspective on feminism was based in her theological understanding of humanity. She did not exalt women above men, nor base her argument on a particular characteristic of women. Rather, she argued for women based on the work of the Creator in endowing all of humanity with his image. Therefore, there is no space for any human to be marginalized. She used her novels and her nonfiction texts to illustrate the

full humanity of women, which challenged society on many levels in the early and mid-twentieth century.

Conclusion

Most of the authors who have written on Sayers mention the lack of scholarship surrounding her life and work. Simmons' (2005) book, *Creed Without Chaos: Exploring Theology in the Writings of Dorothy L. Sayers*, is one of the first to present research on Sayers as a theologian. This is a definite area in which more research is needed. It is evident Sayers' writings effuse theology. Her life was theologically informed, as was her thinking and writing. She may have been overlooked because she was female scholar or it may be that Simmons was correct in attributing it to the vast variety and volume of her work. There seems to be enough theological material in her fiction work alone, however, that a lifetime of study could be done to reach the depths of her theological themes and instruction.

Dorothy Sayers "had a unique combination of talents: a keen theological sense coupled with tremendous writing skill and a concern for how ordinary people understood Christianity. In an increasingly complex and fragmented world, we need these gifts more than ever" (Simmons 2005: 12). Although Dorothy Sayers wrote in the twentieth century, tempting one to discount her work as irrelevant for a modern audience, her mastery of transportation in teaching Christian doctrine is as important today as when she originally wrote. Her passion for the reality of the *imago dei* and the life-altering ramifications of this reality for all of humanity is a relevant example of God's perspective and intentions for humanity, even in the 21st century. Christian communication scholars can learn a tremendous amount from the example of her life and writings. Her commitment to excellence, her love of doctrine, her incredible attention to detail, her expansive knowledge of her culture and society, her insatiable appetite for learning, and her humility in continually working to become a better writer, and therefore a more effective communicator, are all characteristics which made her an effective and influential communicator and are qualities worth emulating for any communications scholar.



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