Dorothy Green (1915–1991) was a feisty yet curiously conservative Australian literary critic-cum-peace activist, with a sharp, angry wit and an intolerance for fools. She was also a deeply religious person who suffered, in laymen’s terms, a major ‘nervous breakdown’ in her mid-40s after the death of her much older husband, the literary historian H. M. Green. While such a midlife collapse could have signalled the closing down of her personality and creativity, it led to the opposite—a flowering of her productivity and an ongoing commitment of her thought and work to compassionate social justice. As a result, the bulk of her poetry and literary criticism was published in the latter half of her life. So too it was in her later years that her deeply-held spiritual beliefs prompted her to become an activist who campaigned vociferously against war and nuclear weapons, and for the environment.

This paper looks at Green’s ‘breakdown’ with reference to work on the ‘midlife crisis’ and its spiritual connections by researchers including Jung (1953-79), Erikson (1965), Jaques (1965), Heilbrun (1989), Grof (1990), Wethington (2000) and Wink and Dillon (2002), and Arnold (2005). In so doing, it connects Green’s midlife collapse and her prolific output as an academic and writer in her later years, as well as her deepening spirituality as evidenced by her increasing involvement in social, religious and political activities as she aged.


**BIOGRAPHY**

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CRISIS OR REBIRTH? THE SPIRITUAL FLOWERING OF THE POET, PEACE ACTIVIST AND LITERARY CRITIC DOROTHY GREEN

Dorothy Green (1915-1991) was a spirited yet curiously conservative Australian literary critic-cum-peace activist, with a sharp, angry wit and an intolerance of fools. She was also a deeply religious person who suffered, in laymen’s terms, a major ‘nervous breakdown’ in her mid-40s after the death of her much older husband, the literary historian H. M. Green. While such a midlife collapse could have signalled the closing down of her personality and creativity, it led to the opposite—a flowering of her productivity and an ongoing commitment of her thought and work to compassionate social justice. As a result, the bulk of her poetry and literary criticism was published in the latter half of her life. So too it was in her later years that her deeply-held spiritual beliefs prompted her to become an activist who campaigned vociferously against war and nuclear weapons, and for the environment.

Dorothy Green began her working life as a journalist—first with the Daily Telegraph and then as one of Australia’s first female radio journalists when she helped set up the Brisbane office of the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC). With the men called away to the Second World War, Green reported on national and Queensland stories and was responsible for transmitting General MacArthur’s war communiqués to Canberra. As a married woman, Green was prevented from continuing to work as a full-time employee at the ABC at the end of the War, so instead she turned to high school teaching, becoming co-headmistress of a Queensland country boarding school for girls. In 1961, she joined the newly opened Monash University as a lecturer in literature, later moving to the Australian National University under A. D. Hope, and finally to the Australian Defence Force Academy where she taught Australian literature to trainee officers in the armed forces.


While Green devoted herself to the cause of Australian literature, she also established herself as a defender of the power of the word, working to expose and challenge those power structures in our society which misuse language for exploitation and greed. At the age of 72, with her colleagues from the Australian Defence Force

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1 Willa McDonald, has also written Warrior for Peace: Dorothy Auchterlonie Green (Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2009).
2 Green always admired members of the armed forces. Both her father and her brother had fought for their countries. Her brother was listed as missing in action in W. W. 2, while her father’s death in the 1919 influenza epidemic was most likely a direct result of his lungs having been weakened from gas in the trenches in W. W. 1. Green was staunchly opposed to warfare, but blamed our war-based economies and the inadequacies of our political leaders and governments for local and international conflicts, rather than the soldiers themselves whom she always defended as honourable and self-sacrificing.
3 Green did have a single poem —Kaleidoscope— published in pamphlet form in 1940, when she was 25, but no other major publications (besides some journalism for The Women’s Weekly and the occasional academic review for Meanjin) until after her breakdown.
4 Dorothy Green, Kaleidoscope (Sydney: Viking Press, 1940); The Dolphin (Canberra: A. N. U. Press, 1967); Something to Someone (Canberra: Brindabella Press, 1983).
5 Dorothy Green, Ulysses Bound; Henry Handel Richardson and her Fiction (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1973) republished as Henry Handel Richardson and her Fiction (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986).
Dorothy Green was only 46 when her husband, the literary historian H. M. (Harry) Green, died in Melbourne at the age of 81. She had spent the previous decade at the Presbyterian Girls College (P. G. C.) in Warwick, Queensland where, with Bettie Crombie, she had proved herself to be an outstanding co-headmistress. Under their leadership, the boarding school was transformed into a first-rate college—one where the girls were not only challenged academically and furthered in their sporting and cultural interests, but where they were nurtured and encouraged to find and fulfil their individual promise. But the job was demanding and exhausting and the two women were on call 24 hours a day. At the same time, Green’s own two children were wanting her attention and Harry in his old age was needing more and more emotional and physical support. Green had become not only the family nurturer but also the breadwinner in an overly-taxing job, with no extended family to lend assistance. Her health started to seriously decline, causing her Melbourne-based friends Clem and Nina Christesen to step in and encourage her to apply for a lecturing position at the soon-to-open Monash University.

When Harry died in 1962, it hit Dorothy Green hard. They had married in 1944 in the face of great public scandal. At the time, he was 63 and had been married to a woman called Eleanor (nee Watson) for 33 years, with whom he had two grown daughters, Nora and Isabel. Dorothy Green was 29. Having migrated with her family from England as a young child, she had no close relatives in Australia. She had lost her father to the ‘black flu’ on his return from the Great War when she was five, her mother to cancer when she was a teenager, and not long before her decision to marry, her brother (her only sibling) was listed as missing in action, a casualty of World War Two. Green was always an extremely anxious woman who had suffered reactive deprivations before, and would do so again, but her grief on the death of her husband was severe and, with no hope of meaningful long-term assistance to help her as a single mother, a decision was made to give her shock therapy (electro-convulsive therapy or E. C. T.). She was given four or five shock treatments to jolt her out of her depression, although the overall psychiatric treatment she received at that time lasted for about a year.

**Midlife Spirituality**

Such a breakdown is not the usual reaction to the death of a spouse, but Green had already faced many losses and much adversity in her life. Her time at Warwick had exhausted her. When she and her family arrived in Melbourne she was severely underweight and had no physical or emotional reserves to cope with the major bereavement she was about to face. At the same time, she had reached a stage in midlife when it is not unknown for people to go through a period of confusion, doubt and even depression, usually emerging some time later with a stronger sense of themselves and their spirituality. Wink and Dillon, in a study of people’s midlife experiences, have found that women in particular show a tendency to become more concerned with issues of spirituality in older age, especially those who, like Green, suffered adversity in their 30s and 40s and were

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7 Dorothy Green and David Headon (Eds.), *Imagining the Real: Australian Writing in the Nuclear Age* (Sydney: A. B. C. Enterprises, 1987); Dorothy Green and David Headon (Eds.), *Looking Beyond Yesterday: The Australian Artist and New Paths to Our Future* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1990).

8 Private papers of the Green family, kept in the possession of Andrew Green. Decree Absolute shows the marriage between Eleanor and Harry was dissolved on 24 April 1944 in the Supreme Court of N. S. W.

introspective, insightful, psychologically minded and tended to think unconventionally.\textsuperscript{10} Arnold, in a similar survey, found that very few of her participants pointed to menopause as the cause of their midlife re-orientation. Instead, reflecting Dorothy Green’s experiences, the majority spoke of a crisis related to the loss of a significant something or someone, which resulted in a period of change triggering a greater awareness of what was important to them. They also reported feeling greater freedom in themselves and a deeper sense of spiritual connection as a consequence.\textsuperscript{13}

While Green has left no public writing that describes her experiences during the period of her collapse, there are first-hand descriptions of psychosis available. Therese Giffney described what she underwent in “Psychosis - An Alternative State of Consciousness,” drawing connections between her sufferings during her periods of illness and the midlife crises of people who are ‘well,’ making the point that such experiences often lead to a greater clarity about the nature of living.

I don't think my senses during such a time give me entirely erroneous messages, the messages are mainly clear as all superfluous material is swept away...The clutter of the everyday disappears and many truths of what is really happening around us is opened up to us. Not many mentally ill people are aware of the pearl to be found in their illness, amidst their pain and confusion. Or else are only informed that all their perceptions are merely symptoms. Those who do believe that they are aware of is not described entirely by the coverall ‘symptoms’ often choose the comforting haven of medication because the experience is so rugged, as they see the horrific with as much clarity as they see the bliss. Apart from this, it is just so bloody draining physically...Also what we experience as an illness, many ‘well’ people experience as Life Crises. So we are all interlinked. We are not alone in our mania, our paranoia and our depression...I'm not saying that the ultimate is to be crazy, I think what I am trying to say is that everyone should live to the full all the different aspects of their lives. And in many aspects of mental illness this is basically what is forced upon us by the nature and chemistry of the illness...\textsuperscript{12}

If seen from this perspective, then Green’s crisis could be viewed as a ‘spiritual emergence’ which Stan Grof describes as a period of crisis involving ‘the movement of an individual to a more expanded way of being that involves enhanced emotional and psychosomatic health, greater freedom of personal choices and a sense of deeper connection with other people, nature and the cosmos. An important part of this development is an increasing awareness of the spiritual dimension in one’s life and in the universal scheme of things.’\textsuperscript{13} The idea that a person may reach a spiritual turning point in midlife is not new. The idea can be traced back to Confucius who reportedly said, ‘At fifty, I understood the Decree of Heaven’.\textsuperscript{14} Carl Jung noted that in midlife a crisis in development can be triggered by the need to shift one’s orientation from the outer world to the inner in preparation for older age - a re-orientation which also requires facing one’s own mortality (or at least the fact that the time left is limited and therefore of increasing importance) and the acceptance of various parts of the psyche which, up till the crisis, have been denied adequate expression. Wrote Jung in a passage pertinent to Green’s situation:

The nearer we approach to the middle of life and the better we have succeeded in entrenching ourselves in our personal attitudes and social positions, the more it appears as if we had discovered the right course and the right ideals and principles of behaviour. For this reason we suppose them to be eternally valid and make a virtue of unchangeably clinging to them. We overlook the essential fact that the social goal is attained only at the cost of a diminution of personality. Many—far too many—aspects of life which should also have been experienced lie in the lumber-room among dusty memories; but sometimes, too, they are glowing coals under grey ashes.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{10} Theirs is one of the few studies done on women and their midlife experiences. It’s also one of the few that does not tie its interpretation of women’s experience of older age to biology—refiguring the second half of a woman’s life as merely a postscript to her reproductive years.
\textsuperscript{12} Therese Giffney, \textit{Eremos: Magazine of the Eremos Institute} 52 August (1995):18-19, adapted from a speech given at a forum on Mental Health and Housing organised by Aftercare at Rozelle Hospital N. S. W. in 1990.
\textsuperscript{13} Stan Grof and Christina Grof (Eds.) \textit{The Stormy Search for the Self: A Guide to Personal Growth through Transformational Crisi}, (Los Angeles: Tarcher, 1990), 34.
Freud spoke of the need to establish one’s identity in the world through work and love. He and Piaget postulated that psychosocial development occurred primarily in the early years, culminating in mature development from the time of adolescence. But Jung, whose life’s work was concentrated in the area of adult development, pointed out that once the task of becoming an adult and achieving one’s place in the world is complete, a person is often confronted by a chasm of fear, uncertainty and even depression as he or she re-adapts to take on the more introverted tasks involved in becoming more truly one’s self in the second half of life. Jung believed the purpose of life was ‘individuation’ or wholeness; the achievement of greater authenticity by integrating all the parts of oneself in line with the path laid down by Nature, which was discernable through dreams, imagination and other expressions of the unconscious. According to the Jungian view, breakdowns such as Green’s may not be so much expressions of pathology as the means by which the psyche re-balances the individual on the path to ‘individuation.’ From this stance, the journey to individuation is inner-driven and can plunge the sufferer deep into the unconscious in a way which profoundly changes his or her perspectives on life.17

Elliott Jaques18 who is credited with inventing the term ‘midlife crisis,’ analysed the midlife transitions of over 300 ‘great men’ and postulated that they had a tendency towards crisis in their creative work in their mid to late thirties which could express itself in three forms - the ability to be creative suddenly appearing for the first time, a withering of their creative work, or a change in the quality and content of their creativity. The turning point, he believed, came both from an acceptance of the existence of hate (in Jungian terms, a reconciliation with one’s own shadow or the rejected parts of one’s self) and the acceptance of the reality of death. Says the psychiatrist Anthony Storr:

So far as we know man is the only creature who can see his own death coming. The realisation concentrates the mind wonderfully. He prepares for death by freeing himself from mundane goals and attachments, and turns towards the cultivation of his own interior garden. This is surely the common factor which links Jaques’s ‘constructive resignation’ with Erikson’s ‘ego integrity’ and Jung’s ‘individuation’.19

There is, however, another line of research that, while it shares the idea that spirituality is a product of the maturational process that occurs in the course of adult life, links it more to external conditions—social and personal—than to an internal, unconscious drive towards emotional, psychological and spiritual growth. A greater spirituality, it is argued, results from the need to engage with adversity and the curtailment of life choices in older age caused by such occurrences as the deaths of people who are close, retirement and the physical decline of ageing.20 Spiritual development is then not so much determined by chronological age as by

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17 Green was familiar with Jung’s work. His emphasis on the development of the individual, while firmly placing the individual within the bounds not only of his or her immediate society but also within the collective culture, obviously appealed to her. His influence on her views (and that of his philosophic predecessors such as Schopenhauer) was still present when Writer: Reader: Critic, a collection of Green’s essays and talks, was published in 1991. In that volume Green discussed the link between ‘self-expression’ and spirituality: ‘...The truth is that the self does not appear sui generis, even though each self is unique. It is compounded of our ancient and complex genetic inheritance from innumerable other past ‘selves,’ together with the infinite influences that work upon us from outside, from past and present environments. It is galvanised into uniqueness by mimesis...’ Writer: Reader: Critic, 105.
circumstance, though the two are usually intertwined. From this standpoint, it could be argued that the limits placed on Green by the difficulties of a future without her husband may have contributed to her re-orientation to her inner world and the amplification of her creativity in older age. There were few social or financial supports at that time for single women and she believed that in the natural order men looked after women and children. If she had married Harry as a father figure, her expectations would have been turned upside down as she looked after him through his ageing and dying and then faced a long future without him.

But Green’s future after Harry’s death was not all grim. Certainly she was not a practical woman, but rather one who found solace and stimulation in her books and writing. Her love of ideas and her capacity to reflect gave her comfort and challenged her intellect, while her horror of war, linked to her deeply felt spirituality, gave her a sense of purpose. Erikson spoke of a period of moratorium in the lives of certain gifted men where the person’s creativity or career seems to stop and he enters a period of confusion about his aims and goals. Erikson postulated that this was a period when, while the person appears to be going nowhere, he is actually preparing for the task that awaits—that it is a time of struggle between generativity and stagnation. The American academic Carolyn Heilbrun investigated the biographies of a number of famous women - including Dorothy L. Sayers, Virginia Woolf, George Eliot, George Sands and the Brontes - in her book Writing a Woman’s Life.

Adapting Erikson’s ideas, she referred to the example of Yeats who suffered through a period where he saw himself dismally without work, sexual expression, or daily companionship, but was actually preparing himself unconsciously for the task of being a poet. ‘...He lived the life suited to his vocation rather than to what he consciously recorded as his desires. He loved an unattainable woman because that love, and his unquenched desire, sharpened him for poetry.’ Heilbrun argued that each of the women she studied had done something (albeit unconsciously) in their late 20s or 30s which had catapulted them out of the usual destiny of women in our society, particularly pre-1960s. Their biographers often described these women pitifully, as having found artistic or vocational outlets to compensate for a life without men and/or children. But Heilbrun argues that these women may have chosen a path, from early on, which allowed them in later life to follow their vocation even though, throughout their lives, they loudly protested that they were lonely or only desired to live in a conventional marriage. For example, George Eliot lived with George Henry Lewes as his wife outside of marriage, which was an outrageous act in terms of Victorian morality but which allowed her to escape ‘social demands, the compulsion to motherhood, and despair at her lack of accepted sex appeal; by the same act she satisfied her sexual desires, her need for a certain dependency, and above all, her need for space in which to work.’ Heilbrun raises the idea that in her later years a woman may become more truly herself because she is neither waiting for a man, looking after children nor climbing a career ladder - that there are fewer external factors to make her something else. On this view, it is possible Green married a man so much older than herself, unconsciously ‘knowing’ that she would be left to be able to get on with her own creative work in the second half of her life and become more truly and authentically herself.

**A CALL TO CARITAS**

Whatever the cause of Green’s crisis, an understanding of Green’s views on religion and spirituality lead to an understanding of the inspiration and moral imperatives which underpinned her poetry and literary criticism, and which fuelled her work for the anti-nuclear movement and her church in her later years. It is clear that Green committed her public selves in the second half of her life - as teacher, writer and citizen - to working for a better society, impelled by her deep Christian beliefs. But her devotion to her God was a private matter which became public only to the extent necessary for her to fulfil her ‘charitable’ obligations to her fellow human beings. Green was courageous enough to discuss her theological beliefs publicly, but it was always from the standpoint of encouraging others to think and take action, never from an attempt to define God or to indulge in metaphysical inquiry. Perhaps this reticence was one of the reasons she enjoyed Sir Thomas Browne’s work so much. He too confessed he had nothing to say about God’s first attribute, his eternity, and addressed himself to

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24 Ibid., 50.

25 Ibid.
the second attribute, his wisdom as revealed in nature and history.\textsuperscript{26} Said Green: ‘As we have seen, it was Christ himself who laid down the precedent for preferring deeds to words, activity in the world to metaphysical speculation’.\textsuperscript{27} Sometimes described as a Christian Humanist,\textsuperscript{28} Green was plainly aware that the ‘mythologies of peace,’ to use Joseph Campbell’s phrase,\textsuperscript{29} including Christianity, Jainism and Buddhism, interpreted the kingdom of God not as something concrete in the future, but as a psychological state within one’s own heart now. Green was not a person to accept anything at face value. She was wary of confusing religiosity with spirituality. In her writings she used the example of Acapulco to draw this distinction, pointing out that the Catholic Churches in that city overflow on feast days while people beg outside in the streets. Green felt that participating in religious ritual meant little when, beyond the church building, people are starving and in misery.

Green equated religion with ‘love’ in the sense of ‘charity’ or \emph{caritas}, as the latter word was used by Tillich in \textit{Morality and Beyond}.\textsuperscript{30} Like Tillich, Green saw \emph{caritas} as being the highest form of love which encompassed love’s other three aspects:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \emph{Epithymia} or the libido element; \emph{philia} the friendship element, the social quality of love; and \emph{eros}, the mystical element. None of these qualities, [Tillich claimed], is absent in any of the others. It is the \emph{caritas} element, however, that prevents culture from becoming trivial just as it is the \emph{eros} element that prevents \emph{caritas} from becoming merely moralistic and contemptuous of the material world.\textsuperscript{31}
\end{itemize}

In Green’s piece, “Love and the Thirteenth Chapter of Corinthians,” published in 1982, she expounded further on her own ideas about \emph{caritas}, quoting from St Paul’s letter to the Corinthians which she described as ‘the great hymn to love of Western man.’ St Paul made it clear, she said, that moral actions not motivated by \emph{caritas} have no spiritual value. ‘...[W]e are told that \emph{caritas} is everlasting, that its fruits or accompaniments are faith and hope; that it is in some mysterious way the fundamental principle of the universe, the ground of its being...’ She continued:

It is obvious that few of our personal transactions and none of our political, economic and international activities are based on these principles. Our economic and foreign policies are based on hate, for which one polite name is ‘competition’...If one were to suggest seriously that the only practicable economic, political and international policy left to us is the one summed up in the Sermon on the Mount as ‘Love your enemy,’ one would be regarded as a lunatic. But it is so and that it is so becomes clearer if we examine the true meaning of the word ‘love’ or ‘caritas’ as used by St Paul. ‘Caritas’ contains the idea of justice as its unconditional element; it is the idea of justice that protects the concept of ‘caritas’ from sentimentality and makes it possible for us to ‘love our enemies.’\textsuperscript{32}

Dorothy Green believed passionately in a personal God, in the importance and strength of the individual and the individual’s personality, and in the need to do battle with the ‘other’ where she perceived the other was at fault, while at the same time recognising that human beings are not separate from the society in which they live. But while the honouring of the individual within the context of human society was at the core of Green’s beliefs and values, she also warned against solipsism. Pointing to the commandment of Jesus—“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart thy mind thy soul thy strength and thy neighbour as thyself”\textsuperscript{33} -- she said it directs ‘man to something outside himself, not to worship it, but to love it with all the mental and emotional energy of which he is capable. The commandment is positive and dynamic. It is a safeguard against that self-regard which is one of the temptations of the secular humanist. Those who dislike the term ‘God’ may translate it...[but] whatever it is, it leads the ‘I’ out of itself and on; it does not diminish it or enclose it...\textsuperscript{34}

\begin{flushright}
27 Ibid., 12.
32 Ibid., 188-189.
34 Green, “Love and the Thirteenth Chapter of Corinthians,” 12.
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At the same time, Green counselled that the second great commandment was to love one’s neighbour as oneself, not more than oneself, a subtlety sometimes lost on people committed to serving others.

...The self as well as the not-self of the first commandment, is to be valued, and the self in every other human being is to be valued equally with one’s own. The separateness of persons as well as the relationship between them is fully acknowledged. I am a self, as much as I am a neighbour, and so is everyone else. This is not at all the same pseudo-profundity about All is One and One is All, that Zaehner (1974) warns us against...

Her Christianity was always compassionate and pragmatic. She denounced reformist rhetoric, supporting philosopher Theodor Adorno’s statement that, ‘There is tenderness only in the coarsest demand: that no-one shall go hungry anymore.’ In the second half of her life she could not write literary criticism that did not have this ‘coarsest demand’ as its underlying agenda. Green believed that our reliance on a war economy was at the root of many of humankind’s problems - poverty, environmental damage, a withering of enriching cultures.

FELLOW TRAVELLERS

Green read widely on religious and spiritual issues, showing a level of erudition unusual in a lay-person. Through discussions with friends such as the priest Jim Minchen, and the Shin Buddhist poet Harold Stewart, her views and principles were sharpened over the years. With Stewart, Green kept up a 30-year correspondence from the time he moved to Japan in 1966. She provided ‘truly creative’ criticism7 of his book-length poem By the Old Walls of Kyoto, during its long creation, which in turn helped her to write a learned review of the poem on its publication.38 While expressing a reluctance to comment on the content of the poems and prose commentaries, her review demonstrated a more than passable intellectual knowledge of Pure Land Buddhism.

While Green’s exposure to Buddhist thought and belief deepened her Christianity and probably helped open the way to her realisation of ‘God’ through the concept of ‘No God,’ and through her personal descent into the abyss of the unconscious, it is not surprising she never adopted it as her personal philosophy. Green once commented to Stewart that, after reading the Dhammapada (a Pali text that expounds basic Buddhist ethical principals), she was struck by the fact that these were identical with Christian ones. But Green was by nature a traditionalist who took great comfort in the Christian rituals. She was also an activist and highly political. Buddhism, as a philosophy, speaks of the transcendence of opposites, of good and evil. By taking a stand against a perceived injustice, one automatically creates an opposition. Buddhist thought stresses the need for ‘compassion,’ an empathy with people and with life which allows one to transcend individual divisions and concerns. This, plus the principles of reincarnation and kharma, and the fact that Buddhism is based on an introverted, inward-looking meditation practice, has meant social justice has not played a large part in its history.39

While it is likely Green had first been exposed to Buddhism at Sydney University where she took Oriental Studies under A. L. Sadler,40 there is no reason to dispute Stewart’s claim that most of Green’s knowledge of Buddhism, beyond the reading of fundamental texts, came from Stewart’s correspondence with Green. Stewart saw no point in social action. In a letter to the author discussing Green’s beliefs, Stewart wrote:

Buddhists are critical of political activism, no matter how well-intentioned and altruistic it may be. (During the Vietnam war some Hinayana monks immolated themselves in protest against the atrocities of the US army, but such extreme measures are copied from Western ideas and are quite contrary to the Buddha’s prohibition of extreme asceticism or self-murder.) Did all the protest marches ever stop any war or proliferation of weapons? What finally did so was the collapse of the Soviet Empire (‘from its own internal contradictions,’ to quote Marx). The result was even more dangerous as fissionable material

35 Ibid.
36 Dorothy Green, The Music of Love, 6.
40 Sadler was very sympathetic towards Buddhism and practised the Zen tea ceremony. His influence on a generation of students who passed through Sydney University from 1922 until the War, was noted by Paul Croucher in his A History of Buddhism in Australia, 1848-1988 (U. N. S. W. Press, Sydney, 1989).
is now for sale through the black marketeers to international terrorists! So when the great poet-sage of Tibet, Milarepa was asked by his disciples if they could engage in worldly good-works for the benefit of others, he replied: ‘If there be not the least self-disinterested attachment to such duties, it is permissible. But such detachment is indeed rare, and works performed for the good of others seldom succeed if not wholly free from self-interest. But without seeking to benefit others, it is with difficulty that even works done in one’s own interest (or selfishly) are successful. It is as if a man helplessly drowning were to try to save another man in the same predicament. One should not be overanxious and hasty in setting out to serve others before one has oneself realised the Truth in its fullness’.  

Green probably would have enjoyed the writings of an engaged (politically active) Buddhist such as the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh who has written on the links between Buddhism and Christianity and of the potential for social justice arising from true compassion. In the 1980s Green wrote:

> It is true that there is much to be learned from Eastern metaphysical systems, but that does not make one’s own worthless. The Western tradition, in fact, is peculiarly well-equipped to regenerate itself from within and make available once more to those who are now seeking elsewhere what has always been available to those who looked. Western tradition has an ingrained habit of self-examination and of disinterested inquiry; it is reluctant to break down the distinction between subject and object which can lead to a dangerous solipsism; it is reluctant to confound the One and the Many, the Whole with the Self in an amorphous unity in which all moral considerations can be too easily set aside as meaningless. The dangers of irresponsible interpretations of Eastern ideas have been pointed out by R. C. Zaehner in his article “The Wickedness of Evil”. 

Yet it is also clear that Green felt institutional religions had to bend and change. She was well aware of the tendency for any institution to become corrupt through the domination of its individual members, a tendency she would not tolerate. She believed in universal values, the need for the individual to be able to fully express his or her own humanity, and she believed in ‘goodness’—the latter she defined as that which is on the side of life and not death.

> Anything that conduces to life and living fully so that we are fully developed human beings (with) all our senses and all our responses...developed, our horizons widened, our perspectives widened. What we need is more awareness of the world in the world. More awareness of things that are not ourselves. At the moment we seem to be terribly preoccupied with our own selves...

Green did not take the Christian story as literal truth. She was a person who had built her life around the appreciation of literature—metaphor and story used to convey deeper truths. Green did not approach her religion as a child seeking succour and protection. She did not seek a parental figure in God; nor did she want a strict and detailed list of rules to live by. To her, the religious urge was innate and was connected to the overriding purpose in life—to discover our full humanity instead of accepting the crippled form of it we are constantly being offered—a point about which she became more convinced as she grew older. Whether Green’s midlife collapse was solely driven by her husband’s death, or was the culmination of a number of major losses and poor physical health, or was caused by an innate urge towards greater authenticity and wholeness—the fact is that from the time of her emotional collapse, she entered a period of intense creativity and expanding political activism, showing greatly deepened feelings of connection with her own self and humanity, the environment and all creation in her later years. It was a turning point in her life that led to a flowering of her compassion and humanity—one that she expressed eloquently in her writings, public service and ongoing political campaigns.

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44 Green, “Sheep or Goats?”, 11.  
45 Peter Campbell and James Murdoch, *Videorecording - Interview with Dorothy Green* (Redfern, N. S. W.: Australia Council Archival Film Series, 1990).  