

The **MAST** *Journal*

Creativity

Art, a Healing Ministry

Cheryl Phillips, R.S.M.

What on Earth Are We Doing?

Cynthia Serjak, R.S.M.

Creativity in the Context of the "Totus Christus"

Marian Thérèse Arroyo, R.S.M.

Creativity, Heartbeat of the Spirit

Mary Paula Cancienne, R.S.M.

Reflection on a Life of Mercy, Ministry, and Music

Claudette Schiratti, R.S.M.

Receiving the Breath of the Spirit and Breathing It On

Audrey Synnott, R.S.M.

Walk Through Your Door Drawkcab

Virginia Farnan, R.S.M.

Like a Root is to Fruit

Katherine Doyle, R.S.M.

A Taste of Taizé

Suzanne Toolan, R.S.M.

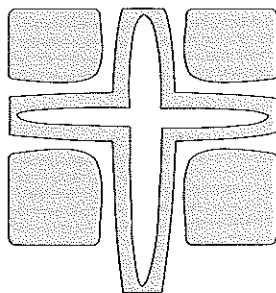
Experiencing Creative Spirituality

Celeste Marie Nuttman, R.S.M.

Creation-Centered Spirituality

Patricia Ryan, R.S.M.

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Dear Sisters, Associates and Friends of Mercy,

Art reflects the present culture. Artists also shift perception of the same culture and look beyond its boundaries. Departures from artistic convention cause audiences to rebel at the unfamiliar. The cubists offended viewers accustomed to impressionists. Realists resisted the abstractionists, castigating them as heretics and betrayers of Western aesthetic tradition.

Over a period of several decades, the Sisters of Mercy experienced a surge of creativity. Its result was the Institute of 1991, a dramatic departure from the model of autonomous provinces and regions. Drafting the Institute Constitutions involved rounds of votes to approve the text at various stages in the 1980s. I remember one Sister who said she had voted Yes so many times, that if another vote came, she'd vote No to spite the seemingly endless consultation.

Could women really imagine a model of governance, and words for it, that would change the way they related to each other in religious life? The miracle of this creative vision was articulated by women, most of whom had been "formed" in religious life under the pre-Vatican era of the 1940s and 1950s. The Constitutions of 1991 represented a tectonic shift from a traditional culture of patriarchal authority to a more uncertain but open culture of participation. How could resistance not be expected to this new form for the art of living religious life?

Living by the 1991 Constitutions is actually quite costly when one considers the power presidents in the previous structure used to have. Then, of twenty-five communities, sixteen regional presidents were like bishops, with "supreme moderator" status, able to go directly to Rome. In 1991, that autonomy changed. Personal authority of regional presidents became structurally limited by an explicit accountability to the new Constitutions, to the Institute chapter and its policies, to the Institute president and councilors, to the Institute leadership conference, to the regional community chapter and its policies and decisions, to the regional government plan, and in all contexts, to church law (Constitutions §§ 68, 72, 74, 75).

Such a system of interaction between leaders and members cannot be sustained without ongoing, stable structures of participation and accountability (§ 77). Nor is the accountability of leadership to members achieved by one-way delivery of information, or by nano-seconds of seeking members' advice. The 1991 Constitutions, at least on paper, subvert an autonomous, episcopal governance style for regional presidents. In the Institute model, regional presidents do not stand in the place of the pope or as female analogues to male bishops. The role of a regional president is severely curtailed by the existence of the Institute if the notion of a regional president's authority is based on the traditional patriarchal prerogatives of "my diocese, my kingdom."

The 1991 Constitutions, however, reconfigure authority in the Institute by describing it in persistently participatory terms at the regional level, by formally democratizing its articulation, and providing a series of structural checks and balances against one-woman decision-making. The effect is to limit the autonomy of presidents and empower members by insisting that leadership carry out the will of members. In fact, active participation is mandated by the Constitutions: "In virtue of membership, each sister assumes responsibility to participate in the decision-making processes of the Institute, regional and local communities." (§ 78). The decision-making structures and processes are numerous and interrelated.

The Constitutions slow down decision-making demand openness and eschew secrecy. Their provisions resist quick-fix strategies and creation of "policies" or changes to them that haven't been voted on by members. The Constitutions mandate that decisions affecting members undergo a filtering process by many listeners and consultants, a careful testing against chapter directives, a review against the regional governance plan, and accountability to the law of the church, which means the rights of members under canon law are observed.

It should not be a surprise, if regarded as a masterpiece of Mercy art, that the governance model of 1991 provokes resistance from the "old school" which for all practical purposes, rejects it as a heretical departure from religious tradition. On the other hand, many members, recognizing the Constitutions' anticipatory promise, eagerly embrace it, examine it again and afresh, as the signpost of a liberating and vibrant culture for a renewed religious life,

In this spirit of promise, Mary Daly, R.S.M. is owed recognition both for her work on the Core Constitutions, and for editing this issue of MAST Journal.



Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M.

Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M.
Editor, *The MAST Journal*

Art, a Healing Ministry

Cheryl Phillips, R.S.M.

The arts heal. Images possess a unique power that can reach right out and touch us when it seems nothing else can. "Perhaps the purpose of art at its deepest level is to transform the scars of life; to take the painful piece of sand and create a pearl. This transformation represents and makes sacred the polarities in our lives."¹

I am writing this reflection exactly two weeks to the day and hour that our country suffered a terrorist attack. At a time when we were numb and speechless with disbelief and pain, music, poetry, and images began to flow from us. "... I suddenly remembered the image of the three pigeons with their faces to the wind and rain and their bodies centered in the earth ... in these times of violence, anger and deep sadness ... that is what we all need to do is to hunker down, and find our center."²

Thousands, watching at home, and those attending the memorial service at the National Shrine in Washington, D.C., were moved to express their grief when the words to a familiar prayer reverberated in a soulful song throughout the cathedral, "... and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." All that horrific week following the attack people who rarely sing at all, like our representatives in Washington who stood side-by-side on the steps of the White House, tearfully broke into *America the Beautiful*. Many schools, churches, institutions, and families continue to symbolize the need they feel for solidarity and camaraderie in these uncertain times by displaying some image of the U.S. flag. Whether an image is in a painting, a song, a piece of prose or poetry, a dance or a drama it has the power to begin in us the healing process.

Sometimes reality is too brutal. Because the image is outside of ourselves it can help us explore our darker truths with some distance and objectivity. An image gently illuminates these shadows whether personal or institutional. Like a metaphor, an image is a way in which one truth is described in

terms of another, thus shedding a new light on the thing being described. Two of my card images that follow illustrate this point:



*I love the moon and the stars.
I think everyone does.*

*Each night we search the skies
for these distant luminaries*

*just as we look
for light
in our dark hours.*

Images possess a unique power
that can reach right out and
touch us when it seems nothing
else can.



*In winter, as in seasons of loss,
the road seems too harsh, too long.
Nothing and no one can hasten or ease
this part of the journey.
But it is just that,
only a rough piece of road. Once traversed spring
will, once again, unfurl in your heart.
It is a promise.*

Cheryl Marie Phillips, RSM

Like dreams, images help us uncover obstacles to our growth, our wholeness, and our health. As our images change, we change with them. "It is a way in which the soul ministers to itself."³ We may be drawn to a winter landscape because a part of us may be cold and dark and waiting for some new life. Images of animals may speak to us of our own need to minister to our instinctual nature, to care for our physical needs. We are all drawn to images of water, which symbolize the soothing motion and feelings of peace we felt in the womb.

Noted anthropologist Angeles Arrien, in an interview with Natalie Rogers, an expressive arts therapist, talks about the arts as "healing salves." She says that in indigenous cultures, where the arts are an integral part of native life, they ask these questions,

"Where in your life did you stop singing? Where in your life did you stop dancing? Where in your life did you stop being enchanted with stories? And

where in your life did you become uncomfortable with the sweet territory of silence?" Because their belief is, where I stopped singing, where I stopped dancing, where I stopped being enchanted with stories, or became uncomfortable with silence is where I began to experience soul loss.⁴

To begin to avail one's self of the arts is, in the words of Arrien, "soul retrieval work." We need not necessarily perform the dance, sing the song, write the story or poem, or paint the picture ourselves. If we pay attention to an image with which we resonate, we can open ourselves to its healing power.

Shaun McNiff, a prominent art therapist, says,

If we imagine paintings as a host of guides, messengers, guardians, friends, helpers, protectors, familiars, shamans, intermediaries, visitors, agents, emanations, epiphanies, influences, and other psychic functionaries, we have stepped outside the frame of positive science and into the archetypal mainstream of poetic and visionary contemplation. This list corresponds to functions performed by figures we know as angels.⁵

**Like dreams, images help us
uncover obstacles to our growth,
our wholeness, and our health.
As our images change, we
change with them.**

In other words, an image in a painting or another art form can guide us if we spend time with it and "listen" to it. "Even lines, gestures, colors and shapes can have angelic existence."⁶ Often an image will strike one person and not another, or it may speak to us at one point in our lives and not another. Sometimes the image in an art form will continue to speak, but in different ways as time goes on. Whether an image draws or repels, delights or angers, it is important for us to explore it for the teachings it holds.

The artist is continuously healed by her own art. Her work holds meanings, catharsis, emotional and creative energy that feeds her soul. But when her work leaves her hands it no longer belongs to her. It belongs to the beholder. Her meaning may

be irrelevant to that of the viewer. Something in the psyche or soul of the viewer is hungry for the nourishment in that particular image. The image may inspire anger or tears, compassion, or solace. It may answer a need for humor, for joy, or simply for beauty.

Catherine McAuley used images in her prose and poetry both to encourage and to elucidate her thoughts for her fledgling community:

*Sweet Mercy!—soothing, patient, kind—
Softens the high and rears the fallen mind;
Knows with just reign and even hand to guide
Between false fear and arbitrary pride.
Not easily provoked, she soon forgives:
Feels love for all, and by a look, relieves.
Soft peace she brings wherever she arrives,
Removes our anguish and reforms our lives;
Makes the rough paths of peevish nature even,
And opens in each heart a little heaven.⁷*

In a letter to Sister Mary de Sales, Catherine writes using the image of a dance, “I think sometimes our passage through this dear sweet world is something like the dance called ‘Right and Left’ . . . I’ll then have a Sea-Saw dance to Liverpool and a Merry Jig that has no stop to Birmingham and I hope a second to Bermondsey. When you, Sister M. Xavier and I will join hands and dance the ‘Duval Trio’ each on the same ground. We have one solid comfort in all this tripping about, our hearts can always be in the same place, centered in God, for whom we go forward or stay back.”⁸

Catherine surely knew the healing power of the arts when, in another letter, she encourages the Sisters to “dance every evening.”⁹

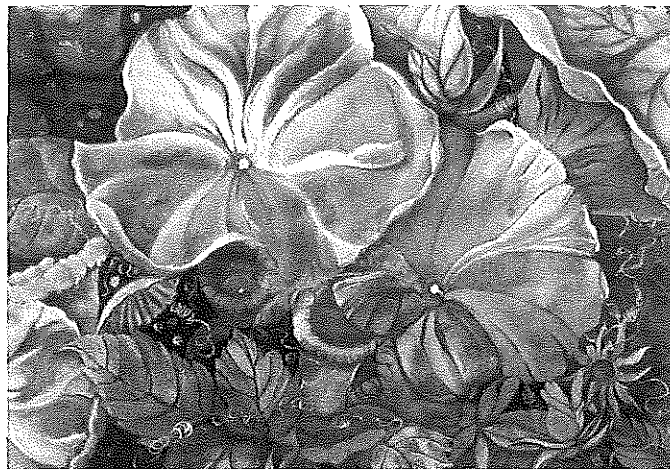
The Christian tradition is rich with beautiful images. Parables are often the means by which Jesus teaches us simple truths through metaphors:

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a person took and sowed in a field. It is the smallest of all seeds, yet when full-grown it is the largest of plants. It becomes a large bush, and the birds of the sky come and dwell in its branches.¹⁰

As a visual artist, my ministry is a part of Catherine’s and Christ’s healing ministry. The images and words that have arisen in me in times of awe, joy, sadness, and pain are often universal images, thoughts, and

feelings. When I attempt to share an image on canvas, a greeting card, or in a watercolor, it can become an “angel, a messenger, a guide.” It can begin the healing process in those individuals who feel themselves drawn into a particular piece of my artwork, and who are willing to listen to and to explore the message it holds for them.

Art can be for each of us an annunciation, the angel, an image.



Glory —Cheryl Marie Phillips, R.S.M.



Notes

- 1 Bruce Moon, *Existential Art Therapy* (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1990), p. 53.
- 2 Gordon Judd, CSB, “Upon Reflection,” Detroit Region Mid-Month Mailing (September, 2001).
- 3 Shaun McNiff, *Art as Medicine* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1992), p. 39.
- 4 Natalie Rogers, *The Creative Connection* (Palo Alto: Science & Behavior Books, Inc., 1993), p. 48.
- 5 McNiff, *Art As Medicine*, p. 74.
- 6 Ibid, p. 75.
- 7 Helen Marie Burns and Sheila Carney, *Praying with Catherine McAuley* (Winona: St. Mary’s Press, 1996), p. 36.
- 8 Catherine McAuley, *Letters of Catherine McAuley*, ed. Sister Mary Ignatius Neuman, R.S.M., (Baltimore: Helicon Press Inc. 1969), p. 273.
- 9 Ibid, p. 203.
- 10 *The Revised New American Bible*, Matt 13:31–32.

What on Earth Are We Doing?

Creativity and Spirituality in Dialogue

Cynthia Serjak, R.S.M.

Several years ago, while meditating on the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel of John, I sensed in myself a frustration at not being able to understand how the persons of the Trinity are in communion. In the midst of my struggle, it dawned on me that I am not truly looking to understand this mysterious relationship. Rather, what I really want is to be part of it. As soon as I had that little revelation, I recognized a more important truth: I already am part of that relationship. This realization swept over me in a rush of joy and I have not been the same since.

Springs of Creativity

This episode provides me with a way to reflect about my relationship to some other realities as well. In other words, are there other times in my life when what I desire is not so much to understand as to belong? Is it less important to analyze than to know and be known? In this article I would like to test whether this story and its lessons might be relevant to experiences in creativity. And so I suggest that creativity is not something I want so much to analyze or understand. My greater desire is simply to be part of it—it being the tremendous creativity of God unleashed at the moment of creation. Further, I will claim that creativity is all around us, as well as in us. It is not something we invent, but rather a font into which we tap, a rolling energy of unfolding ideas, themes, songs, poems, pictures, into which we leap, flail around for awhile, and eventually learn to swim.

I would like to call three witnesses to this claim. First, the new science. Our newest learnings teach us that everything that is part of Earth came from that first burst of particles of fire. That means that whatever we come to know as Earthlings—love, grace, anger, wisdom, violence, harmony—is wound into that great peal of bursting song which announced our creation. If we are sisters and brothers of the

stars, then we share their creativity, not so much because we choose to but because we have no other choice—they are family!

A second witness is the prophet Isaiah, who shouts out the invitation of God to “let the skies rain down righteousness; let the earth open up, that salvation may spring up, and let it cause righteousness to sprout up also; I the Lord have created it”(Isa 45:8).¹ According to Isaiah, righteousness and salvation are not the property of the human creature only, but are swirling around us in the clouds of the sky and buried in the clods of soil beneath us. Righteousness and salvation are God’s intention for Earth, and for us creatures of Earth. They may be hiding, waiting to be invoked in our moments of courage when our desire for them is so intense that we speak in God’s own voice as the prophet Isaiah did, commanding righteousness and salvation to come forth.

If it is helpful to think of creativity not as something we have, as much as something we are in, then a third witness is love. We speak of being “in” love. Beyond the romantic person-centered experience this may describe, being in love (or being a being-in-love) is who we are. We do not invent love, nor even choose it. It is in the air we breathe, the words we speak, the work we do. We may not name it or even recognize it. We may call it compassion, or mercy, or service, or even task, but the impulse is love. If what we are doing every day is not love, what on Earth are we doing?

We could name the same for creativity. It is in the air, the sky, the word, the work, the water, the fire. If we claim to be alive in the image of the Creator God, the most creative being there is, why would we think that we cannot be creative, that creativity belongs only to some of us? Every time we say, “I can’t” we are closing off some part of Earth’s abundance, we are refusing the new word that wants to be spoken, we are shutting off the spring,

sitting on the sprout. We are what Earth has been waiting for during these fifteen billion years. We are the voice that can continue the immense creativity of the universe which now must move forward. Here we are. What on Earth are we doing?

What Evokes Creativity?

If creativity is all around us, when might it be called for in such a voice that it cannot refuse to reveal itself? Here are three situations in which we might find ourselves called to be creative. The first involves an invitation. This may be a request to write, to draw, to sing, to design, to sew, or to imagine a specific event or process. Perhaps the one inviting is not present here and now. Someone from the past or the future can be an inspiration. A composer might be seized by the words of the prophet Joel, or the poet Dickinson. A painter might remember how the light fell through the window in her mother's bedroom. A meeting planner might think about the most successful experience she ever had attending a meeting. A person in the ministry of incorporation might imagine the women who will come to experience that program that she now designs. Whether coming to us from the future, the past, or the present, all of these situations involve an invitation to be creative, that is to work with what is to dream the new, the unseen, unheard, unimagined, unspoken, unsung.

**We are the voice that can
continue the immense creativity
of the universe which now must
move forward.**

This invitation may or may not involve a second situation which is the imposition of a deadline. The reality of a deadline can release the necessary energy to invoke creativity. Some people like to work well ahead of a deadline, so as to have the leisure to revisit the work. Others prefer to work right up against a deadline, knowing that under this pressure they will do better work. Consider the solutions that sometimes arise in round-the-clock negotiations,

when everyone is tired enough to let go of their own agenda and let something new emerge. Consider the deadlines which Earth now faces, when the delicate balance of its systems may very soon be tipped to permanent and fatal damage. Consider the deadline each of us has to be creative in the best way each of us can, with our own lives. What on Earth are we doing? What are we doing on Earth?

A third situation that might invoke creativity is when the chaos is threatening and we want to achieve balance. I have had this experience since I was young, but never thought it was a common one. I just assumed that it was my way of correcting a certain feeling that was out of kilter. But recently I came across a good description of this dynamic. Anthony Storr describes how he found that some individuals were creative because of their experience of loss or separation. "Spurred by depression, they strove to create imaginary worlds, to compensate for what was missing in their lives, to repair the damage they had suffered, to restore to themselves a sense of worth and competence."² He refers to the struggle for balance as a search for coherence and sense. In my own experience, I realized that when I was feeling hurt or angry, I would take the energy of that emotion to the keyboard and compose. At the end of such a session I remember having a feeling of "So there!" It was as if I had proven that I was bigger than the hurt, that I would not succumb to the temptation to wallow in it, but instead use the energy of it to create. Duke Ellington is supposed to have said that he simply took the energy it takes to pout and wrote some blues.

Now we might ask this question: could these descriptions about creativity help us in thinking about spirituality? If so, might creativity and spirituality share something of the same nature? We begin again with the invitation of a someone or a something. Because we are asked, in whatever direct or indirect way that invitation occurs, we compose something. Because there isn't a song that says just this, or that fits just this, or that sounds just this note, we are invited to be creative, to evoke from the pool of our talent a song that will "work." Because we need a piece of visual art that will speak to this community about its heritage or its mission, we invite someone to create a painting. Because we want to move to a new beat, we ask a dancer to create a way for us to dance it out.

Does this same dynamic of invitation also characterize our spiritual growth? Is it not because of an invitation, however round about it may come to us, to consider that so far our thoughts about God and God's life in us hasn't expressed this mystery, or related to that truth. And so we create. We grow spiritually by imagining a new way to relate, to express, to pray, to stretch through the current struggle into a new discovery of the divine. We are being creative with our own souls!

Secondly, we could be faced with a deadline, more literally, a dead line.³ This illness, that catastrophe, this depression, that dis-ease brings us up against the thought: I am not going to live forever. So, what on Earth am I doing with my life, my soul, my spirit? How am I nourishing the space of the sacred inside me and around me? As such a dead line threatens our spiritual well-being, we begin pedaling very fast. We gather all that we have learned and hoped into this final opportunity to make up our life, to imagine how we will possibly live through this crisis or how we will die gracefully. As with other kinds of deadlines, some of us do better when we are up against them.

Finally, what occurs in us when we are feeling spiritually out of kilter? Do we pray because we need to rescue ourselves from the hurt and the pain? Do we need to say, "So there! I can survive this, too." What happens in us when we seek (to use Storr's phrases) to compensate for what was missing, to repair the damage we have suffered, to restore ourselves to a sense of worth and competence? Can we take the energy of our sorrows and write the prayerful blues that will save us and lift us back up?

From this comparison, it does seem that creativity and spirituality share some of the same nature, that they might work together, particularly in helping us to realize that there are many ways in which we already are creative, even if its only in rising each morning and making up our day.

What Does Creativity Do for Our Lives?

Another aspect of creativity that might interest us is the question of what opening ourselves to creativity might do for our lives. From my experience, I would name four gifts that come from living creatively. The first is an overwhelming joy, a joy that is hard to describe. I am reminded of this joy in me when I see a child understand something for the

first time or accomplish something for the first time. There is utter delight and a joy that usually erupts into running or singing or clapping. Unfortunately as adults we don't usually show our joy in these exuberant ways, although joy may be revealed in our demeanor, our way of walking, even our way of speaking. We also want to ask: whence comes this joy? It radiates from my deepening awareness of my privileged participation in the creativity of the universe as designed and spun out by our tremendously creative God. Each time I am creative, I fall more deeply in love with this God who never stops creating us. Each time I am creative, I grow more in intimacy with this surprising God. When I open myself to the creative impulse, I give myself over to the creativity that is available to me as a being in a very creative universe. There is no greater joy than being known by that universe as a co-creator. When I create I know a little more of what I am doing on Earth.

**The more you participate in
creation, the more you learn to
trust your own instincts in
accepting and responding to
creative impulses.**

Creativity also exposes us to terror, for when we go to the edge of our known world, we do not know if we will fall off or find ourselves circling around to return home again. In creating, we know the terror of failure and wasted energy, as well as the joy of participation in a new order. The poet, David Whyte, puts it this way: "All good work should have an edge of life and death to it, if not immediately apparent, then to be found by ardently exploring its greater context."⁴ In creating, we explore the very edges of what we know and what the world knows, because Earth is nudging us into the frontier of things seen so that its own creativity might work in us.

A second gift that creativity offers is trust. The more you participate in creation, the more you learn to trust your own instincts in accepting and responding to creative impulses. Being part of the evocation of something new, laboring to bring it to birth, and

then watching as it makes its own way in the world are all fine experiences. They partake of the most natural processes of our Earth. If this is unclear to us, we can become gardeners and observe for a cycle of seasons how the Earth shares its creativity so lavishly and so intricately. The more tomatoes I grow, the more I learn about tomatoes, and the more I trust my ability to grow these lovely fruits. The more music I write, the more I learn about how music works, and the more I trust my partnership with it. Practicing creativity, I am taught by its dynamics. I give myself more and more to its influence in my life.

A third way in which creativity gifts us is with a sense of timing. How does the composer know when the piece is done? How does the painter know when the painting needs no more paint? How does the gardener know when to pick the tomatoes? As we accept, absorb, and practice our own personal creative process, we come to know when things are ready. We learn the best circumstance for our creativity to unfold at a good pace and we learn how much time that process asks of us.

A fourth gift is a challenging one. Sometimes creativity teaches us to get out of the way, to let go of everything that we thought would happen so that something very new can unfold, something that is more urgent and more right than anything we could thus far imagine. It is in this gift that we see the discipline that creativity asks of us. We deliberately turn away from the known solution and just as deliberately offer ourselves to what wants to happen, what is on the universe's mind to happen, what will be the most exciting, most amazing new thing. One of the clues that this gift is pursuing us is our supreme stuckness. We try and try, and nothing happens. Then let us take a deep breath, push our chairs back from the frustration, and ask "What wants to happen here? And how can we get out of its way?"

Are these gifts of creativity akin to those we receive when we are engaging in a serious spiritual life? Certainly the spiritual quest opens us to joy, delight, and amazement in knowing God and in knowing that God knows us. In our pursuit of our Creator the divine presence surprises us and we erupt in joy. The mystics teach us that in our quest we also will know terror. We stand at the edge of the unknown, not knowing if we will fall off or circle around to return home again. As in creativity, our spiritual work mingles joy and sorrow, beauty and terror, the agony and the ecstasy.

Secondly, as we learn more and more about our soul yearnings we learn greater trust in our own inner promptings. While relying on the experience and advice of the masters, we also come to know and trust our own impulses. The more we practice, the better we know. The one who trusts herself spiritually becomes a dangerous woman because she no longer lives by what others say, but by her own deep trust of herself living in her God.

Thirdly, sitting deeply in our souls changes everything about time. We realize how little help the clock or calendar are to us. In fact, they become irrelevant. We learn the soul's timing as we draw closer to the eternal now of the Godhead.

Finally, the great quest teaches us to let go of any idea of our own soul agenda. We learn to hand it over to God's intention. Over and over again we hear ourselves pray in frustration and over and over again we push back from the frustration and agree to let what wants to happen happen. In a terrible and joyful gift we pray: "My spirit is one with your spirit. May you find me where you need me to be."

Our creativity, rooted in the creativity of our good God and flowing from our relationships in God, shapes us, shakes us, takes us to the edges of the universe's energies and ideas. Likewise, our spiritual life turns us inside out, only to find that we never left ourselves, but have been at home all along. The closer we move to the heart of our own creativity, the closer we are drawn into the heart of the God who is at essence Creator. We feast on the amazing gifts of the universe, and we know with greater clarity what on Earth we are doing.



Notes

- 1 The Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, *The New Revised Standard Version Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
- 2 Anthony Storr, *Solitude: A Return to the Self* (New York: Quality Paperback Club, by arrangement with The Free Press, 1988), p. 146.
- 3 Webster gives the first meaning of deadline as "a line drawn within or around a prison that a prisoner passes at the risk of being shot." *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield: G & C Merriam Company, 1977), p. 290.
- 4 David Whyte, *Crossing the Unknown Sea: Work As a Pilgrimage of Identity* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2001), p. 36.

Creativity and Spirituality in the Context of the "Totus Christus"

Marian Thérèse Arroyo, R.S.M.

Juxtaposed in the context of the totality of Christ, creativity and spirituality are integral to our existence. It is hoped that this reflection on creativity and spirituality might contribute to future conversations and enrich the understanding of our selves as we are continually shaped into the persons we were created to become. This paper looks at the effect of God's word on creation and describes aspects of creativity that include the paradoxes of creative types, the creative process, and enhancing creativity. It also considers implications for all who have dedicated their lives to bringing the reign of God in our midst.

Genesis

The first lines of the Gospel of John and the book of Genesis offer foundational statements that describe the immensity and dynamism of God's Word. "In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God" (John 1:1). "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was a formless void, there was darkness over the deep, and God's spirit hovered over the water" (Gen 1:1-2).

The Word of God is the essence, the root of all that exists.¹ "God spoke and the world was. God commanded and the world existed" (Psalm 33:9). A basic fact of physics is that the universe contains the same number of atoms today as it had in the beginning.² Imagine the explosive energy that set everything in place in the beginning of time and how this energy has taken countless forms through the ages, while remaining constant.

One of the images that come to mind when I reflect on the story of creation is a stained-glass design I prepared in 1977 for St. Philip the Apostle Church in Statesville, North Carolina. The image was that of God's breath hovering over tumultuous waters. It was

an exciting opportunity to imagine the unfathomable power, the magnitude of form and the brilliance of color that transpired in the creation event.

As humans we are intimately connected to God: "God created man and woman in the image of God's self, male and female God created them" (Gen 1:27). Created in God's image, we are endowed with the task of continuing God's creative work in the world. As stewards of God's creation, we all have a share in the adventure of exploring, understanding, sharing, and celebrating the many gifts God has showered upon the universe.

Beverly J. Shamana offers a "look at the creative principles at work in God's sacred process: to make something out of nothing; to bring order out of chaos; to select and combine elements to form something new; to bring light out of darkness; to bring life where none existed."³ An application of these principles follows:

"To make something out of nothing" is attributed to God alone. Because God is love, it stands to say that God created out of love. Because God is omnipotent and ubiquitous, God's Word and love permeate nothingness. All that God creates is gift.

"To bring order out of chaos" is a skill that human beings have had to learn to master through the ages. Human beings have an innate need to have order amidst chaos and confusion. Just as galaxies have their place in the cosmos, human beings work towards establishing themselves as creatures of comfort and habit.

"To select and combine elements to form something new" is about using one's ability to shape one's environment, to affect thought, to form relationships, to contribute to the welfare of humanity. The more complex and challenging the problem, the more fulfilling the experience is to create something new.

"To bring light out of darkness" is intimately intertwined with the mission and ministry of Jesus

Christ, the Light of the world. By our baptism and faith, we share in this same mission and ministry of Christ and participate in showing the Way, the Truth and the Life.

"To bring life where none existed" is to bring Christ to those who perhaps have never heard the Good News of God's mercy and love for all.

Almost a decade ago, I was invited to paint an art piece for the Oncology Ward at St. Joseph's Hospital in Asheville, North Carolina. The art piece was to hang in the hallway just outside the conference room for families. Imagining the emotion surrounding the illness of a loved one and whatever report the family might receive regarding the patient, I could not help but ponder this scriptural passage:

In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death and to guide our feet on the way to peace (Luke 1:78-79).

From this passage came forth three art pieces in the medium of acrylic paint. The first picture depicted a tender embrace of two distinct figures. The second was the image of the rising sun over the horizon as one might see over the Pacific Ocean. The third showed a pastoral mountainous setting. It is hoped that these paintings helped to create a comforting environment for patients, their families, friends, and medical staff.

Our lives of contemplation and action lead us to new discoveries, to receiving insight, to making inroads which all contribute to the tapestry of the big picture, the magnificent creation of God.

The Church offers each Christian the spiritual and corporal works of mercy to participate in the ongoing creation and healing of humanity. It is in these works of compassion that God is made flesh. By word and action, Catherine McAuley engaged

her life of service to those who were poor and in need in her time. Her legacy lives on in the Sisters of Mercy, their associates and coworkers who continue to seek creative ways to improve their service through the rhythm of contemplation and action.

Our lives of contemplation and action lead us to new discoveries, to receiving insight, to making inroads which all contribute to the tapestry of the big picture, the magnificent creation of God. In this sense we are co-creators with God and all of God's creation comes to eschatological completion when we become one in the totality of Christ. The finiteness of Catherine McAuley's *Suscipe*: "My God, I am yours for time and eternity" speaks of the infinite and timeless work of God's mercy in all of us today and in generations to come.

Creativity Up Close

Studies on creativity offer insight into our human nature; particularly in the way we understand and use our gifts and talents. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi suggests that there are at least three types of creative persons: those who express their thoughts in unusual, interesting, and stimulating ways; those whose perceptions are fresh, whose judgments are insightful, and who may make important discoveries; and those who have changed culture in some significant way.⁴

Csikszentmihalyi further describes the complexity of creative persons. These are some of the traits that show their tendencies: creative individuals seem to have much energy but are also quiet and at rest; they might be smart but naïve at the same time. They are both flexible and playful and yet highly disciplined and focused. These individuals alternate between imagination and fantasy, yet are rooted in reality. They engage in both convergent and divergent thinking. Creative people seem to exhibit both tendencies on the continuum of extroversion and introversion at the same time; they could be both passionate and objective about their work. They are also open and sensitive to experiencing suffering and pain, yet have the ability for much enjoyment.⁵

Whether one is writing a book, crafting a musical composition, throwing clay, or engaged in the work of systemic change in Church or society, the creative process has its similarities. As far as I can

remember, I have found that opportunities to employ creative processes come forth out of a given need, challenge or conflict. I recall being engaged in creative activities for the sheer enjoyment of it all. But oftentimes, I find myself in the midst of challenging projects that demand all the skill that I can possibly muster.

The optimal experience in the creative process is called "flow." Csikszentmihalyi used the term to describe the feeling that when things were going well there was a sharp sense that almost everything was automatic, effortless, yet in a highly focused state of consciousness.⁶

The creative process has traditionally been described as taking five major steps: preparation, incubation, insight, evaluation, and elaboration.⁷ Based on personal experience, the following components further describe the creative process, not necessarily in this order.

Determine the goal. Anytime one begins a project, one needs time to imagine the scope of work and the project's outcome. What are the hopes and dreams that propel this work? What is the purpose of this project? What are the objectives? What needs surround this project? Who will benefit?

Plan and Schedule. It is important to map out a plan of action along with a timeline to track progress and results. Depending upon the project's level of priority, the timeline will have to be updated from time to time as needed.

Incubate. Envisioning and planning require time and space for ideas and concepts to grow, develop, and take shape. One continuously gathers information consciously and subconsciously through the experiences of day-by-day living, whether at work, rest, or play.

Reflection and discernment. Prayer, quietude, and rest offer an opportunity to focus and absorb large amounts of energy. A kind of emptying out, cleansing, regrouping, settling-in, and opening up is necessary for inspiration to take root. It is a good time to see the project in perspective by looking at how it might contribute to the greater good.

Research and resources. Once focused and energized, another level of work begins: fact-finding, taking an inventory of resources, and engaging in study and more reflection. Where are my resources? What materials do I need to accomplish this task?

What does it cost? How does this work involve collaboration with others?

Application. By the time one comes to this point, one has taken lots of notes, mental and otherwise. The process of applying layers of paint, notes, phrases, concepts, etc. has begun. Layer by layer, note-by-note, concept-by-concept, melodies, harmonies, color, contrast, form, movement, and expression begin to take shape. This is perhaps when moments of "flow" take place.

Evaluation. It is imperative to stand back and look at the total picture from time to time. In the process of applying the paint to canvas, for instance, the artist must stand back and look at the entire picture intermittently to assess its development, check for balance of color, light, and proportion of design until all elements are integrated satisfactorily.

Edit and fine-tune. The experience of editing or fine-tuning requires patient endurance, not unlike any of the other components in the process. However, the process of completing a project invariably includes a series of hurdles that require problem solving, synchronization and resolution: looking for the balance that resonates in exquisite harmony, the word or phrase that gives rhythmic or poetic flare, the notes that quicken or soothe the tempo, the hue of color that blends into magnificence, the gentle glide of movement that radiates sheer elegance. It demands careful screening and a keen sense for beauty and finesse and somehow is best accomplished when there is interior resolution and personal freedom.

Presentation / Performance / Prayer. "Those who have [shared and interacted] will get more, while those who have not [shared and interacted], will lose even the little they have" (Matt 25:29).⁸ This is the point when the fruit of labor is shared if it isn't already shared along the way. Perhaps the greater gift lies on how it inspires others to conversion of heart, to prayer, to loving and compassionate service to others.

Gratitude and appreciation. It is good to take time to appreciate what has been accomplished. Be willing to receive feedback, commendable or otherwise. Give thanks to God for the opportunity to make yet another contribution to the human community, however big or small, and to humbly submit our complete dependency on God.

Implications for Co-Creators

Julia Cameron maintains, "Creativity is an experience, a spiritual experience. It does not matter which way you think of it: creativity leading to spirituality or spirituality leading to creativity."⁹ She offers the following spiritual principles on which creative discovery or recovery can be built:

Creativity is the natural order of life. Life is energy: pure creative energy. There is an underlying, indwelling creative force infusing all of life—including ourselves. When we open ourselves to the creator's creativity, we open ourselves to the creator's creativity within us and our lives. We are, ourselves, creations and, in turn, are meant to continue creativity by being creative ourselves. Creativity is God's gift to us; using our creativity is our gift back to God. The refusal to be creative is self-will and is counter to our true nature. When we open ourselves to exploring creativity, we open ourselves to God: good orderly direction. As we open our creative channel to the creator, many gentle but powerful changes are to be expected. It is safe to open ourselves up to greater and greater creativity. Our creative dreams and yearnings come from a divine source. As we move towards our dreams, we move toward our divinity.¹⁰

The invitation to live full lives is constant and continual. Moments of inspiration help us to make new discoveries and make inroads particularly with other co-creators. What we do in our precious spare time to improve our quality of life affects how we face life's challenges each day. Mastering a domain in the fine arts, for instance, could enlighten approaches to seeking refreshing and new ways to live in harmony with others and the environment, to bring order out of chaos, while appreciating beauty and human struggle. Parker Palmer writes:

Without deluding ourselves about achieving immortality, we need to act freely and sometimes boldly to express ourselves in ways that offer our gifts to others. Everyone has the right, perhaps even the imperative, to reach for self-expression, not to gratify every whim, but to serve as one was created to serve.¹¹

In whatever way we have dedicated our lives as Sisters of Mercy, associates, or co-workers, the hope in God's promise that God will be with us to the end of time becomes realized in word and action. In all of

these, we become who we were made to become, we are shaped and formed into the totality of Christ, *Totus Christus*.

Te Deum

Since my return to Guam in 1996, I have been inspired to compose music for the liturgy using Chamorro, the native language of the Mariana Islands. While I have some facility with the language, each time I compose music using the language, my experience of Chamorro deepens and is formed intentionally in prayer.

In October 1999, I had the distinct privilege of attending the *Maga'lahi* (Governor's) awards banquet and ceremony on arts and humanities. Prior to the distribution of awards, one of which I was a recipient, a wonderful program was presented which featured a drama on crises intervention by Ina'fa'maolek (To Make Good Our Relationships), Inc. and ancient Chamorro dancing and chanting by the Taotao Tano' (People of the Earth) Dancers. At the time I was musing with the idea of composing music for the *Te Deum*,¹² using the Chamorro translation in time to open the Jubilee Year in December of that year.

The chanting and dancing had a numbing effect on me. It was monotonous and almost dreary. But strangely the experience had far-reaching effects on me than I could have ever imagined.

Shortly after the event, I proceeded to write the music for the *Te Deum: Hagu Yu'os*.¹³ The text was tremendous and so full of imagery! No wonder musicians have found this hymn of praise to God such an inspiration for musical compositions. After reading the Chamorro text, phrase by phrase, over and over again, allowing the words to sink in, the strong rhythmical melodies began to rise from the text and the inspiration emerged. As text and music began to synchronize, a creative technique called text painting, where the music serves the text, giving it color, form, and texture, came into play.

The occasion for which this piece was written also played a significant part in its creation. It would be an expression celebrating the third millennium of mystery of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Because it would be used at the opening of the Jubilee Door at the Dulce Nombre de Maria

Cathedral-Basilica on Christmas Eve just before midnight, the intensity of purpose heightened.

Riding on the inspiration to compose this piece, clueless of its outcome, the creative process began to unfold. The sense of prayer and worship swept over the entire process. The following is an attempt to describe the underpinnings of this magnificent hymn of praise to God.

As the conch shells are sounded, the rhythmic percussive beat begins and the chant follows: *Hagu Yu'os, in tina hao. Hagu Saina, in enra hao . . .* (We praise you, Lord. We adore you, O God . . .)

The chant signifies the gathering of all our ancestors who at one time walked the earth and who called upon the gods to help them make sense of their lives. These were ancestors who established a civilization at least two millennia before the incarnation of Christ. These were the same ancestors whose artifacts and way of life were shattered when the forces of Western colonialism claimed the islands and began to Christianize the nation.¹⁴ Despite the memory of this human experience, the ancestors are called to enjoin with the gathered assembly in its sung prayer.

A sense of journey ascending into *kairos*, God's opportune time, is established.¹⁵ The choir and orchestration continue to build the texture of the song as the assembly gives assent with chants of praise. Soon the whole Church throughout the world, the Communion of Saints, and all of creation resound with adoration. As the mystery of Jesus Christ is acclaimed, the music intensifies, modulates, and culminates at fever pitch, bestowing glory and worship upon the everlasting God of inscrutable wisdom and power. Having touched the heavens, the music subsides, returning the assembly to earth, ever attuned to receiving and responding to the Word of God at liturgy, in life.

Conclusion

All creation groans to be one with God.¹⁶ In its incompleteness, the interplay of good and evil forces continues to challenge us to be ever cognizant of the choices we make. Ironically, the dark side of creativity, the force of evil, seems to have a way of bringing us to our knees, compelling us to call upon God to help us to sharpen our senses, to guide and direct us. The terror of September 11, 2001, for instance, has

catapulted the western world especially into dealing with adversity by applying every possible ounce of creativity to overcome it.

How we spend our time, energy, resources, and the very best (and worst) of ourselves affects the dance of creation unto eternity. In the meantime, our work of justice and peace, compassion and mercy continue to shape us and mold us into the persons we were created to become. God's all powerful and creative Word has not yet completed its course until all are one in the totality of Christ Jesus.



Notes:

- 1 Lucien Deiss, *Celebration of the Word* (The Liturgical Press: Collegeville, Minnesota, 1993), pp. 18–19.
- 2 Parker J. Palmer, *The Active Life: A Spirituality of Work, Creativity and Caring* (Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, 1990), p. 149.
- 3 Beverly J. Shamana, *Seeing in the Dark: A Vision of Creativity and Spirituality* (Abingdon Press: Nashville, 2001), p. 12.
- 4 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* (Harper Perennial: New York, 1996), p. 25.
- 5 Ibid, pp. 55–76.
- 6 Ibid, p. 110.
- 7 Ibid, pp. 79–80.
- 8 Carroll Stuhmueler, C.P., *Biblical Meditations for Ordinary Time-Weeks 10–22* (Paulist Press: New York, 1980), p. 235.
- 9 Julia Cameron, *The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity* (Penguin / Putnam: New York, 1992), p. 2.
- 10 Ibid, p. 3.
- 11 Palmer, p. 20.
- 12 Willi Apel, *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 2nd edition (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1969), pp. 834–835.
- 13 Bishop Tomas A. Camacho, DD, *Te Deum: Hagu Yu'os, Chamorro Translation* (Diocese of Chalan Kanoa: Saipan, 1999).
- 14 Pedro C. Sanchez, Guahan/Guam: *The History of Our Island* (Sanchez Publishing House: Agana, Guam, 1988), pp. 43–44.
- 15 I. H. Dalmais, "Time in the Liturgy," *The Church at Prayer*, Volume IV: *The Liturgy and Time* (The Liturgical Press: Collegeville, Minnesota, 1983), pp. 1–3.
- 16 Romans 8:22–27.

Creativity, Heartbeat of the Spirit

Mary Paula Cancienne, R.S.M.

Creativity is the heartbeat of the Spirit. We don her rhythm of sound and silence, and go with her beat. The music of life happens when sound and silence play. From this, we sing songs of joy and sorrow, life and passing, praise, questions, and gratitude. To say that “creative” ideas and efforts are our own doings is to miss the invitation to be in awe of the Spirit at our center.

What we call “creativity” is perhaps only the tip of the iceberg—one dimension of a greater creative life force that includes changes, stripping, death, planting, growth, and new life. In any garden, death and new life work hand-and-hand. Fall, winter, spring, and summer, hold different coordinates. In all this, our souls are hallowed, filled, and moved. We are not creators nor are we co-creators. But, we have been loved, called, and given the privilege of participating in this miracle of time and space called life.

As life enfolds and unfolds, we find that the motion of life called “creativity” is hard to define. It resists the definitive nail down; a characteristic integral to its nature. Still, it has been defined as, “the production of novel, appropriate ideas or works.”¹ In his book on the subject, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi says creativity is;

any act, idea, or product that changes an existing domain, or that transforms an existing domain into a new one. And the definition of a creative person is: someone whose thoughts or actions change a domain, or establish a new domain. It is important to remember, however, that a domain cannot be changed without the explicit or implicit consent of a field responsible for it.²

“Domain” refers to the particular occupation or talent, and “field” is the circle of influence such as the culture. For vowed religious women, the domain includes the different ministries and talents, and field refers to the congregation as well as the

broader culture. However, perhaps what Picasso said about Matisse gets to the core of the matter best. He said Matisse had “the sun in his belly.”

The “sun” in one’s belly moves a bit differently than intelligence, as ideas fashioned by intelligent individuals may be high in quality but not necessarily “novel.”³ Creativity is also like the sand in the oyster; not always comfortable but, given the right environment, it can become a treasure incorporated into society, sometimes in such a way that the environment itself is changed. This article will explore some of the characteristics and values surrounding creativity. There will be suggestions as to how we might foster the sun in our bellies, in the service of kindness, justice, and beauty. In addition, we will engage John 13:1–20 to see if dialogue with this text has anything to tell us about creativity.

Basic Perceptions Regarding Creativity

Many times when we think of creativity, we think of artists. We live in a specialization society where we tend to turn over such identities to certain groups of people. For music we turn on a CD player and let the professionals entertain us, forgetting that we can each make up ballads, songs, and chants, and that we can sing. Artists? They are creative. They can make things. They can think outside of the box. They question and rattle our way of thinking and seeing. But to the contrary, creativity is part of being human. Only a few percentage points separate us from other creatures. However, those few points

To say that “creative” ideas and efforts are our own doings is to miss the invitation to be in awe of the Spirit at our center.

make all the difference, and in this difference resides our two-fold desire for stability, sameness, predictability, tradition, and for risk, change, newness, surprise, and adventure. Which desire or direction we lean toward tells us a great deal about ourselves and the organizations of which we are a part?

It is important to encourage both aspects of ourselves, to allow some degree of each to develop. If only risk and the adventurous side are free, there is danger of damaging the foundational elements of structures. This can fuel revolutions and even chaos. On the other hand, it can also help to bring about needed reforms. Rigidity, a lack of ability to allow for novelty, can maintain the current structures, but this will often stagnate, suffocate, or freeze things in time.

Both aspects are good, but perpetual indulgence of one over the other can lead to difficulties. Balancing these tensions and impulses is no easy task. The art of moving from one to the other takes practice and desire. But if desirous, one can encourage a large beautiful green serpent, a symbol for creative life energy, to move up and down the river, meandering from one bank to the other, weaving and negotiating these tensions and attractions.

The Christian path can assist with focusing these energies. Approaches available to us are: ongoing prayer, reflection, discernment, the sacraments, and community. They can companion, support, challenge, question, and encourage in us a sense of awareness, consciousness, and wonder as we stretch toward life during the different seasons of our lives.

Creativity Involves Persistence

Along with the skills necessary in a particular field, research on human creativity consistently points to hard work; the ability to stay with that "sun in the belly." People who continually break new ground tend to spend a great deal of time attending to their particular passion, question, project, or work.⁴ They enjoy being about their endeavor. This includes an active way and a passive way of being in the work. Active ways would be concrete and deliberate action with the subject. Passive ways would include experiences like daydreaming, staring at the ceiling, doodling at your desk, going for a walk in the woods, napping, meditating, praying, spiritual retreats, and

quiet time alone. It can also include exercise and activities with others.

The key is that the person continues to swim in the midst of their questions and curiosities, but quietly. They just put them in their pocket for a while, never too far away. The questions and the wonderings are there: hibernating and ripening. All the while, the subconscious is surreptitiously engaging with different experiences around them, looking for metaphors and juxtapositions that might spark a jump to the next step. In addition, creative people take their questions and ideas both to familiar circles, and to circles outside of their normal path as a way to solicit additional input and critique.

It is very important to be able to critique one's own work, but the solicitation of ideas and feedback from others defines a characteristic that speaks of a capacity to engage in serious, critical dialogue. According to Csikszentmihalyi, secondary skills, such as dialogue and critiquing are necessary to sift through several ideas and focus on those that have more possibility than others do, and then to explore their development. Here the person or group seeks to learn and grow, and to test their ideas.

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The questions we ask at these moments are so important. What are we dreaming? Can we describe the idea as it unfolds in steps over time? What is this and is it connected to anything else? What is our hope? Wish! Where is it going? What is missing? What is not getting attention? Is this idea or project meaningful and of value? How might God be moving in this? Who has not spoken? Do I/we have energy for this? What are the fears and concerns? What is the best-case scenario, the worst-case? Are there financial and economic questions? Will this have any negative impact on anyone or anything? How is prayer in the midst of this? Where is beauty? Where

is kindness and mercy in the process and the results? Is this challenging something in our midst that needs to be changed? Who are those that we can learn from? Are we building bridges? Are we being shy or arrogant? Is it time? For whom is this good? Where is "the sun in the belly"?

The ability to place oneself in the crossroads of diversity and multiple influences, where ideas are set beside their counterparts freely, and in tension, provides fertile ground for new ways of seeing. Adversity does challenge one to look hard. Also, creative individuals often make up problems or projects, just because they can not imagine *not* exploring something all the time. These projects may take hours or lifetimes, and usually several are going on simultaneously. This is a way of being, and they experience this as fun and very life enhancing. Struggles can occur when these focuses occupy more energy than they provide in terms of livelihood and when they prevent general activities necessary for daily living.

A balance of different personalities in community and societies can allow for various gifts and talents to be sustained, which might otherwise be unable to exist if they were not connected to a broader community. Ideally, all are enhanced because of the sharing.

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The somewhat limited definition of creativity by Csikszentmihalyi asserts that, in order for something or someone really to be creative, the community must, in some fashion, recognize them as such. Perhaps this is not necessarily so. Saints, martyrs, writers, prophets, social activists, may not always be accepted; but does this mean they are any less visionary or creative?

Csikszentmihalyi's definition places a great deal of importance on being able to sell one's ideas. Certainly, the community acts as a gatekeeper for quality, and without collaboration most ideas remain only dreams or private accomplishments.

The creative process can be deeply transformative, especially when considered outside of a commercial venture where the need to compete, beat, and sell is so important. When looked at as including, but also, more than the production of novel, appropriate ideas or works, the heart and mind are humbly opened to a profound freedom. It is in this space that the creative process opens to more than solving a problem or making a product, no matter how noble.

In an attitude that is beyond the making of a product, a product may come to be but it is not the exclusive focus. Here mind and heart open to a spirituality of dialogue. The experience of sharing an idea, a vision, a plan, a dream, or a piece of art calls for the individual to be vulnerable and open to responses that might not match their own experience of the idea. Here egos get rubbed and bruised, forged in the fire right along with ideas. With raw aspects of our humanity, we try to remember to companion each other in ways that are respectful, truthful, and acknowledging of diverse talents and skills. This helps to provide an environment where creativity can flourish and is a way to be in love. It is this repartee that encourages the developing of ideas and allows the process to continue long enough for it to come to fruition and become "grace upon grace."

Think of the many and diverse forms the works of mercy have taken among us: housing, homeless shelters, prison ministries, empowerment projects in different countries, retreat and hospitality centers, Mercy International, and so many more. In each of these endeavors, tears have been shed, egos have been bruised and soothed, and efforts borne of creative vision have moved forward. By learning and visioning with one another, our humble abilities become more.

Mentoring, apprenticeships, collegial relationships, and friendships offer rich ground for individuals to hone skills and ideas, to play with dreams, to negotiate the communication of hypotheses and proposals, and to build support. Here we can offer mutual assistance and encouragement at different

times to each other. This assistance may not always look as we might expect.

John 13:1–20

In John 13:1–20, we see Jesus take the role of a servant, performing a task even most servants would not have to do: wash the feet of others. Yet when Peter refuses to allow Jesus to wash his feet, Jesus declares that Peter must allow this to happen or he will have no share with Jesus. Raymond Brown saw this event as a foreshadowing of Jesus' humble death on the cross and as a call for us to walk humbly.⁵ Sandra Schneiders approaches the text differently and says it is a call to be in relationship with one another as friends, not as a slave serving a master, not as someone who is privileged serving those who are not, but as friends doing for each other without debt or obligation.⁶

Jesus ushered in a different way of being. He did this by the act of crossing a barrier; just as he had done before by inviting those outside of acceptable circles to join him at table. He did not make anything or sell anything, but he communicated something profound and challenging, and kind. And he used the customs that were already there to build on.

Peter was taken aback and wanted Jesus to wash all of him. This was not necessary. His feet were washed, and Peter got the message, although it may be that the meaning of this gesture is still speaking, never to be fully fathomed.

Jesus' washing of the feet was creative on many levels. Jesus took a risk by stepping beyond the status quo of how things were done. It was elegantly simple, yet called into play a radical vision. He used elements known to those he was trying to teach. The dissenting voice was engaged. Others shared in the action. He was relentless. He was kind. There is no one particular recipe for creativity, but this one made soup that is still being served.

In Conclusion

No matter how much we yearn for peace and harmony, there is a seed of curiosity that begs us on. And, to those who wish for things to stay always the same, there is the inevitability of decay and change.

Either way we must deal outside the realm of our projected utopias. Besides, we would be bored with utopia. One can only sit on the beach for so long. It is when we recognize change and stability as co-ingredients that we can begin to focus gingerly these elements or energies. Knowing that we are only participants in a much larger creative force we contribute humbly in efforts reflective of our values.

Creativity does not happen in a vacuum, but in the midst of life with each other. How we notice, encourage, nurture, and call each other forward is critical to our lives together. On 9/11 we saw the results of starved souls groping for hope and encouragement gone terribly astray. Here in the United States, we see children growing overweight for lack of exercise. How do we respond to these and many other situations? There is no dearth of the need for creativity or of the existence of this energy in the world. Perhaps greater conscious assistance, both personal and corporate, in supporting and focusing this creative energy would be helpful in order to address the needs.

The quality of our lives, our capacity to love, can give rise to our most creative expressions. In support of these expressions is the awareness of the "sun in our bellies," and Jesus' call for us to be in deep friendship with one another. How we respond to these energies, these remembering, these graced invitations, may be the Spirit's gift to us and also the Spirit's challenge.



Notes

- 1 Teresa M. Amabile, "Beyond Talent," *American Psychologist*, 56 (April, 2001), p. 333.
- 2 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1996), p. 28.
- 3 Denis Dutton, "What Is Genius?" *Philosophy and Literature*, 25.1 (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 182.
- 4 Teresa M. Amabile, p. 335.
- 5 Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel of John*, The Anchor Bible Vol. 29A. (New York: Doubleday, 1970), p. 562.
- 6 Sandra Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1999), pp. 171–173.

Reflection on a Life of Mercy, Ministry, and Music

Claudette Schiratti, R.S.M.

In 1958, when I felt called to the Sisters of Mercy, I thought I was giving up a career in music. I would spend my life serving the poor, sick, and ignorant. Much to my surprise throughout the novitiate and juniorate, my God-given gift of music making was encouraged in the liturgy, education, and recreation. I began to see spirituality and music as integrated elements of my life.

When my sister died in 1959 and I was still a postulant, a short motet came to me spontaneously. Music making helped me grieve.

*Jesu, obediens ad mortem
Usque ad mortem crucem
Fac nos obediens ad voluntatem tuam
Usque ad mortem nostram.*

(The translation loses the poetry and rhyme scheme)

*Jesus, obedient unto death,
Even to the death of the cross
Make us obedient to your will
Even unto our death.*

My first assignment in the sixties was among Hispanic people in Denver. I knew nothing of the different cultures encompassing Hispanics but grew to know and love them. And yet my life felt compartmentalized. While I was teaching high school music, religion and English to people of a different culture, I was practicing and working on my mas-

The winds of renewal and change begun in the 1960s have only escalated and continue to escalate, most recently in technology and the reality of terrorism.

ter's degree in piano performance at Catholic University during the summer. I was living in two different worlds that did not seem to be related.

Vatican II was also occurring and talk of changes abounded. Involvement of laity, married clergy, women priests, the Church in the Modern World, Liturgical Renewal, Social Justice, renewing the Rite of Christian Initiation were topics of much discussion. Home Masses and discussions made living the faith more personal and communal.

Upon finishing work on my degree, I was appointed to our college in Omaha to teach in the music department. I missed the students and the Hispanic cultures that I had grown to love in Denver but grew to enjoy college students from 1969–1971; turbulent years of the Vietnam War, a country divided between supporting soldiers and conscientious objectors, the changes of Vatican II beginning to occur in the liturgy. The world was different from the world in which I had entered the community some ten years earlier.

In 1971, an opportunity came to become liturgist at the cathedral in Omaha. As a result of Vatican II, cathedrals and parishes began seeking liturgists to facilitate the renewal mandated in the documents of the council. What a joy it was to develop lay ministers and form them for the full and active participation called for in the assembly. I was blessed to work with clergy desiring to bring the renewal of Vatican II to fruition. I was learning to be a liturgist through working with the clergy, studying and reading the Vatican documents, and meeting in small groups for home Masses and discussions. The winds of renewal and change begun in the 1960s have only escalated and continue to escalate, most recently in technology and the reality of terrorism.

The change called for in church music encouraged the use of the vernacular and seemed to reject chant, polyphony, and Latin. In parishes where the choir had sung the liturgy and the congregation

had attended and listened at Mass, participation was a new phenomenon. What song would the people sing? For some the changes were exciting and welcomed. For others the loss of mystery and the familiar Latin was an occasion of disillusionment and discouragement. In search of a vernacular song, the church used hymns familiar to our Protestant brothers and sisters. Some rejoiced in this use of Christian hymnody while others wondered why the Catholic Church was singing Protestant hymns. People began writing music for Catholic liturgy. A popular folk style of music emerged with texts expressing community and social concerns. The vertical awe-filled, transcendent dimension of worship gave way to a more informal, immanent, and horizontal sense of community.

The challenge of being a church musician since Vatican II has been to uphold the best of both the tradition and contemporary creative expression. Unfortunately polarities occurred—professionals/amateurs, traditional/contemporary, folk Mass/choir Mass. Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians has been alive and well in our own time. "What I mean is that each one of you says, 'I belong to Paul,' or 'I belong to Apollos,' or 'I belong to Cephas,' or 'I belong to Christ.' Is Christ divided?" (1 Cor 1:12).

In some cases, well meaning people wrote heartfelt music for the liturgy that was ignorant of standards of musical composition, liturgy, and text writing. As our culture became more informal, so did our worship and song. Musical and literary judgments were bypassed for the sake of using someone's spontaneous expression of faith. Through time we are realizing that whatever is written is not necessarily well-crafted or fitting for public worship. What spirituality is expressed through mediocre or mundane music and texts? How do we foster good liturgy and a worthy song for God's people? The best fruits of our labor must be offered for public worship.

I have written a few songs. People still ask what I've written lately. But I think of myself primarily as a performer rather than a composer.

As a parish liturgist and musician, I have been involved in renovating a church according to the *Bishops' Document on Art and Environment* of 1976. The pastor was so excited that we could do more than the much needed painting of the church and fixing the leak in the roof. Through the document, we could renovate the church according to the

regulations based on a sense of returning to the essentials of worship of the early Church and letting go of many of the trappings that had developed over the centuries through local customs and differing cultures. In that experience, I learned that it is easier to build a new church than to renovate on older one. Although an educational process was created to involve everyone in the parish, those who did not take part reacted strongly against the project when it was completed. I have recently learned that the parish is raising funds to restore

The challenge of being a church musician since Vatican II has been to uphold the best of both the tradition and contemporary creative expression.

the church to its original state of 1978. The pastor who was at the forefront of the spirit of Vatican II lost his spirit of renewal under the backlash. He has since died and several pastors have served there since. It is no easy challenge to bring people to a new level of faith and spirituality or to change symbols. Continued leadership is crucial but very difficult. How is it possible or what are the necessary components to develop conversion and renewal in a parish?

In the 1980s, I edited a new parish hymnal, a project which took about three years. Concern for inclusive language was addressed as well as diversity of styles of music. Inclusive language was a matter of great controversy. The hymnal lasted at the parish a good fifteen years and has now been replaced by one on the market. At the time, individual parish hymnals were more common. Today I marvel that Protestant denominations have official hymnals but Catholics choose from several different ones. Is it possible to develop a common repertoire for Catholics?

I was also able to oversee the process of purchasing an organ at a parish. I hoped for a pipe organ but felt it was necessary to include consideration of an electronic organ in the process. Through the process,

the committee learned the difference between a work of art and an appliance. I was careful not to let my bias be known and was glad that committee members said that they didn't know what I preferred. However, I was happy that they chose a pipe organ.

Recently I had the privilege of a sabbatical and returned to school to study the activity I had been engaged in for thirty years—church music. During that year, I purposely did not work as a church musician. I attended a different church each weekend. What I discovered was that people are praying regardless of how well or poorly the liturgy and its music is expressed. A sense of community was evident in lesser or greater degrees. A sense of the people of God intentionally worshipping together was less evident.

The year was so enriching that I requested a second year to finish the degree of Master of Church Music. My study was at a state university and explored the history of Christian church music with roots in Hebrew psalmody. A sense of history helped me realize that church music has always fluctuated between high standards and mediocrity and between creative and controlling environments. The challenge is to press onward to the greatest excellence and to work together as a community of believers in the midst of much diversity—no small or easy task.

In our community, the
development of the Institute of
the Sisters of Mercy of the
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While I was there, I was exposed to a wonderful pipe organ that inspired students to practice and play. The hall was designed and built for the instrument. Marvelous concerts are held there. How wonderful if churches planned to have a good pipe organ at the same time that a worship space is being designed. Good acoustics and a worthy instrument will enhance the worship of the people if planned

together from the beginning of the design project. The reality of economics must be faced but, too often, churches assume that a pipe organ is too expensive and do not do even minimal research.

In our community, the development of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas has been an opportunity to express the integration of creativity, spirituality, and Mercy.

The Grand Right and Left held in Belmont, North Carolina in August, 1987, was an occasion for a visual artist, writer, or musician from each of the twenty-five regions to gather, meet, and create art for a traveling, revolving exhibit. Members of the twenty-five regional communities became aware of other regions and of art as a unifying element.

The Founding Event in Buffalo, New York, July 20, 1991 called for new symbols. A wall covered with etchings of Mercy symbols became an opening door through which to walk into our new reality. Musical compositions written by Sisters of Mercy resounded in the voices of the participants both in Buffalo and at sites across the new Institute.

In the Pathways to the Future project in the late 1990s, a Poets and Prophets Resource Group was identified. This resource group could continue to be a creative source.

Our current Opening Worlds of Mercy process can help us as individuals and community to do contemplation and action. The articles on contextual theology have provided much food for thought.

In the Omaha Regional Community, three concentric groups interface with each other: artists, environmentalists, and justice connectors. They meet yearly as a group and in sections. Quarterly reflection papers are sent to Sisters and associates.

Music continues to be an important part of gatherings and celebrations and continues to help us express new moments.

My most direct experience with music and the corporal works of Mercy was a week in 1999 with Cynthia Serjak, R.S.M., who directs a wonderful music ministry with street people in Pittsburgh. Her creative and compassionate nature led people to express themselves through music. A CD was recorded as part of her ministry.

Currently I am working with Kathleen Erickson, R.S.M., at the Women's Intercultural Center in Anthony, New Mexico on three fundraising concerts for their center. Called "A Work in Progress," these

events mark the beginning of construction, midway, and formal opening of the new center. The mission of the center is to be a place where the women of the Mesilla Valley learn and work together to develop their own economic, social, and spiritual potential. The work of developing self-esteem through classes (ESL, GED, art, haircutting, reflexology, massage, etc.) has brought them to the need for a larger space. Border awareness experiences also occur there. Their ecological concern has led them through a process of choosing to build with recycled tires. What fun creating moments of celebration, involving the women in song, and expressing new sounds. Collaborating with local musicians hopefully will create an opportunity for music to be a long-term element at the center.

In the 1980s in the midst of my ministry as a church musician, a council member of the community asked if I missed performing. I had never really thought about it since I was enjoying whatever ministry I was engaged in. At the same time, I met a violinist and a cellist from the Kansas City Symphony. We formed a piano trio and performed for a number of years. When the violinist decided to pursue solo performance, I began to do the same on both piano and organ and discovered how much I did enjoy returning to performing. I have accompanied fine musicians in the area and am a founding member of New Ear, a group that performs music composed in the last twenty-five years. Works are sometimes commissioned. I had to leave the group because of time constraints.

Currently I am associate organist and choir director at a local parish and teach organ to students. Our archdiocese has offered twenty-two scholarships within the eleven regions of the archdiocese—eleven adult and eleven youth scholarships. Forty-four people applied! I teach a fourteen-year old, a forty-year old, and a seventy-year old, all of whom have good keyboard skills but need help with the pedal. They learn on the instrument that they play at church. Monthly they are taught on area pipe organs so that they become familiar with pipe organs and develop their taste for good instruments.

I have enjoyed teaching in high school and college and administering parish music programs.

Having done those ministries, I know that the very soul of me is a musician. It is such fun to be a musician, to spend hours rehearsing and perfecting beautiful music for performance. I have thought that, if the whole world were engaged in performing or listening to music, there would be no violence or war. I have learned that music is my way of living as a person and as a Sister of Mercy. Music can comfort the sorrowful, instruct the ignorant, and feed the spirit.

I do hold a sadness that has developed over the years because of wasted energies, turf bables, conflicts between clergy and musicians, and priest shortages. Even this next generation of musicians continues to express discouragement about a lack of rapport between clergy and musicians. How blessed are those situations in which clergy, liturgists, and musicians work well together for the development of liturgy and life for their parishioners. We continue to hear of a priest shortage. Instead, is there not a short sightedness of who is allowed to be priest?

Over the years, I have mused over the words work, career, occupation, job, ministry, life work, and vocation. At different times in our lives, I think that we engage in each one of them. My life's work is to be a musician and I am blessed to do this through the community of Mercy which places me in both church and secular circles.

On the horizon, I see people gathering and talking ecumenically about spirituality and the arts. What place will the arts hold in this new millenium? The arts have been comforting responses to the events of September 11, 2001. A periodical, *Christianity and the Arts* has folded after nine years of publication. Donna Ryan, R.S.M., has served on that editorial board. A group gathered by my major professor, Dr. Michael Bauer of Kansas University, is discussing the possibility of the emergence of an entity, Christianity and the Arts. What might this new entity look like?

I draw this reflection to conclusion with a quote from Pablo Casals that for years has hung on my wall and sums up my music making. "I long for the day when the peoples of the world will sit together bound by happiness and love of beauty as in one great concert hall."



Receiving the Breath of the Spirit and Breathing It On

Audrey Synnott, R.S.M.

Let us receive the breath of the Spirit in every way it comes to us. In that openness a new heaven and a new earth will come into being; one that will draw upon the creativity and spirituality of each and all of us.

Years ago, I was working on a poem about a summer evening. I wanted to get the idea of darkness coming gradually and the birds gradually quieting. I wrote and rewrote, but I could not talk myself into liking any of the versions. A few days later, when I was contending with a computer tantrum, this line came to mind: “while in the trees birds sang themselves invisible.” The clarity and rightness of words came to me in a flash of insight that I have come to know as the Spirit breathing within me. I had been given the privilege of co-creating with God. The poem came alive and has since gone out to touch the Spirit in others.

As I read and write poetry, I grow in the awareness of different rhythms pulsing through poetry, prose, and life. There is the strengthening heartbeat of the child in the womb; the throb of youth’s daring and dreams; the cacophony of times of crisis; the slow, measured movement of aging. Death sings the song of eternal life in us. We rise up singing. Never again will we not know the words, the cadences. Creativity and spirituality will be the in and out of every person’s breath; artists of every kind will have no “blocks” to contend with. Beauty will bathe us in new harmonies of nature, of humanity, and of spirituality.

In the following pages, I want to share with you some images that have helped open me to the breath of the Spirit. I have chosen *God’s Grandeur* by Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Musee Des Beaux Arts*, by W. H. Auden, and *Still I Rise* by Maya Angelou. Hopkins always invites me to risk being misunderstood, to set my words ajar. Auden shows me the power of more ordinary language, deceptively plain, the way that embers glow beneath the ashes in a hearth. Maya

Angelou makes me pay attention as she pulses out her poems of self-possession, challenge, and hope.

Gerard Manley Hopkins 1845–1889

God’s Grandeur¹

*The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man’s smudge and shares man’s smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.
And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.*

Hope catches fire in *God’s Grandeur*: Here the creativity of the poet reaches to the edge of eternity and invites readers to experience the immediate presence of God, a God who does not stay palely on a church altar, but insists on being noticed everywhere. “Everywhere” includes all places that have been sullied by our heedless use of them. Hopkins says: “And all is seared with trade, bleared, smeared with toil; And wears man’s smudge and shares man’s smell.” For all that we creatures misuse or destroy, Hopkins insists: “There lives the dearest freshness deep down things.” We need not fear that God will let us destroy our world and us: “Because the Holy Ghost over the bent World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.”

Alliteration builds momentum and intensity in the poem. Compelling images give the reader new

insights into the human and the divine. There is assurance in this poem that God is always being near and loving toward creation. However, as Hopkins well knew, there were times when, from a human standpoint, God was distant, uncaring, and unjust. Hopkins lived a lonesome life. One of his superiors noted that Hopkins "is clever, well trained, teaches well but has never succeeded well: his mind runs in erratic ways." Hopkins had frequent struggles with depression. "He didn't fit in; it's hard to imagine where this moody, overwrought genius could have fit in."²

Hopkins died in 1889, aged forty-four. His first collection of poems was published in 1918, twenty-nine years after his death. The Spirit "unearthed" the gift that Hopkins had been given. Hopkins broods over all the people whose gifts are enriched by his sprung rhythms and arresting images. He breathes on in his thousands of readers and has inspired other geniuses to be true to what the Spirit is saying to them, however "erratic" their response may seem to be.

W. H. Auden, 1907–1974

Auden was an Anglo-American poet who got directly involved in causes that he believed in. In 1937 Auden drove an ambulance for the Loyalists in the Spanish Civil War. In the same year he was awarded the King's Gold Medal for Poetry. In 1947, he was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for his poem "Age of Anxiety."³ He wrote in every conceivable verse form and is considered by many poets and critics to have been the greatest poet of the twentieth century. He was a chancellor of The Academy of American Poets from 1954 to 1973.⁴

In "Musée des Beaux-Arts,"⁵ Auden is moved by the Spirit to see into the depths of Breughel's "Fall of Icarus."⁶ In the Greek myth, Icarus, was the son of Daedalus, an ingenious inventor. Daedalus had been imprisoned in a maze. He used wax to stick feathers onto a wooden frame to make wings for flying out of the maze. He made a pair of wings for Icarus and cautioned him not to fly too close to the sun, lest the sun melt the wax and send him plunging to his death. Overcome by the joy of flying, Icarus flew too close to the sun. The wax on his wings melted and the boy hurtled to his death in the sea.⁷

Musée des Beaux Arts

*About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters; how well they understood
Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking
dully along;
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:
They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.
In Breughel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.*

In this poem, the Spirit does not flame out. Our not noticing both insults and muffles the Spirit. Auden calls his readers to greater awareness, to caring, to seeing those things that remain invisible until we are able to see beyond ourselves.

Whether noticed or not, the Spirit glimmers in images that awaken and enrich the reader's experiences of suffering. While he muses over Breughel's painting, Auden has an epiphany that quickens his understanding of suffering and gives birth to his poem. Auden has a fresh understanding of suffering:

*The Old Masters, how well they understood
Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating, or opening a window, or just walking
dully along.*

Suffering is often so sudden and sometimes so silent and near that we go on with our everyday lives unaware of the terrible anguish and deaths that are happening in the house next door or across the street.

One thing that TV has done for us is to bring suffering alive into our living rooms. Will anyone forget seeing the planes crash into the twin towers of the

World Trade Center? Or the joy of the Afghanastani women when their beautiful faces were freed from the stifling bands of material? Or the utter demolishing of Afghanistan towns; the terrible loss of life among townspeople during this "long war"?

Auden's poem notes how leisurely both people and animals turn away from the disaster, caught in the blinding sameness of their days:

*The ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to go to and sailed calmly on.*

How does Auden breathe forth the Spirit in this poem?—in quietly penetrating images that speak to us of our need of the graces of awareness and of compassion. The ploughman must have heard a splash or a cry, but the rhythm of his plowing deafened him to the disaster. The "delicate ship" was blinded by its need to get "somewhere." Anywhere but here? As awareness and compassion root more firmly in us, more of us will be caring in our relationships; more of us will see a boy falling out of the sky and take the risk to save him.

Auden's poem gives depth to the painting as well as to the deadly results of our unawareness. In "ordinary" words, Auden paints a frightening picture of our unseeing. He warns all of us to awake from our self-absorption.

Maya Angelou, 1928–

Angelou spent most of her childhood living with her grandmother in rural Arkansas. She graduated from high school with high honors at sixteen. In the 1950s, she became a nightclub performer and started careers as a singer, dancer, magazine editor, civil rights activist, novelist, and poet. In 1971, she was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize for her first volume of poems: *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'Fore Di'ie*.⁸ Presidents Ford and Clinton have honored her.⁹

Not one to wait until things improved for her people, Angelou pulsed to the forefront in places where none or very few black women had been before

her. Her book, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, made the bestseller's list, an accomplishment that few black women had achieved. Angelou was a groundbreaker for black women in the film industry, especially in the areas of script writing and directing.

In her poem, "Still I Rise,"¹⁰ Angelou's humor intensifies her determination and that of her people to come to the fullness of who they are, of the gifts that fill them, and of the dreams they reach for. The Spirit can laugh.

Still I Rise

*You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.
Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.
Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.
Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries.
Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I got gold mines
Diggin' in my own back yard.
You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.
Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?
Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,*

Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
 Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
 I rise
 Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
 I rise
 Bringing the gifts my ancestors gave,
 I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
 I rise
 I rise
 I rise.

The Spirit can also be sassy—all the better to get someone's attention! There is also in sassiness a sureness of who one is; a sturdiness that endures every setback. There is also defiance, unsettling to the people who wield power:

The rising is at times violent; it is also inevitable. Angelou has learned not to be trapped in her past. She moves out “of the huts of history's shame” and “Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear, I rise.”

The Spirit rises in Angelou's poetry. It lifts up people who are discriminated against or discounted and urges them to see themselves as valuable, even priceless. Angelou, herself, is a sign for all people that it is possible to rise from shame to daybreak.

Living the Breath of the Spirit

There is another observation to make about these poems: they need to be read aloud. Hopkins' alliterations beg to be heard. When the lines “Because the Holy Ghost over the bent World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings” are spoken, the listener feels the brooding and the warm breast of the Holy Ghost and the flash of light from her wings.

Speaking Auden's poem gives it a pace that allows the listener to take hold of the images. They flow into each other so subtly that it is possible for the reader to swallow the poem whole, and so to miss the flavor of it.

Reading Angelou's poem aloud is a must. It's almost a must that she read it, her voice rich with having lived through “nights of terror and fear” and risen “Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear.” The repetitions of “I rise” lie flat on the page until a voice provides some crescendos.

To come full circle, creativity lives by the breath of the Spirit, and the Spirit breathes in every kind of

creation. Each life, however short or interrupted by tragedy, sickness, or war, is precious to the Spirit and will feel her warm breast and see her ah! bright wings.



Notes

- 1 Gerard M. Hopkins, “God's Grandeur” in *Web Concordance*, “Gerard Hopkins” poems (1918) Section 4 c 1996 RJC Watt. <http://www.dundee.ac.uk/english/wics/gmh/gmh4.htm>. Text from the first edition of Hopkins poems edited by Robert Bridges and published in 1918. The html text of the poem is derived from the one at Columbia University's Bartleby Library.
- 2 Beth Randall, “Gerard Manley Hopkins” in *Illuminating Lives*, 1996. http://www.mcs.drexel.edu/~gbrandal/Illum_html/Hopkins.html.
- 3 W. H. Auden, *The Age of Anxiety* (Pulitzer Prize winner 1948). <http://www.teachervision.com/lesson-plans/lesson-1644.html>.
- 4 The Academy of American Poets Poetry Exhibits, “W. H. Auden” <http://www.poets.org/poets/poets.cfm?prmID=121&CFID=3922207&CFTOKEN=10229852>.
- 5 W. H. Auden, “Musée des Beaux Arts,” c. 1976. Edward Mendelson, William Meredith, and Monroe K. Spears, executors of the estate of W. H. Auden. <http://poetrypages.lemon8.nl/life/musee/museebeauxarts.htm>.
- 6 Pieter Brueghel the Elder (about 1525–1569), *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, c. 1558. <http://www.arthistory.cc/auth/bruegel/>.
- 7 “Icarus,” *Encyclopedia of Greek Mythology*. http://216.237.150.140/greek_resources/greek_encyclopedia/greek_entry_to.html/icarus_e_to.html.
- 8 “Maya Angelou—A Look Into.” A biographical sketch. <http://www.empirezine.com/spot-light/maya/maya1.htm>.
- 9 “Maya Angelou.” The Biography and History channels. Year 2000 Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia and Compton's Encyclopedia. Women's. International Center. Biography of Maya Angelou. <http://www.dejaelaine.com/maya.html>.
- 10 Maya Angelou, “Still I Rise,” from *And Still I Rise*, c. 1978. Used by permission of Random House. http://www.kalimunro.com/still_I_rise.html.

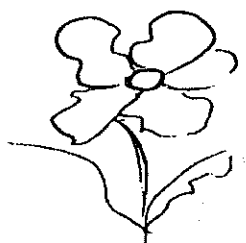
Walk Through Your Door Drawkcab or: Imaging the Creator

Virginia Farnan, R.S.M.

*They were amazing, our foresisters. They handled Church Law
with such creative thinking and Irish witt
These women walked through the streets of Dublin to tend the sick
wearing large brimmed black hats covered with veiling,
similar to those worn by the women of their time who were in
mourning.
Should anyone inquire as to why they were not in their cloister like
"good nuns,"
they replied, quickly pulling the black veil over their faces:
"Oh! but we carry our cloister with us!"*

This describes only one of many instances of creativity in action initiated by these wonderful pioneers. I believe everyone is creative. After all, if we truly believe we are born in the image and likeness of God, the first "likeness" we know about God is that of God creating—God, creating something that never existed before.

Just for a moment consider this flower that I drew:



Here in this space, you draw a flower

My flower may resemble a flower that you have seen and so may yours. The fact is the flower I created and the one you created never existed before. You and I brought them into being. We created them!

Think of a newborn child. Each gesture, each movement of this newborn child never existed before. They are unique to this infant. The way the infant expresses her/his uniqueness and relates to everything that surrounds her/him is brand new to this one person. One of the gifts of our birth is creativity. This may be hard for you to believe, but it is true. You are made in the image and likeness of God who placed this lovely gift of creativity within you for you to enjoy.

Lynn Weiss, in her book on creativity, says: "Creativity involves certain characteristics that are familiar to all of us, characteristics that we each have to some degree."¹ You might want to check yourself against this list and see which characteristics of creativity you recognize in yourself. Check them off here.

<input type="checkbox"/> originality	<input type="checkbox"/> curiosity	<input type="checkbox"/> risk-taking
<input type="checkbox"/> intuition	<input type="checkbox"/> flexibility	<input type="checkbox"/> attractions to complexity

<input type="checkbox"/> enjoyment of discovery	<input type="checkbox"/> independence of thought and action
<input type="checkbox"/> ability to separate & combine things in new ways	<input type="checkbox"/> enjoyment of brainstorming
	<input type="checkbox"/> enjoyment of ambiguity

"If even one of these characteristics applies to you, that means you have awakened at least one attribute of creativity in yourself."²

For many people, creativity was stifled when they were very young. The blossoming of creativity is en-

couraged by a sense of trust that was developed at an early age. The separation from dependency on caregivers when one is just about three years of age enables us to uncover our own identity and risk doing things on our own. This is when we begin to become aware of our own uniqueness. Lynn Weiss encourages the “gardening approach” to parenting which nurtures and supports the development of the uniqueness within a child rather than imposing on the child what a parent thinks the child “should” be.

Reassurance is important in the development of creativity. I once read a story of a little girl who loved to dance around the house. She flitted and flew having just a wonderful time. Her parents, wanting to encourage her, signed her up for dancing lessons. The desire to dance quickly died within the child because of all the restrictions training imposed on her. Probably she would have, in her own time, asked for lessons. But lessons that were imposed with the best of intentions stifled the freedom of expression that was just born.

I myself had a dad who was the king of reassurance. Every little drawing or painting that I did was framed and hung on the wall. This probably was one of the greatest gifts he gave me and one that permeated all my adventures in ministry.

So I invite you to risk with reassurance. Begin by:

Walking Through Your Door Drawkcab

Any door will do. Have confidence. A new perspective will awaken in you! Risk seeing the world from a new point of view. Laugh at yourself as you go. Leave the weight of the world behind you on the way out—or was it “in”!

I suppose we might say that creativity is giving birth to the child within us . . . that child who adventures into life and sees all things new each day for the first time. Lynn Weiss says: “Creativity is a process that allows for transformation into anything we want to become.”³ Our creativity is as unlimited as that Higher Power ever re-creating itself. By envisioning who we are, how we see ourselves, how we *want* to see ourselves, we can create the very life we desire. The more you learn to believe in and release the creative aspects of your *self*, the more you will affect your environment, creating one that is wonderful.

Think of the founding Sisters of Mercy. Imagine a shelter for poor women and children in the middle of the richest section of Dublin. Our Sisters

took themselves into the hovels of the sick, not hesitating or asking if they were wanted. They thought nothing of getting on a rickety boat and traveling into the unknown, hoping America was at the other end of the journey and that there would be people who needed God’s Mercy. Sister Mary Silverius Shields, once the executive director of our federation, always said of these women that they heard of a need and they said: “Damn it! Do it!” In the middle of our lengthy and exhausting discussions of creating an Institute of Mercy, she just repeated her famous phrase: “Damn it! Do it!” and we did! Just look at what is happening today. An Institute that never existed before has come into being. The video “Opening Worlds of Mercy” reveals Mercy Sisters and Associates seeing a need, hearing in the hearts “Damn it! Do it!” and creating new ideas for revealing Mercy; Mercy sponsored housing for the poor and disabled, training women in Panama for street-cleaning to enable them to become earners and so many other creative expressions of Mercy.

Creativity is giving birth to the child within us . . . that child who adventures into life and sees all things new each day for the first time.

Think of yourself and the people who serve in ministry with you. Needs arise, you put your heads together and create in your ministry space something that never existed before: new systems for doing for others, new ways of initiating old ideas. What new visionary pieces does your curriculum contain? What new experiences do you now give your students and clients to put them in touch with the world in which they will grow?

Lynn Weiss points out: “You need to distinguish two kinds of creativity as an adult—that of having a specific talent that is probably obvious to you and others such as artistic, musical and expressive talents that showcase a specific skill. But there is much more to creativity. You may be a creative problem-solver who conceptualizes new answers to old problems. You may be a creative homemaker who figures out

how to best utilize the laundry room space to set up a sewing machine." We can add so many more examples of ordinary folks expressing creativity: the Sister who crochets through a meeting, the women who planned the meeting, the person at table 3 who came up with an innovative idea.

It is important to get in touch with your creativity. We have all had this gift from birth. Some of us are very aware of it and feel responsible to always be in touch with it. Some of us cannot imagine that we are creative. Believe it, we are! All of us! As we get in touch with and/or deepen our expressions of our creativity, we are getting in touch with God within us who is Creator and who has gifted us with this wonderful attribute.

Creativity has its painful side. There is the pain experienced by the artist who has cultivated her/his talent and feels called to express that which has yet to be expressed from his/her experience (for example: the pain of loss of loved ones in the World Trade disaster). Lynn Weiss reminds us that creativity awakened brings a heightened sensitivity with it.

Being sensitive means you are open to stimuli: the sights, sounds, tastes, smells, touch, feelings and actions of what is around you. It also means that you are open to learning from what you take in. You will tend to recombine those stimuli into new creations. In addition creativity awakened brings with it sensitivity to judgement and criticism. This makes you vulnerable.⁵

For those of us who have experienced a lifetime of creativity, this experience is very real. If we have created art, music, parish programs, etc., we are vulnerable. Everyone sees our creations as "products" which are fair game to judgment. People feel we are public property and our "work" is there for criticism. Often their first response is a negative one: "There should be more blue in the sky," "This isn't exactly what I was thinking of when I asked you." We can learn from these experiences. Swallowing feelings of rejection and inadequacy is not always easy. Believing in new possibilities and in the truth of oneself is the factor that strengthens the ongoing ability to continue to create.

Lynn Weiss reminds us "that creative people are often way ahead of their time and can see the broad picture before others."⁶ Most of the time, we do not realize this is part of our creative experiencing until the debris starts falling around us. Take, for in-

stance, the beginning actions toward the Institute of Mercy. The creative women who brought the idea into being experienced resentment and resistance. The idea seemed right on time to them. The idea was an explosion of the current reality to others.

Add to vulnerability and resistance experienced by those with awakened creativity the loneliness of being alone with an idea. Creative people often cannot adequately express the beginning of the idea. Furthermore, they never think it is finished when they present it. However, their presentation often sounds finished. The creatively awakened want people to explore with them. Frequently, they find people exploding or withdrawing from the thought sharing. Creatively aware people live a great deal of life within their heads. Often they share with us, forgetting we have not been in their heads with them. They may leave out the first three paragraphs of their thinking. On the other hand, very creative people seem to others as if they have everything together; therefore, others do not know how to be for them.

All of the above is part of the becoming of a person who allows her/his creativity to awaken and become gift to the world. As you become enmeshed in your creative potential and allow it to flow out of you, you should frequently

Walk Through Your Door Drawkcab

It will hone your sense of humor for sure.

Spirituality

Having, to some extent, explored the gift of creativity given to each of us at birth and developed through our life time, it is only fitting to link this gift to an exploration of our spirituality. There are many definitions of spirituality. The one that comes to mind now is this. For me, spirituality is a developing consciousness of God. I believe that "contemplation" is *not* me contemplating God. It is God contemplating me. From the moment of my birth, God has always contemplated me. The power of the *one* who is Creator permeates every atom of my being at every moment ever since I was born. Contemplation, then, for me, is to bring to consciousness more and more this extraordinary fact of my existence. The Creative Force, God, is part of every fiber of my being. It is for me to awaken to this

reality in order that this Creative Force can live, each day, more fully through me, exploding Mercy in my small part of the world.

In a wonderful song called "Mystery" from Paul Winters' *Missa Gaia*, come these words to us:⁷

*O Mystery, you are alive, I feel you all around
You are the fire in my soul, you are the holy sound
You are all of life, it is to you that I sing
Grant that I may feel you always in everything!*

The gift of this Creative Force, uncovered and developing in us, enables us to leap into mystery and not only believe it is true, but own the experience of it. When I was very young, I always talked to God outside me. God was just there walking with me through life and available for conversation at any time. One day, while at a meal in the novitiate, they played a tape of a talk by Daniel Berrigan, S.J. The talk developed the words of Paul to the Colossians:

For I am a minister of the Church by divine commission, a commission granted to me for your benefit and for a special purpose that I might declare God's Word—that sacred Mystery which has been hidden in every generation but which is not as clear as daylight to those who love God. And the secret is simply this: Christ in you! Yes, Christ in you, bringing the hope of all the glorious things to come (Col 1:25–27, Phillips translation).⁸

Well! Here was a revelation. Here was a new consciousness of the Creative Force of God's presence. God was not just around me and near me, God was *in* me! What a shock! God! permeating every atom of my being all the time! I was astounded. I wanted to run around the table of silent nuns and nudge each one saying "Did you hear that? God is in us!"

How do creativity and spirituality mesh? Creativity encouraged and developed enables the leap of faith into the unknown, the mystery, that which never existed before you were born, the personal experience of you in God and God in you. Creativity acknowledges its source as the Creative Force which permeates not only the universe, but one's very being.

Allowing the development of her own consciousness of God, as Creative Force in her, was the driving force that literally pushed Catherine McAuley and her sisters to begin the Order of Mercy. They began this religious order because God in them wanted it,

because the Creative Force in them wanted this group of women to become the Mercy of God to the poor, the sick, and those who are ignorant of causing poverty and sickness in our world. Because they responded as one with the Creative Force within them, an order of religious women that never existed before came into being.

This Creative Force continues to push itself forward in the hearts of women and men of Mercy today. Once the Creative Force pushed them to open schools, hospitals, and social service agencies. Now the Creative Force pushes them to Open New Worlds of Mercy. What new worlds of Mercy will be brought forth through us, worlds of Mercy that never existed before?

*Women and men of Mercy
do not hear the voice of God on the mountain.
We hear the cry of God in our streets.
We go to the mountain to be with the Word of God
In order to return to the cry we hear in our streets.*

Spirituality, then, is participating with God in developing my consciousness of God present in every fiber of my being until I become so one with God that the people "look up and see only Mercy." It is to become so one with God that I look at the people and "see only God." Further, spirituality is participating with God in developing my consciousness of God, as Creative Force in all of Earthlife. This seems like a monumental task, but I have discovered that if I let God be God, creating new worlds of Mercy through me, all this seems to take care of itself. The only help I can give is not to get in the way of letting God happen.

Walk Through Your Door Drawkcab

Creativity actualizing God within us begins and grows to fruition as we empty ourselves of all that is not God. Caryll Houselander gives direction for this emptying:

It is an emptiness like the hollow in the reed, the narrow riftless emptiness which can have only one destiny: to receive the piper's breath and to utter the song that is in the piper's heart . . . Mary was a reed through which the Eternal Love was to be piped. Our effort will consist in sifting and sorting out everything that is not essential and that fills up space and silence in us. From this we shall learn what sort of purpose God has for us."⁹

Sorting everything that is not essential is as simple as not reacting to a seemingly personal slight, the frequent "little things" that disturb our equilibrium. We, associates and Sisters of Mercy know very well the ultimate purpose God has for us; that, in every pore of our being, we become the Mercy of God; that the Creative Force of the God of Mercy so permeate ourselves that, "looking up," the people experience only Mercy.

Participation with God in continuing creation requires the willingness to feel foolish for "Christ's sake." Even the simple drawing of the flower requires this. Certainly *walking through the door drawkcab* requires this! "Will people like my drawing? Will they laugh at it—at me?"

To fully be the reed of God requires our sense of humor. You never know what the breath of God as Creative Force breathing through you will come out with? Merton says:

One of the greatest obstacles to your (spiritual) growing is the fear of making a fool of yourself. Any real step forward implies the risk of failure . . . We have to have the courage to make fools of ourselves and at the same time be awfully careful not to make fools of ourselves.¹⁰

Michael Finley reflects "There is a paradox encountered in the understanding of the terms wisdom and foolishness. We are called to become prudent enough to embrace the folly of the cross, to become wise enough to be a fool for Christ' sake."¹¹

Walk Through Your Door Drawkcab

Lynn Weiss earlier reminded us that: "Creativity is a process that allows for transformation into anything we want to become." We want to become the Mercy of God.

Emptying ourselves to allow the breath of God's Mercy to expand through our presence to life is part of James Finley's reflections on Thomas Merton's words in Finley's book *Merton's Palace of Nowhere*. Merton says: "The door of emptiness . . . of nowhere . . . of no place for self, which cannot be entered by a self and therefore is of no use to someone who is going somewhere. It is not a recognizable door."¹² Finley reflects for us: "This one door is the door of the Palace of Nowhere. It is the door of God. It is our very self, our true self called by God to perfect union with God. And it is through this door we

secretly enter in responding to the saving call to 'Come to the Palace of Nowhere where all things are made one.'"¹³

Many of us have entered into this mystery, this Palace of Nowhere, understanding that the Creator of All is exploding within us every day in gentle and not so gentle ways. This Creative Force known to us as Mercy has brought us to the emptiness that allows the energy that is God to exude through us and unite with all whom we encounter. This Creative Force sees all things new through our eyes as we dare to allow it to Open Worlds of Mercy and even go through doors backwards with us!

Roberta Peters tells us: "I find it incredible that anyone believes that realization of union with God is the rare experience of a few privileged . . . when awareness of union with God becomes a habit, we lose its active consciousness, because the habit has become incorporated into our everyday lives."¹⁴

Let us then have confidence in God. Let us enjoy the presence of this Creative Force in us, through us, in one another, and in our world. Let no obstacles daunt us as we allow the Creative Force, God's Mercy, to explode through us in all Its wonder!



Notes

- 1 Lynn Weiss, *A.D.D. and Creativity* (Dallas, Texas: Taylor Publishing Co., 1997), p. 38.
- 2 Ibid, p. 3.
- 3 Ibid, p. 3.
- 4 Ibid, pp. 48-49.
- 5 Ibid, p. 94.
- 6 Ibid, p. 60.
- 7 Paul Winters, *Missa Gaia/Earth Mass, The Paul Winters Consort* (Living Records Inc., Box 72, Litchfield, CT 06759, 1972).
- 8 *New Testament, J.B. Phillips Translation* (New York: Macmillan, 1958).
- 9 Caryll Houselander, *The Reed of God* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1944), pp. 1-3.
- 10 Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal* (New York: New Directions Publishing Co., 1973).
- 11 Thomas Finley, *Merton's Palace of Nowhere* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1978), p. 119.
- 12 Ibid, p. 153.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Roberta Peters, *The Path to No-Self Life at the Center* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), pp. 208-209.

Like a Root is to Fruit

Reflections Upon the Relationship of Spirituality and Creativity

Katherine Doyle, R.S.M.

The image of a tree captured my attention as I began to reflect upon the relationship of spirituality and creativity. The health and life of a tree is dependent upon the vitality of the root system which feeds and nourishes it day after day. The life force moves up through the roots to the branches and ultimately blossoms forth in fruit. Coming to full fruit depends upon the interplay of internal and external forces. There must be pollination. Blossoms must be sheltered from strong winds and the hazards of freezing temperatures or searing heat. In the end, no fruit is the result of the tree alone but is, rather, an outcome of the intricate, interdependent movement of natural forces.

This metaphor is one expression of how creativity and spirituality connect in my experience. Spirituality is the root feeding my creative process, which ultimately is expressed in the creative act. Spirituality not only feeds the creative process, it provides the interpretive relationship between the one creating and life itself. Spirituality as the life stance that one takes in relationship to God, self, others, and the world is the definition that most resonates with me. It is the prism through which all interactions are given meaning. Diarmuid O'Murchu speaks of spirituality as "an innate wisdom of the human heart that enlivens a zest for life, a search for meaning and purpose, a love for all that is good and beautiful, a passion to create a better world, a sensitivity to the life-energy (God, if you wish) that permeates the entire cosmos."¹

The wisdom from such a search includes myriad expressions that en flesh the experience grasped in the depths of one's heart. For some, the wisdom is expressed through the visual arts, music, or the realm of writing and poetry. For others this wisdom finds expression in the care with which a recipe is created, a homemade welcoming, a closed door circumvented. In a sense, creativity is the impulse to find a way to put flesh on the vision of the spirit. Rit-

ual makers and liturgists engage in this process daily as they strive to create environments in which others might encounter God at the deepest level of their persons; but they are not alone. Every person who strives to express the inner movement of their hearts in concrete form engages in creative work.

As I reflect upon my own creative work, I can identify four elements or spiritual roots that are inseparable from my creative life. These elements are: (1) sacramental vision; (2) empathetic capacity; (3) a sense of interconnectedness, and (4) the unbidden fusion of conscious and unconscious experience spontaneously expressing itself in music or poetry. All arise out of a contemplative stance toward life and a belief that in prayer you are gifted with new eyes and new understandings.

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A familiar line from the poem "God's Grandeur" that proclaims: "The world is charged with the grandeur of God" speaks to the dynamics of sacramental vision. When you see all life as holy, a revelation and reflection of the transcendent, you look for levels of meanings and truth beyond the immediate. "There lives the dearest freshness deep down things."² Stones have beauty in themselves but also become metaphors with multiple faces. A stone

speaks of hardness of heart but it also speaks of constancy and strength. Sacramental vision causes one to see things unseen, to make connections that are new and fresh. In a way, it provides the seed for changing the way in which others see and perceive. That is at the heart of creative work. It always moves to a message, verbal or non-verbal. It always circles beyond the one who sees to the wider world.

This sense of all life as sacrament provided the inspiration of a song which I composed many years ago, "Jesus in Our Midst."

*Jesus in our midst, veiled from our eyes but seen through the vision
of faith. We do adore you hidden in the signs of your presence
here causing our hearts to burn with joy.*

- 1. Veiled in each moment your Spirit moves within our lives. You
meet us in signs of faith but have we eyes to see?*
- 2. Your word falls gently upon our hearts of flesh. Life-giving water
for those who thirst but have we lips to drink?*
- 3. Chosen in your mercy and sent to reveal God's great love. We
preach the gospel to the world but have we hearts that love?*

Another aspect of the sacramental vision of life is a natural movement to symbolic thinking. Always the question lingers: "What speaks of this experience?" "What image captures its feel, depth and energy?" Recently I was reading about the "butterfly effect." It is proposed that "interdependence within universal life is so widespread and sensitive that the beating of the butterfly's wings can alter the course of a tornado on the other side of the world."³ Just this little piece of data can be woven into an entire reflection and ritual celebrating the difference one person can make, pointing to the difference one harsh act can have upon the well-being of all creation. Putting disparate pieces of data together moves the creative into the realm of prophetic voice. It allows an alternative vision to emerge.

A second spiritual root is that of empathy. To be a good storyteller, you must experience the story

Sometimes the realization that,
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in your being. You have to enter into the pain, joy, and journey of the characters to be able to engage the listener. To do this demands that you claim a solidarity and union with the other whose story you tell. There is an identification with the universal story of all humankind and the range of emotion, fear, and hope that we experience communally. When Hans Christian Anderson told the story of "The Ugly Duckling," he wasn't just talking about a duck. He spun a story around the human experience of rejection and low self-esteem. Because he could empathize with the experience, he could find the connections and use them to point to truth.

Sometimes the realization that, try though you may, you will never fully understand the depth of pain in another can provide the impetus for a creative work. This was the case when I wrote the prose poem "To Be Their Voice."

*In the night of my dream I met them and stood silent in their
presence.*

*Who could find words to speak in the torrent of human pain,
in the deafening quiet of human indifference?*

*I stood and the eyes of my heart brimmed with the tears of
complicity.*

I heard a voice speak from the gray darkness of despair:

*"Will you speak for us? Will you give us a voice to sound where we
may not go?"*

*I felt the small warm path of tears flowing down my cheek, rushing
to meet the ocean*

*of their tears and knew in that instant the face of powerlessness,
and owned that I could never fully feel their ache or know their
loneliness.*

*I, born to comfort, love and hope, could not rob them of their dignity
by professing to*

understand or feel their depths of suffering, oppression and despair.

*I could but offer a voice to tell their stories and in the telling
recognize my own poverty.*

*And so they came, one by one, relating their tales of lives crushed
by the weight of others' lust for power and wealth;
scourged by the lash of human cruelty.*

*They came: Those maimed by their brother's instruments of torture
Those whose bodies were racked and emaciated from endless hunger
The mothers of the lost grieving their sons and daughters
The jobless of the inner cities*

*They came: Children who have never known a day without
violence, never felt
the caress of loving hands.*

*They came: The hopeless young who drown despair in drug-filled
needles*

pouring death into the human spirit,

*The aged ones who, having given of their lives and labor, are
expendable, lonely and unwanted.*

*Their stories poured over me until my being would hear no more,
could no longer endure the nakedness of sin's reality, haunted by
faces whose eyes were like huge black pools of darkness devoid of
spark or emotion—soul waters dulled and
deadened by hope's vanished shadow.*

*And through it all my spirit cried and writhed with the dawning
truth*

that though they asked of me my voice, I, too, am their jailer.

*In their suffering I stand accused, for each is flesh of my flesh, each
bone on my bone.*

*We are part of each other yet I have not hungered when they starved
or shivered*

as they lay upon the earth in deep winter.

*I have not mourned the child of promise who now lies dead from
war's quick touch.*

*I have not cried for them or laid down my life for them, but in the
dream of night they
plead for my coming, plead for my voice.*

*Dawn comes and dreams vanish as mist upon the meadow in the
morning sun*

*but the silent faces are seared upon my soul and through the power
of their*

suffering comes strength to be their voice

In order for the creative act to have power and energy, it must well up from our inner resources. There is no way that one can sing of another's pain or write of it without facing one's own. It takes inner work and a willingness to taste and savor our own experiences, those that are painful and those that delight. Our inner experience then must be placed in dialogue with the experience of others. In this dialogue, new insights emerge, new images are discovered, and new options unfold. It is the tension between my "familiar" and the other's "difference" that generates the questions and wonderings that lead to creative insight and action.

Understanding that spirituality is about a way of relating means that our relationships are another root which shapes our creativity. When the relationships of our life are hostile and capricious, then our creative expressions flow from that perception. We can hear despair in music and see anger or hatred in the visual arts if that is the experience of the creator. Listening to the music of an oppressed people can bring us into their sense of longing or resistance. We can also hear the hopes of an artist or experience the hospitality of a room designed to say: "Come in. You are always welcome."

Architecture is an example of such a dynamic. It is a field which expresses the relationship the architect sees between humankind and creation. A cursory study of the spatial designs used in some contemporary business or technology buildings reveals designs that often isolate the worker, endless cubicles in windowless rooms lacking color. In other buildings, light and openness are abundant because it is the architect's belief that work inside must be connected and informed by the wider horizon of life.

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There is a rhythm in all of this, a mutuality. Adriana Diaz tells us that "receiving the universe in all its diversity allows us a new self-appreciation, and coming to a level of self-acceptance and self-love prepares us to love the world in return."⁴ Presence and mindfulness are core to this process. In order to see with sacramental eyes and to feel with an empathetic heart, I have to be in the present moment. I must bring all of my person to the encounter, whether that is the encounter with God or with a stranger. Without that type of disciplined presence, the transformative moment does not occur. Split attention short circuits the creative process and leaves the inner spirit untouched.

When we are most present to another, we feel our interconnectedness and unity. The psalmist speaks of it as “deep calling to deep.” (Ps 42:7) This communion allows new connections to be made. We move to the place where our deepest longings meet. It is in that place that I discover how to ritualize our common experience, how to speak to our common yearning and how to own our common fears. We move from complexity to simplicity.

These three roots—sacramental vision, empathetic capacity, and interconnectedness—are really part of a contemplative stance toward life. They are characteristics of approaching life as holy and revelatory. They provide the context for our response to experience. When we talk about creativity, we are not just talking about the arts. We are talking about the art of living life in its richness and abundance. We are talking about the way in which a mother weaves a story for her child at bedtime. We are talking about the person who places flowers on the window sill of a decrepit tenement house and the retired grandmother who collects scraps of cloth to make quilts for homeless children. Each one brings change to the moment.

**We are most creative when we
bring our whole person to the
task at hand, whatever
that task is.**

Creativity takes so many forms. Clarissa Pinkola Estes calls creativity a shape changer, taking on a variety of forms and faces. She asks what gives evidence of its existence.

Ironing a collar well, cooking up a revolution? Yes. Touching with love the leaves of a plant, pulling down ‘the big deal,’ tying off the loom, finding one’s voice, loving someone well? Yes. Catching the hot body of the newborn, raising a child to adulthood, helping raise a nation from its knees? Yes. Tending to a marriage like the orchard it is, digging for psychic gold, finding the shapely word, sewing a blue curtain? All are of the creative life.⁵

We are most creative when we bring our whole person to the task at hand, whatever that task is. It is in these moments of self-forgetfulness and pres-

ence that a type of creative expression beyond real explanation occurs. It is an expression arising from the fusion of the conscious and unconscious within us. For me, it comes totally unbidden. It emerges in silence, usually the silence of prayer. In the quiet there begins a melody that wells up and sings itself. Simultaneously, words merge with the melody and out of silence comes the song. It leaps to life of itself. The song “Silent Music” is one which emerged that way.

There are no words

There are no words to pray what I would pray, my Lord

There are no words,

There are no words deep enough to speak, my Lord

So I will pray with silent music and let the Spirit sing my song.

O Spirit, sing in me

The best explanation for this type of creation is that it is given. This type of creative act is very different from the creativity that is demanded of liturgical planning, rituals, or writing, although the latter sometimes happens the same way. The creation of unbidden song is flutelike in the sense that it flows through you like wind through a hollow reed. It is a process that has to be honored and received. If I begin to “work” with it, it vanishes as quickly as it came. If I don’t tend its emergence, it also disappears. The experience is similar to the experience of the spirit nudges that come to us. We have to act on them just as they are given, neither delaying our response or making more of them than they are.

It would be misleading to imply that a contemplative stance toward life and all that entails automatically leads to an outburst of creativity. There is an asceticism that goes along with both. Our spirituality focuses our vision. Asceticism disciplines our action to move forward to the realization of that vision. If I see all life as interconnected, then I must bring all my creative energies to the task of making that communion a reality in my day-to-day activities. For example, if I believe that I have been given the cosmos as gift to treasure, honor, and protect, then my creative energies will be challenged to find ways of doing so. I have to be willing to do the work necessary to proclaim the message I steward in ways that are transformative and compelling.

While there are many disciplines that might be helpful for the creative process, there are four that have been important for me. They are:

- ▶ Wait for meaning to emerge
- ▶ Step back and look at the larger horizon
- ▶ Honor the integrity of the movement
- ▶ Be willing to be changed in the process of creating

The first discipline, waiting for the meaning to emerge takes time and honesty. The waiting can be a time of prayer, study, and experimentation or it can be a time of letting the land lie fallow. What is important is that the vision be disentangled from any agenda other than its own reality. If we compose a prayer, it must have the integrity of prayer. It must not be used as an opportunity to tell people what we think they should be doing or feeling. If we arrange a welcoming space we must do so not to show how gifted we are but to truly welcome.

The second discipline is to step back and look at the whole. While it is helpful to look deeply into a piece of the whole, to grasp its truth, the piece has to be seen in its relationship to the wider horizon in which it exists. The same holds true for our own work. It is only a small piece of the whole. This discipline invites us to look at alternative modes and possibilities. It invites us to seek out the perspective of others who might think differently or move out of other mindsets. This discipline is closely related to our empathetic capacity. I might lay a splendid table and invite the neighbors, but how will the neighbors experience the feast if they are economically challenged? Hospitality must never diminish the guest. It is necessary to understand how my action graces the whole and contributes to a more human society.

Honoring the integrity of the movement is the third discipline. If the creative act and the spiritual center are in harmony, there is an energy and flow to what emerges. It follows the spirit and has an inner authenticity to it. When I first served in music ministry, I was often asked to write a text "on demand." The songs didn't arise from my heart, but rather from expediency. Such song texts might have been fine for the moment but they lacked the ability to hook the heart. They were quite forgettable.

The difference between transformative creation and other creative works that are done solely for profit, popular praise, or without a movement of the heart is that they lack power and energy. They fail to bring about change either in the creator or in the beholder. Respecting the integrity of

the creative movement demands a fidelity to truth and to the real. It is what it is.

The last discipline is the discipline of allowing oneself to be changed by the act of creating. Like a tree that goes through the cycles of barrenness, growth, and fruitfulness, we move through creative cycles. There are times when we burst forth with all sorts of creative life, but there are times when we must embrace the silent time, the germination time. The leaves of the tree fall to its base and provide the fertilizer for new life; the learnings from our works of creativity have to fertilize our next period of growth. We must, like the tree, endure the pruning and stripping away of old growth that saps the life from us. None of this is easy; in fact, it is quite difficult.

To create is a holy act, a sharing and participation in the creative love of God. It has to be entered into with a spirit of reverence and humility for, like the butterfly effect, our creative action changes the world in which we dwell. It sounds echoes into the cosmos, echoes that will last long after our lives have ended. The well of spiritual waters that flow forth in the creative act are waters of conversion and transformation for every act of creating carries with it the call to enter into what is created, to experience it and claim its truth as our own. If it does not change us, who will it change?

The relationship between spirituality and creativity is not easily put into words. It is dynamic and charged with mystery. Perhaps the only word to describe it, is the word which is our life.



Notes

- 1 Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Our World in Transition* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1995), p. 58.
- 2 Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1994), p. 26.
- 3 O'Murchu, p. 74.
- 4 Adriana Diaz, as quoted in *Spiritual Literacy*, ed. Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat (New York: Touchstone, 1996), p. 291.
- 5 Clarissa Pinkola Estes, as quoted in *Spiritual Literacy*, p. 276.

A Taste of Taizé

Suzanne Toolan, R.S.M.

In 1977, one of the Burlingame Sisters of Mercy returned from a trip to France. She brought with her an LP from the ecumenical Community of Taizé. It took me several weeks to get around to playing that record, but it took just moments to realize that I had come home! I had discovered *my* music, music that spoke the prayer of my soul.

Then, in 1981, two Burlingame Sisters of Mercy, Jean Evans and Judy Carle, joined the many young people who converged upon the small ecumenical Community of Taizé in Southeastern France. They returned to Burlingame, having interested some of the brothers in spending time with us here for a young adult gathering.

Thus opened for our center a vital ministry, and for me, a wonderful way of praying through music. It has become in my elder years a way of bringing together important strands in my life: prayer, a certain skill in making music, and love for young people.

To understand the impact of the community of Taizé one needs to go to this little village situated on a hillside in southeastern France. And if it is during the summer months, there is incredible inspira-

tion to be had as one becomes a part of the huge numbers that converge there during student break.

For they come from all over Europe; they come from Asia, Africa, from North and South America. They come to meet one another, to pray, and to discover a way of life. The village? Taizé is a rather insignificant site to have attracted so many young people for so many years. Taizé is situated within a few miles of a monastery at Cluny, a Roman Catholic institution, once the most influential and wealthiest monastery in Europe. How extraordinary that within a short distance of this former powerhouse another "monastery" would spring up years later, one whose members would live in such simplicity that they would renounce even their own patrimony.

What attracts young (and not so young) people to Taizé? I think that it is threefold: the integrity of the brothers' lives, the beauty of their worship, and the inspiration of their message, a message that encourages the young to live in solidarity with the poor and disenfranchised and to be bearers of peace and reconciliation.

The brothers wear habits only in church; their dress at other times is very ordinary, very simple. There is a sort of romanticism that attracts young people as they see these white cloaked figures assemble in the large church at Taizé. I can remember a similar superficial attraction when I was in college at Immaculate Heart in Hollywood. The sight of black and white clad young women gliding down chapel aisles led me to fantasies about my own future involvement with these Sisters who I envisioned spent all their time either praying or teaching fascinating college music courses to enthralled students.

Is it a wonder that the counter-cultural quality of the brother's lives fascinate our society, immersed as we are by the culture of consumerism, a culture that seeks immediate gratification in most arenas of our lives?

A unique element in the community of Taizé is that the brothers come from different Christian faith traditions. Anglicans, Lutherans, Roman Catholics and men from various Protestant traditions are numbered among Taizé membership.

A unique element in the community of Taizé is that the brothers come from different Christian faith traditions. Anglicans, Lutherans, Roman Catholics and men from various Protestant traditions are numbered among Taizé membership. Most of the brothers live in Taizé, but others live in very poor areas of the world. Brother Roger, the founder, stays in one of these impoverished areas for a time each year to write a letter to the young, entitled *Letter From Taizé*. (Available on the Internet at <http://www.Taizé.fr>.) This letter becomes the focus of study and a source of inspiration to visitors of this little village and to the world-wide communities the brothers visit throughout the year.

The Sisters of St. Andrew, a seven-hundred year-old order, have begun to play an important role in the welcome of the young people. At first, the Sisters did many of the menial tasks connected with the welcome: preparing food, doing laundry, etc. It didn't take long for the brothers to discover the value of having the Sisters share other parts of their ministry. Now Sisters meet one-on-one with young women sharing their own search. They prepare and rehearse the chants used in the prayer, and some of the Sisters give Bible presentations, talks that lead to prayer. The Sisters I have met have given superb presentations and, indeed, have helped me to pray.

A week at Taizé during the summer months will include prayer three times a day, the unfolding of Scripture by brothers or Sisters, and meetings in various language groups. The purpose of these groups is to enable participants to discover ways to be messengers of hope as they return home to their own environment of family, school, or work. The week also includes some manual work; each person assists in some way with the daily chores of keeping this multitude of young adults (sometimes as many as six thousand in a week) functioning as a community.

But what of the worship itself? The prayer is composed of repetitive chants, Scripture reading, silence, and intercession. During the Friday evening Prayer Around the Cross, those assembled also have the opportunity of coming to the icon cross for a few moments to pray. The tradition of Taizé is to kneel and place one's forehead upon the cross, thus releasing to Christ all that is in one's heart.

One summer, as the brothers were trying to find a way to make the young people an active part of the prayer, someone started singing the Praetorius, "Ju-

bilate Deo." It is said that the hills of Taizé resounded with this beautiful canon. It became a prototype of the many chants that were to follow, chants that have touched the hearts of people on every continent. The repetition of the chant often leads to deep prayer, a sort of a communal *Lectio Divina*.

Jacques Berthier, organist and choir director of St. Ignatius in Paris, began to collaborate with Brother Robert, medical doctor, musician, and one of the first members of the community. Together, Berthier and Brother Robert composed ostinato responses and chorales, litanies, acclamations, and canons—functional music of great simplicity and beauty. Well crafted, the chants are able to "bear the mystery," not becoming threadbare despite endless repetition. (One small defect in Berthier's writing is the misplacement of the Latin accent. Berthier never quite understood Latin accents. Thus we hear such phrases as *Glori-á ti-bí Domi-né*, throwing the accent on the last syllable. A small defect when one considers the overall value of this music.)

The prayer of Taizé that has most often been transplanted to other countries is the beautiful Prayer Around the Cross.

The prayer of Taizé that has most often been transplanted to other countries is the beautiful Prayer Around the Cross. In the San Francisco Bay Area with which I am most familiar, there are many churches and chapels that provide this prayer monthly. Here at Mercy Center in Burlingame, we started with fifteen people in attendance in 1982. Although we have never advertised the prayer, people come from over one hundred miles away, battling Friday bridge traffic to attend prayer on the first Friday of every month. Our seating capacity is about three hundred but with floor overflow we come close to five hundred—five hundred people, gathered to close off a busy week, five hundred people who value the silence, the deep prayer, the community, the sometimes quiet, sometime exuberant chanting, people who want to lift up in prayer their own needs and the crying needs of our world, of our universe, to a merciful God.

"Stay here and keep watch with me; the hour has come. Stay here and keep watch with me; watch

and pray." This simple phrase might start an evening. It may take yet another chant as transition from busy work and family life, from traffic noise, from inner clutter to still the mind and heart. Perhaps we might continue with, "Ubi caritas et amor; Deus ibi est." Then we hear the ancient psalmody, so much a part of Jewish and Christian tradition. As the cantor sings verses of a psalm, the people respond with a simple alleluia. Then we are ready to hear the word of God. The passage, purposely short so that we may hold it in silent prayer, is read in the dominant language of the group; short phrases are often repeated in other languages, then a responsive chant and then, the heart of the prayer, a silence of at least five to ten minutes.

Silence, hard for our culture to take? Indeed it is. When I first introduced this prayer to groups in the Bay Area and in other places, I sometimes cut the silence a bit short because people are so uneasy with it. But silence, a resting-place with God, is something that grows on us. We find home for our restless hearts, minds, and bodies. Then from out of silence comes a quiet chant followed by intercessions. Borrowing from the Eastern Church, we respond: "Kyrie eleison" or sometimes "Gospodi pomilui" in a Slavic tongue (Lord, have mercy).

The cross is placed upon small stools on the floor and as we continue to chant, people are invited to bring their burdens, their worries, their anxieties, and the burdens of the world to the icon cross. As in Taizé, people may leave quietly when they need to, but the gathering around the cross continues until everyone has the opportunity to come to the cross. Often, when I pick up the cross after the service, I am aware of all the fears, the anxieties, the pain that has been left there. I am also conscious of the peace that has been found at that cross.

At Mercy Center, we have the custom of singing a song of resurrection at the end. It is the Risen Christ with whom we have gathered, and so we end consciously in that risen life. Christ has risen, is present among us, and leads us back into our ordinary life, ready to live the mystery.

I wrote the chant, "Jesus Christ, Yesterday, Today and Forever" for the papal visit to San Francisco in 1987. One evening at our Taizé service, I decided to give it a try as a resurrection close to our evening. I found that the people immediately took

up the singing with great enthusiasm. Not only that, they all stood and held hands. This immediately became a custom for us, a custom that greatly irritates the brothers. For awhile after brothers registered disapproval, I tried to stop this action, but an elderly United Methodist minister said, "Why? This is *our* custom now as Mercy Center pray-ers; if we want to stand as one in Christ, why not?"

I always like to bring the exuberance of the resurrection song back down again so that people may begin to leave in quiet. We sing, "Now in peace, O God, let your servant go, alleluia, for my eyes have seen your salvation, alleluia" an adaptation of "Nunc dimittis" from the Taizé repertory.

A part of our evening has become the greeting of one another in the lobby area after the service. Here old friends meet and exchange happenings from the previous month and good wishes for the coming month.

The brothers insist rightly that Taizé is not a movement; they wish to avoid any semblance of a cult. They are also ambivalent about the use of their prayer in settings other than Taizé; it is *their* prayer. On one hand they encourage others to make the prayer available, but they are reluctant to have it known as "Taizé Prayer." We speak of it as prayer using the music of Taizé.

Until the opening up of Eastern Europe, we were privileged to have the brothers for a weekend every year. Now we are glad when they can make it every other year. They were last with us February 15-17, 2002.

Our weekends are one of the high points of the year. In addition to our ninety bedrooms, we open up some of our larger meeting rooms to accommodate the crowds with sleeping bags to enable young people to be housed inexpensively.

Sometimes I have regrets that I no longer compose the amount of music that I did when I had as many as five choirs for which to write. I have no choir now and I feel that absence. What an experience of God it has been to facilitate the coming together of mind and heart and voice in some precious moments of making music, of singing texts that express the multiplicity of human emotions: joy, sorrow, sadness, playfulness, exultation.

I find that I am often writing simple one-liners that don't require a lot of skill for a musician. But

often, for me, they express the simplicity of praying to God with few words but with words that upon repetition lead to silence.

I remember as a college student, before I entered the Sisters of Mercy, having an intuition one day. (I don't think I really understood it at the time; maybe now I am beginning to penetrate its meaning.) It is this: Where words leave off or become inadequate to express the power of the mystery, there music takes over, expressing a thought or feeling or prayer in a manner beyond words. And where music itself is inadequate, there is silence.

For the past two years, a few of our Sisters and associates have gone to San Quentin to facilitate Centering Prayer. We have been so touched by the men's response to Taizé chant and even more, by their response to the silence of contemplative prayer. As one of the men put it early on in our time with them: "Now I get it! It's like the Bible says, 'we don't know how to pray but the Spirit prays in us in ways beyond words!'"

For these incarcerated men, who live in an environment of chaos, whose lives are so filled with noise, with pain, with anger and confusion, simple chant and the quiet of silent prayer have become lifelines.

I think that my experience with the music and prayer of Taizé has begun to help me to pray in simplicity. And my experience of the community of Taizé has helped me go beyond myself to embrace the world in all its complexity, in all its needs. In the end, I think my Taizé experience is helping me become a better Sister of Mercy.

On a video entitled, "Trust is at Hand" (not currently available in the United States), a young Indian girl speaks for all of us when she says how wonderful it is to find a community with whom we can share our questions, a community that does not give the answers but waits with us until we discover our own answers. This kind of patient but compassionately active waiting seems to me to be very much in tune with our Mercy charism.

That sense of acceptance, of patient waiting is expressed in this prayer of Brother Roger:

Risen Christ, you take us with our hearts just as they are.

Why think we must wait for our hearts to be changed before we go to you? You transfigure them.

With our thorns, you light a fire. The open wound in us is the place through which your love comes streaming. And within the very

hurts themselves, you bring to fruition a communion with you. Your voice comes to rend our night, and the gateways of praise open up within us.'



Notes

- 1 *Songs and Prayers from Taizé* (GIA Publications, Inc, 1991), p. 24.

Sources

Taizé Resources (GIA Publications, 7404 S. Mason Ave., Chicago, IL 60638)

To order: <mailto:Custserv@giamusic.com>;

Website: <http://www.giamusic.com>

Vocal editions (includes cantor, choir parts, keyboard and guitar chords)

Music from Taizé, Volume 1, G-2433

Music from Taizé, Volume 2, G-2778

Cantos De Taizé, Spanish volume, G-1974

Taizé: Songs for Prayer, G-4956

Instrumental edition (includes music for a variety of instruments)

Music from Taizé, Volume 1, G-2433A

Music from Taizé, Volume 2, G-2778A

Cantos De Taizé, Spanish volume G-2974A

Taizé: Songs for Prayer, G-3719A

Songs & Prayers from Taizé (contains melody lines, guitar chords with text and keyboard accompaniment together with suggestions for scripture texts, intercessions and Brother Roger prayers.) G-3719

Some of the CD titles published by GIA Publications:

Songs & Prayers from Taizé, Laudate, Veni Sancte

Spiritus, Resurrexit, Ubi Caritas

Sing to God, Benedicid Al Señor, Jubilatam Canons and Litanies

Suzanne Toolan's CD contains several Taizé-like chants

Jesus Christ, Yesterday, Today and Forever

OCP Publications

55346 NE Hassalo

Portland, OR 97213

E-Mail: liturgy@ocp.org

Website: <http://www.ocp.org>

Experiencing Creative Spirituality

Painting an Icon: Opening a Window

Celeste Marie Nuttman, R.S.M.

Art has been a long-time influence on my spirituality. During the last eight years, I have been painting Mercy icons for Taizé prayer and for worship spaces. I have been invited to reflect on the process and how that has affected my spirituality and how it seems to have affected some others (the viewers). Henri Nouwen has said, "An icon is like a window looking out upon eternity." Windows have been opened to let in fresh air as well as to afford unexpected views.

The icons I have been called upon to paint are usually six feet tall and four feet wide. They have what I would call a "spiritual and artistic springboard" in the San Darmiano cross. My first invitation was to paint an icon for the Sisters of Mercy in Omaha. As I prayed about it, I decided to paint the saints, angels, and disciples as the Sisters and associates who were doing the works of Mercy today. I began by researching photos from the region as well as sketching actions that would be readily recognizable as the temporal and/or spiritual works of mercy. I wanted those who gazed upon this painting either in Taizé prayer or at other times to witness the community of Mercy saints being about the works that contribute to the realization of the realm of God today. I hoped that in seeing them people might celebrate and give thanks as well as be called to participate in

such works. I wanted gazers to be drawn into the mystery of the Trinity and into the Pascal Mystery, both present in the icon.

When I begin to paint, I first shape and prepare the board. While I am doing this, I am praying for those who will receive the finished icon as well as for inspiration about the composition that is needed for it. The first segment that I paint is the face of the suffering Christ. I pray that the face that emerges will be the one that the people praying with it need to see. Often, as I paint this image, I am arrested in the act of painting by the presence of that Christ with whom I exchange gazes. I paint this image first so that he will be present in a "sacramental" fashion throughout the painting of the whole composition. His gaze will remind me of what I am about and why I am about it and will call me to deeper awareness.

I have discovered in this work that the act of painting the portraits of women and men at work serving those in need is a constant meditation on our lives being at the service of the gospel. This meditation often turns into an act of praise for the gifts of service these people have given and are giving. It also can be a petition for those being served as well as a deepening of the understanding that those served are the body of the Christ today. This work has afforded me the opportunity to contemplate the aged faces of Sisters who have given a lifetime in service and whose lined faces image the wisdom of their experience. I also see the fresh and eager countenances of newer members and observe the fire and passion that sparks out from the faces of those engaged in works for justice or systemic change. I have come to deeply appreciate my sisters and the lay men and women who minister side by side with us. I have beheld generous ordained men such as Cardinal Bernadin. I have come to see the eucharistic service and the preaching that our Sisters do as well as to recognize the confessions they hear and the anointing they do

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so often. I have come to understand more deeply and broadly the reality of sacrament.

The act of painting is also for me a humbling act. When I begin, it is curious to me that I seem to feel that I do not have the capacity to paint! I call upon God to bring forth this gift in me and to help me experiment and see what happens! Something begins to emerge and I continue to “work at it.” Reflecting on this aspect of my work has been fruitful in other arenas of my life.

I have been able to paint about ten of these icons, and the process has called me to deeper theological reflection on the mystery of resurrection and its meaning for us today. The images of the Resurrected One have become more cosmic: the joyful Christ holds the cosmos or holds the earth, which is kissed by the fire of the Spirit. In one painting, the waters of life flow from the wounds, and creation flourishes in them, drinks deeply, and slakes its thirst in them. In another, the Wounded One is the source of the living vine in which creatures nest, live, and are nourished. It is a fruitful vine, fruitful beyond what we might have imagined as its capacity. The Christ is touched by the open, loving hand of God. We gather around and beneath his cross, under the fountain of his wounds, near to his heart, serving and preaching and singing, mourning and dancing, waiting and creating.

The people on these icons also represent the various cultures that make up the Sisters of Mercy and in which they serve. The prayer that has come in painting these men and women is one of gratitude and appreciation for the richness of the many ways people live and worship. I was struck by the spirituality of Native American peoples and other indigenous peoples as I researched and then painted them in acts of honoring God. We are gifted and influenced by such rich heritages!

I have also been immersed in the suffering of the body of Christ as I paint those in whom this is real today: the hungry, thirsty, homeless, sick, ignorant, imprisoned, grieving, mourning, those abused and alone, and those unable to care for themselves.

The border of the cross began as a more decorative and non-reflective edging. However, at times it has become a continuance of the meditation. In one case, it picked up the design of a gate to a Mercy institution and the repeated pattern forged into that gate which spoke of the years of ministry

in merciful works. Another time it reflected the many different cultures in which the sisters were serving. On yet another cross, the border reflected the variety of religions whose members would use the space in which the cross would hang. This was a meditation on the richness of divine revelation throughout our world and the diverse ways humanity understands and honors the Godhead.

The act of painting is also for me a humbling act. When I begin, it is curious to me that I seem to feel that I do not have the capacity to paint!

I have painted a cross for a Franciscan ministry in which older women who would otherwise be living on the streets are given a home. I became aware of the Franciscan ministry to the desperately poor and marginalized as I painted for Madonna House of the St. Anthony Foundation. I experienced the table at which homeless men and women from many ethnic backgrounds shared a banquet as the eucharistic table. As I painted the people, I came to recognize homeless “angels” who live on the streets and minister to the suffering Christ: street men and women who share a cup of cold water with each other, addicts who struggle toward health as they farm food for the urban hungry. I contemplated the face of innocent children who could laugh at parties given by those who had little or nothing to share but themselves.

Since all of these icons have been painted during my time as co-minister of the institute novitiate for North America, they have been accessible, in process, to the novices and professed who live at our house. It came as a gifting surprise to have these women reflect back to me how the paintings, both in process and completed, have been a source of prayer for them and have impacted their understanding of Mercy life. Several women spoke of spending hours in front of the paintings, meditating on the process of becoming whole or on the

(continued on page 44)

Creation-Centered Spirituality

Patricia Ryan, R.S.M.

As obvious as it seems, creativity implies creator and creation. There is One who reaches into an inner source and brings forth a new other. Our Mercy spirituality has always involved devotion to Jesus, the Redeemer. It seems equally important to honor Jesus, the Creator. Would this be detracting from His Father's dominion? Not if you hear the words of the Gospel of John. "For just as the Father raised the dead and gives life, so also does the Son give life to whomever he wishes" (5:21). "If you knew me, you would know my Father also" (8:19). "The Father and I are one" (10:30). "The Father is in me and I am in the Father" (10:37). If we interpret the healing actions of Jesus solely as restoring to health, we miss the fact that a blind man had been given new eyes, a lame person new legs, and Lazarus a second life. The abundance of life that Jesus came to give implies *new*, what was not there before.

This abundance of life to which Jesus refers is a gift to be lived and enjoyed but also extended to others. We are all called to become creators, to find the means which best expresses our own unique life-giving potential. Art has traditionally been recognized as an outlet for creativity. However, there are multiple ways to pass on what has been given to us with a newness that bears the hallmark of our individuality.

Modern science is correcting the conviction that creation was a once-and-for-all action. In the words of Brian Swimme, "I am asking you to contemplate a universe where, somehow, being itself

arises out of a field of 'fecund emptiness' . . . the base of the universe seethes with creativity . . . the great news of our time is the evolutionary story in which we come to realize that we humans are all embedded in a living, developing universe."¹ Swimme uses the term "all nourishing abyss" as a way of pointing to this mystery at the base of being. "Mystery" is a good word to rely on when we find ourselves in the confusion of trying to relate scientific truth using the language of theology or vice versa.

Given the above as a background for my present understanding of creativity, I look at the question, "How does creativity affect my spirituality?" I would not have been able to answer this question until I discovered within myself a source of creativity where I can go and generate what is new for me and can be given for others. It is here that I relish the gift of sharing in the divine action of creation. I have two outlets for what I draw from this inner well: poetry and teaching. I can express what is truly mine to give and I can find the way to present it so that it can be accepted by another.

My spirituality has been shaped by many and varied external influences such as family, nationality, religious teaching, education, friends, community, and ministry. When I look to the internal influence of creativity, I find its expression in my poetry. An example is "Ecstasy, Not Technology," that was written after attending the rich conference, Earth Spirit Rising, which took place in Louisville in June, 2001. From the energetic, knowledgeable, and inspirational people present at that gathering, I learned to celebrate what science *is* over what it can *do*. My academic degrees are in chemistry and natural science, which I taught at the secondary level for many years. My teaching involved both theory and practice; however, I had never really thought much about how scientific knowledge affected my spirituality.

We are all called to become creators, to find the means which best expresses our own unique life-giving potential.

The poem which follows has the original title "Ecstasy, Not Technology" but the original poem itself is what I now call the second section (part II). I was satisfied that it said what I wanted to convey about the recent enlightened moment when I saw that technology was a by-product of scientific discovery and that the primary result was ecstasy. When I showed the first draft of the poem to a friend who is a perceptive critic and very intuitive person, she said that the subject matter was so important that it deserved a longer exposition. I knew she was right and began to explore what in my experience led to the insights of part II. What came to mind were the nights I spent outdoors with a telescope and a map of the sky, discovering the constellations, comets, and meteors. I had never had a formal course in astronomy and was proud to have taught myself a subject for which I had a great deal of interest and enthusiasm. And so part I was born. Part III came from memories of classroom interactions with students over the years who were a bit too pragmatic for my taste. I worried that they were headed for a life of consumption and materialism.

Ecstasy, Not Technology

I

*The night sky, my textbook.
Lying on the back lawn
map held overhead, scanning
with a dim flashlight.
I found and named them
one by one.*

*Orange Betelgeuse in Orion's shoulder
tied forever to bluish-white Rigel, the knee
although they burn light-years apart.
Red Antares, larger than the sphere
carved out by Mars around the sun.
Sirius, dog star, our nearest visible neighbor
who will be dead five years before we know*

*The joy of splitting a binary
counting the Pleiades
welcoming meteors,
Hours of missed sleep
never counted
drinking energy
from the Dipper.*

II

*Brilliant discoveries
found beyond the confines
of the journals.*

*Georgia O'Keefe
probably, never used
the scientific method.*

*Wallace Stevens
did not need a scale
to weigh a blackbird.*

*The sounds of Paul Winter
conversing with wolves
uncovers the subject in every object.*

III

*Year after year
students asked*

*"Why are we learning this,
what can we use it for?"*

*I would tell them, "Nothing,
it's good for your head."
A better answer would have been
"To hammer your head
down into your heart."²*

*"Wake up! the night sky
is in love with your eyes.
The cosmos is filled
with your lovers.
Every sand particle
worships your feet."*

(Ryan, Creation-Centered Spirituality,
continued from previous page)

Admittedly my life has been enriched by the products of technology, and I would not align myself with those who denigrate advances in technology which have allowed moderns precious time to spend beyond survival activities. However, I see that the belief in seemingly infinite possibilities of technical development ignores the limits to growth which survival on this planet demands. Creators work within the limited boundaries of their medium. Otherwise they create monstrosities, out of balance with the natural processes of evolution.

Back to the question "How does creativity affect my spirituality?" My spirituality combines a deepening understanding of what it means to be creature and creator. I owe all that I am to an action of divine generosity. I have been given a share in the power to create and what I create must responsibly fit into the cosmic evolutionary process. I cannot separate myself from the life of all creation in its profound mystery of unity in multiplicity.



(Nuttman, Experiencing Creative Spirituality,
continued from page 41)

experience of recognizing the Christ as he comes to be manifested *today*. Some spoke of realizing how the beatitudes come alive in our ministry and of the gift those we serve are to us. One shared how her understanding of what it means to be a vowed woman of Mercy emerged as the painting took form. Some of the Sisters who prayed said they had come to an understanding of what it means to be pictured as a saint and a realization of our place within the community of believers.

At Easter one year ago, a member of the St. Anthony community called to speak with me. They had received their icon during Holy Week and it was present at a prayer service. The man who spoke with me told a story of how two people who had been at enmity for years stood in front of the cross awhile and then turned to each other and were reconciled. I can only believe it is the gaze of a loving Christ that could soften their hearts to recognize the godliness in themselves and in the other. One of the icons hangs in a hospital and a chaplain there has shared with me how people spend time with it and experience God's care for them in their time of suffering.

I gather these stories and experiences into my heart as treasures to ponder. I breathe in the fresh air that wafts through the newly opened window; there are scents I have not noticed before. I see new sights and I share this with others. I pray for continued openness to the art to which I have been allowed and invited and which opens me to Holy Mystery.



Notes

- 1 Brian Swimme, *The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos* (New York, Orbis Books, 1996), chapter 13.
- 2 Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, *The Circle of Love* (California, The Golden Sufi Center, 1999), p. 71.

THE MAST JOURNAL, begun in 1990, is published three times a year by the Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology. Members of the Editorial Board are Sisters Eloise Rosenblatt, Editor (Burlingame), Doris Gottemoeller (Cincinnati), Mary Sullivan (Rochester), Patricia Talone (Merion), Mary Daly (Connecticut), Carol Rittner (Dallas), and Kathleen McAlpin (Merion). Subscriptions correspondence to Marilee Howard, R.S.M., 8300 Colesville Rd, Silver Spring, MD 20910. Email: mhoward@sistersofmercy.org. Editorial correspondence to Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M., at 1121 Starbird Circle #4, San Jose, CA 95117, e-mail erosen1121@cs.com. Layout, design, and printing by BIBAL Press, an imprint of D. & F. Scott Publishing, Inc., P.O. Box 821653, North Richland Hills, TX 76182. Back issues at \$5.00 may be ordered from BIBAL Press at (888) 788-2280 or sales@dfscott.com.



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Katherine Doyle, R.S.M. (Auburn) holds an M.A. in liturgical studies from St. John's University, Collegeville. She is a member of the Auburn leadership team. She was on the editorial committee which compiled *Morning and Evening Prayer of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas*. She is presently engaged in research on Mother Baptist Russell. She has been involved in music ministry, retreat work, writing, and education for over thirty years. Her e-mail is mkdoyle@mercysisters.org.

Virginia Farnan, R.S.M. (Brooklyn) holds an M.A. from Notre Dame University in Indiana. Currently, she is director of quality improvement at Angel Guardian Children and Family Services, a social service agency sponsored by the Brooklyn region. She taught art in high school for ten years and focuses on watercolor, line drawing, and pottery. Her e-mail is vfarnan@erols.com.


Celeste Marie Nuttman, R.S.M. (Burlingame) is a practicing artist whose background includes high school teaching in California. She served on the architectural team which redesigned the space and appointments for the renovated chapel at Mercy Center in Burlingame. She has created and sold liturgical vestments, paintings and drawings. For the last thirteen years she has been Director of Novices at the Institute Novitiate in St. Louis. This year she completes her term and begins a sabbatical.

Patricia Ryan, R.S.M. (Burlingame) has given several retreats and weekend reflection sessions on earth spirituality and deep ecology. She draws on her background in science, poetry, and Celtic studies to engage participants in reflection and prayer about the loss of feminine values relating to the ecological crisis. Patricia has ministered through secondary education, community leadership, and as the first director of Mercy International Centre in Dublin.

Cheryl Phillips, R.S.M. (Detroit) is a practicing artist residing in Detroit, Michigan. She holds a B.F.A. (fine arts) from the University of Detroit Mercy, an M.A. in the teaching of art from Eastern Michigan University, and an M.Ed. (masters of education in art therapy) from Wayne State University. She has taught art in various schools in Michigan. She has recently published an article and painting in *Working with Images: The Art of Art Therapists* (2001), edited by Bruce Moon, a noted art therapist.

Claudette Schiratti, R.S.M. (Omaha) is associate director of music at St. Patrick's Parish in Kansas City where she teaches organ, and works as organist, pianist, and accompanist. She holds a Master of Music in piano performance from Catholic University of America and a Master of Church Music from Kansas University. An associate of the American Guild of Organists, she is a founding member of New Ear contemporary music institute. She has served in regional leadership and on justice committees. She rejoices in being a ten-year survivor of cancer. Her e-mail is schirattic@aol.com.

(continued on next page)



Discussion Questions



Arroyo: If you could find a musician to set something you have written to music, what would be your text?

Cancienne: Name an experience where you felt the Spirit was inviting you or the community to step beyond the normal mode of acting, like Jesus did when he washed the feet of his friends.

Doyle: "Interdependence within universal life is so widespread and sensitive that the beating of the butterfly's wings can alter the course of a tornado on the other side of the world." If you agree, what evidence supports this conviction?

Farnan: "I believe that contemplation is not me contemplating God. It is God contemplating me. From the moment of my birth, God has always contemplated me." What has God been seeing in me? In us as an Institute?

Nuttman: Choose an icon. As you gaze on the face of Christ, or the person represented, what qualities do you see? What does that person, gazing back, cherish in you?

Phillips: Angeles Arrien reports that indigenous cultures ask questions, "Where in your life did you stop singing? Where in your life did you stop dancing? Where in your life did you stop being enchanted with stories? And where in your life did you become uncomfortable with the sweet territory of silence?"

Ryan: In what ways have you been able to integrate your academic discipline with your spirituality?

Schiratti: How does the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy foster the arts and artists in our midst? Is a life devoted to art compatible with serving the poor, sick, and ignorant?

Serjak: In what ways are you faithful to your own creativity in the work you do, even if you don't consider yourself an artist?

Synnott: What does a poem by an established poet (such as those in this article) cause you to pay attention to? What poem by a lesser-known poet would respond to the dilemma, tragedy, or challenge faced by one of your friends?

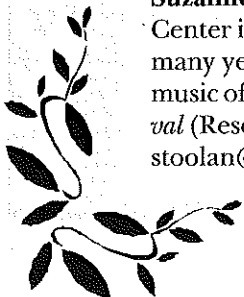
Toolan: In your experience, have the chants in the style of Taizé provided an alternative or a replacement for Gregorian chant? What do these chants express about your spirituality that is different from music normally played in parishes for Sunday liturgy?

Contributors (continued from previous page)

Cynthia Serjak, R.S.M. (Pittsburgh) is an incorporation minister for the regional communities of Pittsburgh, Erie, Buffalo, and Rochester. She serves as coordinator of liturgy and music at Mother of Mercy Chapel, and works in a music program for people who are homeless. She has published two books: *Prophecies and Puzzles: A Seven-Day Retreat for Those in Music Ministry*, and *Music and the Cosmic Dance*. She is completing a third book, *Music Lessons*. Her e-mail is cserjak@juno.com.

Audrey Synnott, R.S.M. (Rochester) was poetry editor for the magazine *Sisters Today* from 1977 to 1991. She guides retreatants making the 19th Annotation form of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. She also writes articles for her regional community's publications.

Suzanne Toolan, R.S.M. (Burlingame), a teacher, choral conductor, and composer, is on staff at Mercy Center in Burlingame, California, where she directs liturgy and facilitates retreats and days of prayer. For many years, she has taught parishes and groups throughout the United States how to pray and sing the music of Taizé. She has published three collections of music: *Living Spirit* (GIA Publications); *Keeping Festival* (Resource Publications); and *Jesus Christ, Yesterday, Today and Forever* (OCP Publications). Her e-mail is stoolan@mercyburl.org.



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Want to Write: If you have an idea for an article, or you have a talk or article you would like published in *The MAST Journal*, please send the article or inquiry to Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M., MAST Office, 1121 Starbird Circle #4, San Jose, CA 95117. Please include a complete return mailing address on all correspondence or contact her by e-mail at erosen1121@cs.com.

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MERCY ASSOCIATION IN SCRIPTURE AND THEOLOGY

MAST, the Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology, met for the first time in June 1987 at Gwynedd-Mercy College in Gwynedd Valley, Pennsylvania. Called together by Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M. and Mary Ann Getty, twenty Mercy theologians and Scripture scholars from fourteen regional communities formally established the organization to provide a forum for dialogue and cooperation among Sisters of Mercy and associates. The stated purpose of the organization is to promote studies and research in Scripture, theology, and related fields; to support its members in scholarly pursuits through study, writing, teaching, and administration; and to provide a means for members to address current issues within the context of their related disciplines.

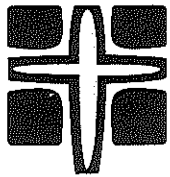
MAST has been meeting annually since then, usually in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America, and the organization now numbers fifty, with members living and working in Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, Central and South America, as well as in the United States. Marie Michele Donnelly, R.S.M. currently serves as MAST's executive director. MAST will hold its annual meeting in Philadelphia, at St. Raphaela Center, June 9-11, 2002.

Members work on a variety of task forces related to their scholarly discipline. Present task forces include: Scripture, healthcare ethics, and spirituality. In addition, the members seek to be of service to the Institute by providing a forum for ongoing theological education.

Membership dues are \$20 per year, payable to Marilee Howard, R.S.M., MAST treasurer, 8300 Colesville Rd, Silver Spring, MD 20910. Email: mhoward@sistersofmercy.org.

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Since 1991, *The MAST Journal* has been published three times a year. Members of the organization serve on the journal's editorial board on a rotating basis, and several members have taken responsibility over the years to edit individual issues. Maryanne Stevens, R.S.M., was the founding editor of the journal, and Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M., currently serves in that capacity.



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